

**Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee Meeting
Tuesday September 16, 2014
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

In Attendance

Trevor Baptiste, Chair

Stephen Sullivan

Dan Robb

Sarah Dolven

Katherine Appy

Kathleen Traphagen

Lawrence O'Brien

Myles Olmsted, Student Representative

Amilcar Shabazz (arrived @ 6:11 p.m.)

Rick Hood (arrived @ 6:40 p.m.)

Maria Geryk, Superintendent

Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent

Public and Press

Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

1. Welcome and Agenda Review

6:05 PM

A. Call to Order and Agenda Review

Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He asked the committee if they wish to open the floor to public comment even though it was not included on the agenda. Mr. Baptiste moved to extend the meeting to 7:15 instead of 7:00 in order to accept public comment. Mr. O'Brien seconded and the motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 3 with Mr. O'Brien, Ms. Dolven and Ms. Appy opposed. Those opposed clarified that they support public comment, but they would like to complete both public comment and the agenda item by 7:00 p.m.

2. Public Comments

6:10 p.m.

Caridad Martinez, Oasis and Occupy Amherst member, spoke against the "corporate-driven, state-mandated evaluation system." She read a statement from Oasis (attached) outlining their suggested areas of focus for the Superintendent evaluation. Jean Sherlock, grandparent and educator, spoke about the need to shift the focus from PBIS to a culturally responsive intervention system. She noted that PBIS is a system of exclusion. Susan Theberge, community member, spoke about the need to invite in and engage the most marginalized families. She gave concrete examples of ways to achieve this including use of advisory boards and providing food and childcare at meetings. Ms. Theberge noted that she believes this can be a transformational year.

5. New and Continuing Business

6:18 p.m.

A. Superintendent Evaluation Priority Elements

DOCUMENTS: Chart Outlining and Tallying the Priority Elements Identified by Each School Committee Member

Ms. Traphagen distributed the chart she developed tallying the School Committee members' top four priority elements for the superintendent evaluation process. The four elements that were chosen by the majority of the members were:

- I-B-3 Diverse Learners Needs (7 selected)
- IV-F-3 Consensus Building (5 selected)
- I-E-2 School and District Goals (3 selected)
- III-B-1 Student Support (3 selected)

At Mr. Baptiste's request, each member spoke briefly to his/her reason for choosing the elements and the value those elements represent for them, particularly the ones they chose outside of the four top elements. Ms. Traphagen noted that she believes all of the committee members value all of the elements; however, she clarified that she chose her priorities based on areas where she believes additional work is needed based on last year's evaluation. After the discussion, Mr. Hood and Mr. Shabazz noted that they had been swayed and would support the top four identified priority elements as their choices. Ms. Geryk stated that the discussion has been very

helpful and she will include all of the areas in her district improvement plan. Mr. O'Brien noted that he would like to switch two of his elements to II-A-3 Student Safety, Health and Social and Emotional Needs and to I-D-2 Observations and Feedback. It was agreed that the Superintendent will keep all of the rubric elements, not just the top four, in mind throughout her work. After a final review, the same elements were identified with the tally switching to:

- I-B-3 Diverse Learners Needs (7 selected)
- IV-F-3 Consensus Building (5 selected)
- I-E-2 School and District Goals (5 selected)
- III-B-1 Student Support (5 selected)

7. Adjournment

7:15 p.m.

Mr. Shabazz moved to adjourn at 7:15 p.m. Mr. O'Brien seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland

PUBLIC COMMENTS FROM CARIDAD MARTINEZ:

The first point we would like to make is that the Massachusetts State Rubric presented as a Model System for Supt. Evaluation is fundamentally flawed because it is a corporate business model of assessment. (How many widgets does the worker produce in one hour?)

We do not envision education as a business. We envision education as a democratic space where people can learn and grow; where they can develop their strengths and creative potential in order to confront and transform the enormous challenges that humanity faces. These include, among many other issues, the climate emergency and the class, racial and gender conflicts that continue to divide us, thereby, preventing us from collectively working to create vibrant solutions to meet the vast unmet needs of people across the globe.

With that in mind we propose that this School Committee and the Superintendent adopt the following six areas as priorities to work on this year and into the future.

1) Culturally relevant curriculum that meets the needs of all learners including teachers, administration, staff and community. Focusing on “standard-based units of instruction” is a reference to the corporate driven core-curriculum standards and assessment package. Standards based curriculum is assessed by high stakes standardized tests which do not provide a full picture of either a student’s learning or a teacher’s teaching. We fully understand that you and other educators across this country are profoundly limited by this rigid corporate state mandate. However, we also know that on a local level this community can and should establish our own vision of learning and education based on the whole child which honors the cultural i.e. the class, race, gender, ability, and other lived experiences of the members of this diverse community and prepares them for the challenges our society faces.

We would like to highlight that this reality negatively impacts ALL the members of our community. For example, when white children witness the oppression and suffering of their black colleagues, teachers and friends, as they did last year, they are also wounded and dehumanized. So it is in the best interest if all members of our community that our children engage in democratic learning spaces where they have the opportunity to deconstruct oppression in all its forms, and to work in collaboration with the community to address and problem solve the inevitable conflicts that arise from such inequalities. That is what our curriculum should be doing. It should be relevant to the needs of the community and to the world. Not relevant to the mandate of the corporate state.

TRACKING: The following quote reflects our concerns with tracking which are relevant to curriculum as well as assessment.

Detracking for Excellence and Equity

by Carol Corbett Burris and Delia T. Garrity

“Perhaps the most accurate description of the belief systems that sustain tracking comes from Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton. In their 1999 essay "Access to Knowledge: Challenging the Techniques, Norms, and Politics of Schooling," Oakes and Lipton discuss how the categories that human beings create to explain differences in children change from school-created labels of differences to reified "realities" that limit opportunities for learning: Those who promote ability grouping, special education, gifted programs, and the myriad other homogeneous instructional groups in schools claim that these classifications are objective and color blind, rather than, as Goodlad suggests, reflecting myths and prejudices. Advocates of grouping explain the disproportionate classification of white students as gifted or advanced and of students of color as slow or basic as the unfortunate consequence of different backgrounds and abilities. They base their claims of objectivity on century-old (and older) explanations of differences that are neither scientific nor bias-free.

Both students and adults mistake labels such as "gifted," "honors student," "average," "remedial," "LD" and "MMR" for certification of overall ability or worth. These labels teach students that if the school does not identify them as capable in earlier grades, they should not expect to do well later. Everyone without the "gifted" label has the de facto label of "not gifted." The resource classroom is a low status place and students who go there are low status students. The result of all this is that most students have needlessly low self-concepts and schools have low expectations. Few students or teachers can defy those identities and expectations. These labeling effects permeate the entire school and social culture. (p. 171)

Do students differ in talents and achievement? They do. But when those observed differences are reinforced by track placement and grouping practices, and children then internalize those differences, learning opportunities become limited for all but the elite student. The talents of late bloomers go undiscovered, and the rewards of hard work and diligent study are never realized.”

2) Develop authentic assessment tools rather than relying on high stakes standardized testing in order to truly understand the specific barriers to learning that specific groups and individuals are facing. Once we can identify these barriers through authentic, culturally responsive formative and summative assessments we can then develop appropriate strategies to support the full academic and social-emotional blossoming of all of our learning community.

3) Discipline disparity... We have years of data that clearly demonstrate that there is a disproportionate disparity based on race, class, gender and learning abilities in discipline. We believe that lower economic status also plays a role in these statistics and we establish that this can be proven through the use of reduced-lunch statistics. We want the Superintendent and School Committee to lead this school system in ending this disparity. At the end of this school year, our rates of discipline need to be proportionate to the demographics of the learning community.

We call for an immediate end to suspensions and expulsions. These strategies to deal with difficult situations should have no place in circles of learning and education. Tap into the available resources you have and stop discriminating against children with our tax dollars.

We would like for the Southeast Campus to be re-evaluated on its relation to Discipline Disparity and the lack of competency on behalf of educators to appropriately address the behaviors of children identified as “special education”. Why does the Southeast Campus exist? How can the District stop the segregation of these children and find ways to integrate them into the mainstream campus?

4) Shift from focus on PBIS to culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate approaches such as Social Emotional Learning and strength based approaches so that we are focusing on the whole child/person: We want the Superintendent, in collaboration with the community, to come up with culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate solutions to the current situation in which some adults are struggling with understanding and responding to behaviors deemed to be inappropriate. Our perspective, “grounded in the study of child and adolescent development and strengthened by our professional experiences, holds that behavior is a powerful way for children and youth to express their inner lives reflecting the outer world of their experience. As educators we know that students who feel shame, powerlessness, humiliation and a multitude of other difficult emotions and who are still developing the skills and the confidence to identify and articulate their feelings through verbal communication will often communicate feelings and needs through their behavior, which is a fundamental form of communication.

We propose that we to move beyond behavioral modification models towards evidence based social-emotional learning programs which look at the whole child.

These students need to be met and engaged in a variety of ways depending on multiple systemic factors in their lives. **A red flag should have gone up when you realized that PBIS is used in prisons.**

How does PBIS address this complex issue?

“PBIS ‘sells’ itself as an effective instrument for decreasing problem behaviors and the suspension and expulsion rates, increasing time spent in academic instruction, and improving academic outcomes. Despite its call against restraining and secluding, PBIS, in fact, practices exclusion... Behaviors falling in the field of bad marks and points are subjected to punishment, exclusion or modification. An exclusionary nature of PBIS is manifested through its behavioral spectrum consisting of three levels of intervention. By labeling students as normal, at-risk or high-risk according to the set behavioral expectations and moving them from one to another level of intervention, PBIS conducts an exclusion of individuals who do not behave “appropriately” both for schools and wider neoliberal order using softer measures of punishment in comparison to those in criminalization and places them in more advanced levels of behavioral modification....It has become a disciplinary curriculum that teaches students “appropriate” behaviors and disciplines them for their adulthood where a possession of “appropriate” behaviors, attitudes, and skills can result in a financial reward.”

“PBIS depoliticizes the rights of students as they do not have any say in behaviors which they must exhibit as well as their citizenship by equating it with a “good” and “effective” citizen. Despite the fact that schools have autonomy in outlining behavioral expectations, these expectations are almost the same across all schools which points at the “production” of individuals with the same behaviors and their collective governance.”

“PBIS and zero tolerance preserve racial politics and racial order(ing) through the disproportionate use of discipline measures toward youth of color. For example, in their national investigation of African American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline, Skiba and his colleagues (2011) found that while PBIS reduced school exclusion

for all students, African American and Latino students received more severe punishment for the category “minor misbehavior” in comparison with their white peers.”

“The last important effect produced by PBIS is a spectacle of “good” behaviours. **PBIS organizes a spectacle around public acknowledgement and celebration of “appropriate” behaviors exhibited by “good” students, for example, at weekly and monthly school assemblies. The practice of acknowledgement produces lasting effects on students slipping into their minds an idea that they can be recognized if they exhibit certain behaviors and also commodifies their behaviors contributing to the creation of consumerist individuals (see the next section). How is this competitive nature of PBIS good for children?”**

Christopher G. Robbins, Serhiy Kovalchuk; **Dangerous Disciplines: Understanding pedagogies of punishment in the neoliberal states of America** *Journal of Pedagogy* 2/2012 205

5)Recruitment and retention of a faculty and staff that reflects the diversity of the student population and the community in which we live. And this of course, means class, race, gender, abilities, political and community affiliations as examples.

6)Community and family engagement: We need to create strategies that will result in meaningful connections with all of our families, with an emphasis on those families who are part of the most isolated communities (for example, Latino and poor/working class families). We need the insights and wisdom of these families in order to create positive solutions to the many challenges faced by this school system. Families have unique insights into their children’s learning approaches, hopes, dreams and concerns. In order to engage family and community members in important processes such as meetings with teachers and staff, task groups such as the Equity Task Force and cultural and arts based experiences in our schools we need to make provisions for child care, transportation, food, interpreters, and accessible meeting spaces which might mean going out to the communities themselves. This requires financial support and staff time to make arrangements and to engage in effective outreach. In addition, our faculty and staff need to ensure equal access to available resources and programs as well as processes and protocols by helping the entire community to learn about what is available and how to access these resources, particularly around the information for children with special education needs. One way to assess the effectiveness of our strategies for community and family engagement is to document a significant increase in participation of the members of isolated and marginalized communities in: creative thinking and decision making about their students; active engagement in the work groups and activities currently organized throughout the school system; the creation of new ventures initiated by families who are currently marginalized and to see increased utilization of resources.

We need to reach out to and welcome all community members as stakeholders in our school system. One way to do this is to involve stakeholders in a comprehensive diagnosis of school and district strengths and areas in need of further development through extensive eliciting of feedback and using meaningful data. A collaborative process to develop a focused, results-oriented strategic plan with annual goals would be a powerful indicator of the effectiveness of the effort. Another path is to invite and support the formation of advisory groups on issues identified by all stakeholders with the members of these advisory groups reflecting the diverse families and community in our midst.

We need to provide resources and support to help all faculty and staff to use culturally sensitive practices to successfully engage families, and to ensure that all families feel welcomed and are encouraged to contribute. We need to work with administrators, families, and organizations to identify and remove barriers to family involvement, including the barriers faced by families whose home language is not English. A first step is to set clear expectations for faculty and staff regarding culturally sensitive communication in an effort to ensure that district-wide communication with families is always respectful and demonstrates understanding and appreciation of different families’ home language, culture, and values. An essential tool in this effort is a rubric created to both offer feedback and to identify truly culturally competent teachers/staff.