

**Meeting of the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee
Tuesday, June 10, 2014
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE

Lawrence O'Brien, Vice-Chair
Katherine Appy
Trevor Baptiste
Rick Hood
Sarah Dolven
Stephen Sullivan
Dan Robb
Amilcar Shabazz

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Mike Morris, Director of Evaluation and Assessment
Ian Stith, K-8 Math-Science Coordinator
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Rhonda Cohen, Director of Teaching and Learning
Simon Leutz, ARHS Social Studies Department Chair
Jane Mudie, ARHS Mathematics Department Chair
Public and Press
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

ABSENT:

Kathleen Traphagen

1. Welcome and Agenda Review

7:04 p.m.

A. Call to Order & Agenda Review

Ms. Geryk called the meeting to order, noting that it is time for the committee to reorganize now that each of the towns has appointed all of their representatives. She then asked for nominations for Chair. Mr. Shabazz moved that the vote for Chair be tabled and that the committee proceed under the direction of the Vice-Chair until the last meeting in June. He spoke about the reasons for his motion, including giving new members an opportunity to get to know the members of the committee and to allow for a discussion of the role of the Chair at the School Committee retreat. Mr. Baptiste seconded and discussion followed. Mr. O'Brien noted that the retreat has been uncoupled from the June 24 meeting and is now scheduled for August. Mr. Shabazz agreed that if his motion passes, he would support waiting to reorganize until after the retreat in August. After additional brief discussion, the motion was approved 7 to 1, with Ms. Appy opposed.

B. Approve Minutes

Mr. Hood moved to approve the minutes of the May 27, 2014 joint meeting with two minor corrections. Ms. Dolven seconded and the motion was approved with Mr. Shabazz abstaining.

2. Public Comment

7:12 p.m.

DOCUMENTS DISTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLIC: *Statement from Jackie Wolf; Statement from Mary Lou Conca; Definitions of Racism and The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy from Kathleen Anderson; Most U.S. Students Won't be Taking PARCC or Smarter Balanced Tests from Education Week; Peabody Rejects PARCC Exam from The Salem News*

Jackie Wolf, community member, distributed and spoke about a handout regarding Massachusetts superintendents who have informed parents that their children can opt out of PARCC testing. She also read a statement in opposition to high-stakes testing and requested that the School Committee endorse it or a similar statement. Michael Burkhart, community member, spoke in opposition of high stakes testing. He noted that high stakes tests are not good predictors of success and spoke about ways in which such tests are biased against the economically disadvantaged and new immigrants. Mary Lou Conca, grandparent, distributed a sample letter from the Peabody School Committee in opposition to PARCC testing. She also read from a statement regarding "myths of standardized tests," which Ms. Westmoreland will copy for members of the school committee. Andrea Battle, grandparent, spoke about the ways in which standardized tests and the Common Core Standards stifle the creativity of teachers. She noted that PARCC testing is making large sums of money for the state of New York. Sovann-Malis Loeung, parent, said she is at the meeting because she still does not have a clear understanding of the Common Core. From her reading on-line, however, she believes that it represents symmetry which takes away academic freedom. She spoke emotionally about the impact of such high stakes testing on students who believe that they must do well on these tests in order to be valid and successful. Michael Mangeau, distributed a story about and spoke regarding an opt-out movement that is happening in Peabody. Dr. Susan Theberge, Keen State College Head of the Graduate Program in Counseling, stated that she would like to see the peer-reviewed, valid data that shows that high-stakes standardized testing will prepare our students for the world today. She noted that she believes that is owed to the community. Nick (no last name given), noted that he appreciates that the School Committee and administration have a hard decision based on pressure from the state and federal government regulations. He read quotes from students across the country about why they do not support standardized testing, as well as a portion of a letter from the Ludlow School Committee to their legislators regarding this issue. Kathleen Anderson, community member, spoke about the book *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* by Nicholas Lemann and read the author's synopsis of the book which addresses the way in which standardized testing and tracking is used to determine who can participate in the country's economic resources. She provided a packet of handouts to Mr. Shabazz, Chair of the SETF, and Ms. Geryk to share with the full committee. Jean Sherlock, grandparent, spoke in opposition to the Common Core Standards. Carol Ross, parent, noted that Amherst has always been a community that takes

risks and has been well respected throughout the country. She stated that the School Committee members are parents, too, which means that we can work together on these difficult issues.

3. Superintendent's Update

8:08 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Superintendent's Update to the Regional School Committee dated June 10, 2014

Ms. Geryk noted that the 10th annual Amherst Human Rights Commission picnic is scheduled for Sunday, June 15 at the Mill River Recreation Area, and a community retirement celebration will be held for Sue Dunbar on Monday, June 23 at 7:00 p.m. in Crocker Farm gymnasium. She reported that ARHS is in the process of electing the Student Advisory Committee, for which 23 students were nominated. Five will be elected and one of them will serve on the SETF and one will serve as the student representative to the Regional School Committee. Mr. O'Brien congratulated the ARHS staff and students on the outstanding graduation ceremony last Friday. Mr. Shabazz congratulated Oumy Cisse and Jeff Stauder on their selection as Robert Frost Chairs.

4. Subcommittee Updates

7:59 p.m.

A. AEF Representative—Mr. Hood noted that June 15 is the deadline for making a donation to AEF's Stars in Our Schools program in honor of a teacher.

B. Budget Subcommittee—There was no update.

C. RAWG—Ms. Appy noted that the Education Subcommittee of RAWG is meeting tomorrow at 8:30 a.m. at ARMS and the full committee is meeting Thursday, June 12 at 6:30 p.m.

D. Policy Subcommittee—Mr. Baptiste reported that the Policy Subcommittee met yesterday and is almost ready to bring forward the policies for Fingerprinting, Wellness and Service Animals. Policies to be considered in the fall include OPEB.

F. SETF—Mr. Shabazz reported that the SETF met on June 5 at 5:30 and reviewed the agenda of that meeting. He noted that there were approximately 30 members in attendance. Mr. Shabazz noted that there was consensus of the group that the idea of developing a nine-member voting group should be tabled until there is a better understanding of the work of the SETF. He explained to the group that the purpose of SETF is not to focus on deficits, but to be purpose-driven rather than reactive in moving forward. Principals will be invited to attend the next SETF meeting to address areas of concern, and Mr. Jackson agreed to develop a 20 minute presentation for that meeting. The next SETF meeting is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. on June 18 in the ARHS library.

G. Data Trends Subcommittee—Mr. Hood reported that the Data Trends Subcommittee met tonight prior to the School Committee meeting. He noted that discussion continued regarding areas in which they may want to track trends and they hope to present a rough draft in August. The next meeting is at 5:30 on July 14.

5. New and Continuing Business

7:49 p.m. (A only)/8:13 p.m.

A. Collaborative Articles of Agreement

DOCUMENT: Serving Our Members; Memo to Member School Committees from Bill Diehl, CES Executive Director, Regarding New Articles of Agreement; Agreement of the Collaborative for Educational Services

Bill Diehl, Executive Director of The Collaborative, gave a brief overview of the services CES provides to member districts. He outlined the major changes in the CES Articles of Agreement, which must be approved by the School Committee of all member districts. Mr. Baptiste moved to approve the Articles of Agreement as presented. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

B. Teaching and Learning Update

DOCUMENT: Teaching and Learning Powerpoint Slides (dated June 10, 2014); HS Math Text Review form; Common Core State Standards Initiative Frequently Asked Questions

Dr. Cohen began the presentation by noting that she is not defending the Common Core and that she feels fortunate to work in a district with community members and parents who are so engaged and willing to advocate. She then utilized a Powerpoint presentation to provide an overview of the Common Core State Standards. Dr. Cohen emphasized that the Common Core Standards are not the curriculum or the high-stakes assessments; instead, they are tools for building high quality curriculum and assessments. Dr. Cohen then gave an update on the curriculum work in Social Studies, including an overview of the new materials being used and subjects being covered in each grade level through seventh grade. Mr. Leutz then provided an overview of the social studies course recommendations for the high school, which includes requiring World History I in ninth grade and World History II in eleventh grade. He explained the rationale for this requirement, noting that it supports the district commitment to inclusion of diverse voices in the social studies curriculum and brings to all students the content about Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America that is currently only available through electives. Dr. Cohen spoke about an idea of developing a Multicultural/Anti-Bias Study Group that would be co-facilitated by a school administrator and a community member with the purpose of "engaging in examining curriculum taught in specific courses or grade levels with an eye toward expanding different perspectives, identifying what is missing, as well as identifying high quality materials to strengthen the curriculum." She noted that she welcomes ideas and input about this idea and encouraged school committee members to email her at cohenr@arps.org. Dr. Stith then took the opportunity to provide an update on Mathematics grade 7-

12, including ways in which the seventh and eighth grade math options will provide links to support participation in advanced mathematics courses in high school. He outlined the books that will be used on eighth grade math beginning in the next school year and gave an overview of the Middle School Math Portfolio Option that is available to students who want to complete two high school mathematics courses in eighth grade. Ms. Mudie provided an overview of the math textbook evaluation that has been done for grades 9-11. Mr. O'Brien expressed appreciation for the presentation, noting that curriculum work takes a great deal of time and effort. He asked Mr. Leutz if the research component of the ARHS social studies curriculum will remain in place, and Mr. Leutz assured him it will.

C. PARCC/MCAS Vote

DOCUMENT: Choosing PARCC or MCAS for Spring 2015

Mr. Morris noted that he presented information at the last joint meeting about the decision of whether to utilize PARCC or MCAS in 2015; therefore, he just reviewed the key points about the two tests. He noted that June 30 is the deadline for School Committees to vote with a guarantee of participating in the preferred test. Ms. Dolven asked for clarification of the timeline for a vote and its consequences. Mr. Morris noted that the June 30 deadline gives the School Committee full control over the choice of which test will be used. Committees can vote up until October 1, but will not be guaranteed their test of choice. After October 1, the district will automatically default to using MCAS in 2015. Mr. Robb asked if there are any other options. Mr. Morris noted that the Superintendent's responsibility is to share the School Committee's vote with DESE and the MCAS test will have to be administered if no vote is taken. He stated that he believes there is room for advocacy on the part of the School Committee with regard to high stakes testing. Mr. Hood noted that he is willing to draft a statement regarding high stakes testing on behalf of the School Committee and will bring it to the next meeting. Mr. Morris said that he will be happy to work with Mr. Hood on the statement if he would like to hear his thoughts on the matter. Mr. Baptiste noted that it is time to look at ways to decouple assessments from high stakes testing and to advocate for it. He stated that he believes it is important to go with PARCC since it is full of possibilities. Discussion continued with each member sharing their opinions regarding the two choices and high-stakes testing in general. Mr. Shabazz noted that he has been a vocal, active opponent since the first high-stakes test, TASS, was introduced in Texas in the 1990s. He said that he believes choosing to use PARCC next year is "going the way of the lemmings," and moved to remain with MCAS for the 2014-2015 school year and not go with PARCC. Mr. Robb seconded. Discussion of the motion followed, with Mr. Shabazz speaking about his opposition to the roll-out process DESE has used with PARCC testing. The vote was then unanimous in support of the motion.

D. Approve Gifts

Mr. Baptiste moved to accept \$500 from Deborah A. Ritzer for the Kingsley Perry Award; \$500 from David A. Perry for the Kingsley Perry Award; \$500 from Stephen and Brille Cotsoradis for the Kingsley Perry Award; \$500 from Regina and Daniel St. John for the Kingsley Perry Award; \$500 from Zella Harrington for the Anson J. Tripp Memorial Scholarship; \$500 from the Northampton Elks for the General Scholarship for 2014; \$300 from Amherst Leisure Services for the General Scholarship for 2014; two gifts of \$500 each from the Pelham Afterschool Program for the General Scholarship for 2014; \$500 from Jeffrey D. Tripp for the Anson J. Tripp Memorial Scholarship; \$250 from Shirley J. Musumeci; \$790 from R. Todd Rainwater for Golf at SEC; and \$500 from Norman and Eva Brown for the Metzger Brown Holocaust Remembrance Scholarship. Ms. Dolven seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

6. Policy for First Reading

9:49 p.m.

Mr. O'Brien noted that the District Investment Policy is a revised policy being presented for a first reading and asked if there are any questions. He noted that this policy will be brought back for a second reading and potential vote in August and asked that the Finance Director be in attendance to answer any questions. Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Geryk answered brief clarifying questions about the first draft of the policy.

7. School Committee Planning

9:55 p.m.

Ms. Geryk reviewed the calendar for the remaining two meetings of the school year. She also invited members of the school committee to attend the Employee Recognition Event at 7:00 p.m. on June 18 in the ARMS cafeteria.

8. Adjournment

10:00 p.m.

Mr. Shabazz moved to adjourn at 10:00 p.m. Mr. Sullivan seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland