

**Joint Meeting of the Amherst and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committees  
Tuesday, November 22, 2011  
Town Room, Amherst Town Hall**

**In attendance:**

Rick Hood, Regional Chair	Maria Geryk, Superintendent of Schools
Kip Fonsh	Beth Graham, Dir. of PD, Collaboration & Teacher Eval.
Debbie Gould	Jerry Champagne, Information Systems Director
Katherine Appy	Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Annemarie Foley	Mike Hayes, ARMS Principal
Irv Rhodes	Kathy Mazur, Human Resources Director
Rob Spence	Rhonda Cohen, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Kristen Luschen (arrived at 7:06 p.m.)	Kim Stender, Volunteer Coordinator
Steve Rivkin (arrived at 7:12 p.m.)	Kathy Mazur, Human Resources Director
	Barry Brooks, Ombudsman
	Mike Thompson, ARHS Interim Assistant Principal
	Diane Chamberlain, ARHS Assistant Principal
	Hannah Hartl, ARHS Art Department Chair
	Simon Leutz, ARHS Social Studies Department Chair
	Jane Mudie, ARHS Math Department Chair
	Erika Zekos, AEF President
	Sue Cairn, AEF Allocations Committee Chair
	Public
	Press
	Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

**1. Welcome 7:00 p.m.**

**A. & B. Call to Order and Agenda Review**—Mr. Hood called the Regional meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and Mr. Rhodes called the Amherst meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. Mr. Hood noted that the Regional committee will enter Executive Session after the agenda is complete for the purpose of contract negotiations. They will not return to open session.

**2. Announcements and Public Comments 7:02 p.m.**

Mr. Hood reported that the Amherst Town Meeting voted to create an Amherst Regionalization Study Committee, which will include three members appointed by the Town Moderator. He noted that the Town Moderator has indicated that he will appoint Ms. Appy as the School Committee representative, Andy Steinberg from the Finance Committee and Alisa Brewer from the Select Board. Mr. Hood noted that Pelham, Leverett and Shutesbury Town Meetings have also approved creation of Regionalization Study Committees in those towns.

**3. Superintendent's Update 7:03 p.m.**

**DOCUMENTS: Memo regarding Superintendent Updates to the Amherst and Regional School Committees from Superintendent Maria Geryk dated November 22, 2011**

Ms. Geryk introduced Erika Zekos, President, and Sue Cairn, Allocations Committee Chair, from Amherst Education Foundation who reported on the AEF large grant program that will be offered for the first time this year. Ms. Zekos provided background information on AEF and their past grants program. Ms. Cairn followed up with a description of the new large grant program, noting that AEF will award four or five grants of \$10,000 to \$20,000. Applications must be submitted through the schools and must align with either the District Improvement Plan or the School Improvement Plan in order to be considered for funding. Ms. Geryk reported briefly on upcoming events in the schools, including the Warm Winter Clothing Drive being sponsored by the districts and Amherst Lions Club. Mr. Jackson reported that David Poritz, ARHS Class of 2008, has just been awarded a Rhodes Scholarship. He will send Mr. Poritz a letter of congratulations on behalf of the entire school community.

**DOCUMENTS: Summary Report for October 2010 to Present by Barry Brooks, Ombudsman, ARHS Course Enrollment Report October 1, 2011; ARHS New Course Proposals: Advanced Drawing, Advanced Painting, Modern African History, and Introduction to Statistics I and II; Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools Budget Guidelines Draft (dated November 22, 2011 and distributed at the meeting)**

**A. Ombudsman Update**—Ms. Appy asked how families have been informed that an ombudsman is available to them and how they can contact him. Mr. Brooks reported that his contact information is listed on the district website and in the school handbooks. He is available by email or phone and has a private voicemail box so families can leave a message. Mr. Brooks noted that although he has an office at the middle school, he meets with families in locations outside of the school if they are more comfortable with that. Ms. Gould asked what Mr. Brooks' role is in working with the administration with regard to concerns that are brought to him. He reported that he asks permission to share concerns with the appropriate administrators of staff members; however, families can also choose to remain anonymous when reporting concerns. Mr. Fonsh thanked Mr. Brooks for taking on this work, noting that he cannot think of anyone more qualified for the role. He asked if Mr. Brooks has any thoughts about structural or other changes the School Committee should consider based on his work. Mr. Brooks noted that he believes the achievement of all students is a concern for all members of the community and that, while it is a work in progress, issues are being addressed by the schools. Ms. Luschen asked if five hours per week is sufficient for the work. Mr. Brooks noted that it has proven to be sufficient for now, with some weeks requiring fewer contact hours with parents and other weeks requiring more. Mr. Hood asked how many of the 17 cases have been resolved. Mr. Brooks stated that most have been positively resolved, but there are a few cases in which the parent or parent advocate was unhappy because they were only interested in one particular outcome. He attributed the successful resolution of many of the cases to the flexibility of the school staff in order to have positive outcomes. Ms. Geryk noted that, in some cases, issues have arisen simply through miscommunication, and it has been helpful to have an impartial person to assist in resolving these matters.

**B. ARHS Class Size Report**—Mike Thompson, ARHS Interim Assistant Principal, briefly reviewed the highlights of the 2011-2012 class size report, which is based on official enrollments from October 1, 2011. Mr. Rivkin asked how the ARHS class sizes compare to other schools in the state or country, noting that his sense is that the average class sizes in our academic programs is much lower than other districts. Mr. Thompson noted that he does not have that data. Mr. Rivkin also asked how many of the ninth grade students in IMP math are in honors. Mr. Thompson stated that the data in the report does not reflect that information. Mr. Jackson stated that he is unapologetic about class size being the driving goal for discussions around budget because we aspire to these sizes. He said he is willing to do without a lot of other things to keep these class sizes and he would not want larger average class sizes in other districts to cast a shadow over the class sizes in our district. Ms. Gould asked what drives the decision about whether to offer separate College Prep and Honors classes in World Language or to combine them in one class. Mr. Thompson noted it is a challenge to make the determinations, but they are based on a combination of enrollments and the ability to differentiate instruction in a particular class. Mr. Rhodes asked how the administration would characterize Directed Studies. Mr. Jackson stated that Directed Study is a block of time in the student's day that can be utilized to be more successful. Students can sit and work, meet with their teachers if available, go to the labs or libraries, and a range of other options.

**C. ARHS Course Proposals**—Mr. Jackson reported that the Department Chairs for Social Studies, Mathematics and Art are in attendance to answer questions regarding the new courses that are being proposed for the 2012-2013 school year. He noted that the department chairs at ARHS are an exemplary group that provides outstanding leadership, and the work of the high school could not move forward without them. Simon Leutz, Social Studies Department Chair, reviewed the process used in developing the Modern African History Course proposal and the units to be included. Ms. Gould noted that offering this type of course for only one-trimester seems to be simply scratching the surface and asked why they are not offered as two-trimester courses. Mr. Leutz explained that offering the courses for one trimester allows Juniors and Seniors to experience a wider range of courses because they can choose four electives rather than two. Mr. Rhodes

asked if there is an African-American History course at the high school. Mr. Leutz explained that the African-American experience is taught as an integral part of the American experience in the U.S. History class. Mr. Rivkin noted that he appreciates this course and asked if there is a course that teaches North Africa. Mr. Leutz noted that it is dealt with in World History and some elective courses. He stated that he agrees that it would be beneficial to have a Modern Middle East course, which would include North Africa. Jane Mudie, Mathematics Department Chair, outlined the reason it is necessary to add the Introduction to Statistics I and II Course, noting that this is a short-term way to meet the Statistics requirement of the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in the traditional mathematics pathway at ARHS. Mr. Fonsh asked for more information about the type of projects that will be used for assessment in the proposed course, and Bill Blatner, ARHS Math Teacher, described some examples. He noted that the course will be taught at a very high level, with assistance for students taking it at a College Prep level rather than differentiated content for College Prep and Honors students. Mr. Rivkin noted that this is the hardest class students can take in Mathematics and he encouraged the Math Department to consider not offering it as a heterogeneous course. Ms. Appy noted that she thinks it is beneficial to offer the course heterogeneously so more students can be exposed to statistics. Hannah Hartl, Art Department Chair, reviewed the proposals for two new courses—Advanced Drawing and Advanced Painting—that are designed to close a curricular gap between the introductory classes and the portfolio course. She noted that the courses would be budget-neutral because they will take the place of random ALPs currently being offered to individual students by establishing a set curriculum and meeting concurrently with the introductory courses. Ms. Luschen noted that she supports these courses, but is concerned that there will be an increase in interested students that will make it impractical to offer the class concurrently with the introductory class. Ms. Hartl agreed that enrollments may increase once formalized classes are offered because some students who want to participate may be unable or unwilling to design an ALPs. For now, this will bridge a large gap in the curriculum. Mr. Rhodes made a motion to approve the new courses Modern African History, Statistics I and II, Advanced Drawing and Advanced Painting. Ms. Gould seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**D. Finalize FY13 Budget Guidelines**—Ms. Gould distributed a revised copy of the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools Budget Guidelines that has input she received from School Committee members highlighted in red. The committee reviewed and had an in-depth discussion of each of the points included in the three tiers of priorities, as well as a discussion about the meaning of each of the tiers. After extensive discussion, it was agreed that Ms. Gould will make the edits suggested at tonight’s meeting and email the revised document to the School Committee. This topic will be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

Ms. Gould made a motion to extend the meeting to 10:00 p.m. Mr. Spence seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**E. Snow Days/Calendar Adjustment**—Since all five of the days built into the calendar for school closings have already been used due to the October snowstorm, Ms. Mazur outlined the scenarios that have been considered by the administration for handling any additional closures. She noted that what seems to make the most sense is to take any additional days individually, as necessary, from the April break. Ms. Mazur said she will consult with the APEA and a formal recommendation will be brought forward for a school committee vote at the next Regional meeting.

## **6. Subcommittee Reports**

**9:45 p.m.**

### **A. Budget Subcommittee**

**1. Regional Capital Plan**—Mr. Detweiler noted that the Regional Capital Plan was adopted and put into use for the first time last year. The Budget Subcommittee has reviewed the Capital Plan for FY13 and beyond and recommends approval by the full committee. After very brief discussion, Ms. Gould made a motion that the Regional School Committee approves the Capital Plan for Fiscal Year 2013 not to exceed \$937,200, to be funded in part from the Stabilization Fund, in part from a Bond Anticipation Note (BAN) not to exceed \$905,000. Mr. Rhodes seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**2. District Fees**—Mr. Detweiler gave a brief overview of programs that are supported, either partially or in full, by fees noting that the budget sub-committee has done an in-depth review of all fees. Mr. Hood outlined

the Budget Subcommittee's recommendation regarding each fee and whether it should be increased or held at the current level. He noted that the only fees the subcommittee has requested additional information about are the athletic fees. Mr. Rhodes stated that the athletic fees impact a large number of families and asked that the School Committee members review them carefully and provide feedback to the subcommittee. After brief discussion of whether to vote on any of the fees at tonight's meeting, Mr. Spence made a motion to approve the college application services fees, the ARHS parking fees, the musical instrument rental fees, the ARHS preschool fees, and the school meal prices. Ms. Gould seconded. Mr. Fonsh noted that he is uncomfortable voting on the motion tonight because he has not had an opportunity to review the data. After further discussion, it was agreed that the motion will be tabled until the next Regional School Committee meeting. Ms. Appy made a motion to table the motion until the December 7, 2011 Regional School Committee meeting. Ms. Foley seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**7. School Committee Planning**

**10:00 p.m.**

**A. Calendar**—Mr. Hood reviewed the revised calendar of reports

**B. Items for Future Agendas**

**5. Adjournment**

**10:01 p.m.**

Mr. Spence made a motion to adjourn the Amherst School Committee meeting at 10:01 p.m. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. By unanimous roll call vote, the Regional School Committee adjourned to Executive Session for the purpose of contract negotiations at 10:01 p.m. They will not return to open session.

Respectfully submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland

*APPROVED DECEMBER 7, 2011—REGION*