

PELHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, June 8, 2016

6:30 P.M.

Community Room, Pelham Library

IN ATTENDANCE

Tara Luce, Chair
Trevor Baptiste
Emily Marriott
Darius Modestow
Cara Castenson

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Lisa Desjarlais, Principal
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Monica Hall, Director of Equity and Professional Development
Nancy Stewart, SEPAC President
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

1. Call to Order and Reorganize

6:30 p.m.

Ms. Geryk called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m., noting that the Pelham School Committee is required to reorganize after the spring elections. She welcomed new member Cara Castenson to the committee and to her first meeting. Mr. Modestow then nominated Tara Luce as Chair. Mr. Baptiste seconded and the nomination was unanimously approved. Ms. Luce then asked for nominees for Vice-Chair. Ms. Marriott nominated Mr. Modestow for Vice-Chair. Ms. Luce seconded and the nomination was unanimously approved. Ms. Luce noted that the committee needs to select a secretary. Ms. Marriott nominated Mr. Baptiste to serve as secretary. Ms. Luce seconded and the nomination was approved unanimously. The committee then unanimously selected Ms. Marriott and Mr. Baptiste to continue as the Regional representatives.

Mr. Modestow then moved to approve the minutes of April 6 and May 4, 2016. Mr. Baptiste stated that his understanding is that the policy about not naming staff members by name or title does not apply to the Superintendent since that is a public official position. He asked if the sentence "Ms. Luce noted that Ms. Anderson was not present at the beginning of the meeting when she explained that policy requires that commenters refrain from mentioning staff members by name or title" should be removed from the minutes since Ms. Anderson's comments pertained to the Superintendent. Mr. Modestow and Ms. Luce noted that it did happen, whether it is correct or not, so it should remain in the official record. After brief discussion, both sets of minutes were approved unanimously, with Ms. Castenson abstaining.

2. Announcements and Public Comments

6:41 p.m.

Melissa Miller, Pelham parent, read a statement regarding their first grade daughter's experience with bullying at Pelham School, which she stated was wide-spread in the class. She noted that the school's approach did not partner with families to address class-wide bullying concerns. Ms. Miller noted that they will not be returning to Pelham School next year. Ms. Smith noted that the meeting is being recorded and there is a requirement that people in the room be notified if a recording is happening. The gentleman who is recording is a reporter from *The Republican* newspaper and noted that he hoped to record just the public comment portion of the meeting. Mr. Baptiste noted that the expectation would be that the Chair announces at the beginning of the meeting that it is being recorded so people in the room are aware. Ron Mannino, Pelham community member and member of the School Council, distributed and read a statement (included in the minutes). Rebecca Casagrande, parent, stated that she does not want the reputation of Pelham ruined, but it is not what it was 10 years ago. She spoke about the state-mandated bullying program, stating that it is terrible. She encouraged the School Committee to find funds for a better bullying curriculum. Judy Brooks, retired Pelham teacher, spoke about the bullying program she and Deb King put together, which she knows works. She said the stories coming out of Pelham break her heart, and she encouraged getting "Be a Buddy, Not a Bully" off the shelf.

3. SEPAC Presentation

6:57 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Pelham, Amherst, Amherst-Pelham Regional Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) 2015-2016 Powerpoint Slides

Ms. Luce noted that the SEPAC presentation has been moved up on the agenda since Ms. Stewart has another event she has to attend. Nancy Stewart, SEPAC President, introduced Laura Kent who served as Co-President until she was elected to the Amherst School Committee in March. She then provided an overview of the role SEPAC plays in the schools outlining the workshops presented and partnerships with the district. Ms. Stewart noted that the Stars Celebration was held in Pelham last week at which staff members from all the schools who have done an outstanding job of supporting special education students are recognized. She noted that Leanne Hunt and Ms. K. were recognized from Pelham School. Ms. Stewart encouraged the committee members to make attendance at one or more SEPAC events a goal for themselves next year. Additionally, she asked that SEPAC be consulted with regard to Policy development. Ms. Stewart noted the strong relationship SEPAC has with the District offices, expressing appreciation for the support they received from Superintendent Geryk. Mr. Baptiste

thanked Ms. Stewart, noting that people who become involved in community make community family, and he applauded Ms. Stewart and Ms. Kent's work. Ms. Geryk also expressed appreciation to Ms. Kent and Ms. Stewart for their involvement and feedback to the schools. She noted that their strong, clear and candid feedback is much appreciated. Ms. Brady agreed, stating that she is grateful to have such an active SEPAC because it helps people who may not come forward to the administration have a place to share their thoughts.

Although it was not an agenda item, after Ms. Stewart's presentation Mr. Baptiste made a motion to have a separate summary of the superintendent's evaluation regarding Pelham-only issues. He spoke to the motion, noting that he believes it is in the best interest of the Pelham School Committee to speak to these issues without changing the evaluation summary system. Mr. Baptiste noted that the School Committee authority is over finance, superintendent evaluation and policy and his motion would empower the Pelham Chair to notify the Regional Chair that Pelham intends to write a separate evaluation summary. Ms. Luce expressed her belief that the committee cannot take a vote on a topic that was not on the agenda without breaking open meeting law. Mr. Baptiste noted that he does not believe it would break open meeting law, but a new meeting could be posted within 48 hours if it is announced at the meeting and the secretary is asked to post it. Ms. Westmoreland noted that Pelham meetings must be posted by the Pelham Town Clerk in order to meet OML requirements. Ms. Luce again expressed her concern about OML. Ms. Battle, community member, stated that she serves on many boards and committees and taking a vote on this matter would not break OML. After further discussion, Ms. Marriott seconded the motion allowing discussion of the motion. Mr. Modestow noted that last year the Chairs agreed not to do a summary because a summary does not reflect everyone's voice. He noted that the evaluations are public and include everyone's individual evaluation. Mr. Modestow stated that the Pelham members can include any goals they would have for next year in their comments for the Superintendent. Ms. Marriott noted that her understanding is that the summary does not have any official weight; it is just for public convenience. Mr. Baptiste said that this is why he believes this is important since the Pelham constituency is so interested in knowing what the Pelham members think about the progress toward goals set for Pelham. He stated that, as elected officials, the Pelham School Committee should produce an evaluation summary for their constituents and members of the Select Board and Finance Committee who have questions about the recent incidents in Pelham. He believes Chair Luce should write such as summary rather than having Pelham's evaluation mixed in with Amherst and the Region. After further discussion, Ms. Luce called the question. Ms. Mazur noted that she would caution that it may not be appropriate for Ms. Luce to put together the summary since she works in a capacity under Superintendent Geryk. Mr. Baptiste noted that Ms. Luce could ask another member to do the summary, and he would be happy to volunteer. Ms. Luce noted that she can think about that and call on another member if necessary. The motion was then unanimously approved.

4. Superintendent's and Principal's Update

7:45 p.m.

Ms. Geryk noted that ARHS graduation is on Friday, June 10 at 5:30. Ms. Westmoreland has tickets available tonight for any Pelham members who may want to attend. Ms. Geryk also noted that Pelham sixth grade graduation is June 16 at 7:00 p.m. She then reported that Amherst has received a \$350,000 grant for electric school buses.

Ms. Desjarlais reported that Pelham had a wonderful field trip event on Monday that included a cook-out handled by Pelham parents. Sixth grade students will be going to Nature's Classroom for two days next week and there is a Mill River trip for all students on June 20. Other events include a Preschool Moving Up day next week and a retirement picnic celebration for Deb Jacque this Saturday. Nettie Harrington-Pangalo, the current Preschool teacher, will be the kindergarten teacher replacing Ms. Jacque. Preschool teacher interviews are occurring at this time. Janet Scott, School Secretary, is also retiring this year. Anne Maziarz, who has worked at ARHS, will be taking Ms. Scott's place. Ms. Desjarlais noted that Justin Giansen, guidance counselor, has taken a position at South East Campus in order to work again with older students. His position will be posted and interviews will begin soon. Ms. Desjarlais then reported on the school climate work that has been done this year as part of the School Improvement Plan. Work has included:

- Multi-age reading buddies in all classrooms;
- Ongoing School Climate Team, School Council and staff meetings regarding equity issues and issues impacting the building;
- Mix-it-Up Day in the fall, which is part of the Teaching Tolerance curriculum;
- Student Council cohort of grade 5 and 6 students who meet with Ms. Desjarlais every Friday;
- Support from Deb King beginning in February around climate issues and students' social/emotional needs;
- Continuation of Pelham PAWS;
- Second Step training for teachers; and
- Use of bullying prevention and intervention curriculum, including the former curriculum referenced in public comment.

Mr. Modestow asked if the curriculum is the issue or if it is deeper than that. He noted that he does not want parents to believe that we have the wrong curriculum in place. Ms. Geryk and Ms. King addressed the question, noting that Second Step is an excellent curriculum. Ms. King noted that Second Step is an in-class curriculum and the older curriculum is a

community curriculum. Mr. Baptiste noted that he thinks the most important thing is the example set by the leadership in the building and Ms. Desjarlais is setting a fine example. He stated that he wants to give that public support to Ms. Desjarlais and expressed his belief that she can grow into a strong leader. Ms. Desjarlais thanked Mr. Baptiste and noted that, as the school leader, she is committed to listening and reflecting on how she can improve.

Climate work next year, some of which has already begun, will focus on:

- PD work with Pat Romney and Monica Hall on school equity issues;
- Work with the School Council on climate;
- Strengthening the partnerships/communication with parents; and
- Focusing on our goals for school climate and equity as a community conversation and effort.

5. New and Continuing Business

8:17 p.m.

A. FY16 Third Quarter Budget Update

DOCUMENT: Pelham Elementary School FY16 Consolidated Operating Budget Third Quarter Budget Report

Mr. Mangano briefly reviewed the highlights of the third quarter budget report, noting that the budget is on track to finish without a deficit at this point.

B. Resolution Against Lifting the Cap on Commonwealth Charter Schools

DOCUMENT: Resolution Against Lifting the Cap on Commonwealth Charter Schools

Ms. Marriott distributed and briefly reviewed a resolution that is being used for advocacy by committees across the Commonwealth. She noted that the Regional School Committee is considering such a resolution, and Pelham may want to do the same. Discussion followed regarding the resolution and potential edits to the draft. Mr. Baptiste moved to approve the letter with the addition of the District name and dollar figures added in the fourth sentence. Mr. Modestow seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Ms. Westmoreland will prepare the document on letterhead and send it to Ms. Luce for her signature.

C. Equity Task Force

Ms. Marriott noted that this topic has been discussed before, and she asked that it be added to the agenda again to discuss whether it may be helpful to have such a task force at this time. Mr. Baptiste reviewed some of the concerns that were raised when the idea was considered before, and noted that the community is in need of uniting. Mr. Modestow asked if there is a current group that is actively discussing these issues rather than creating a new committee when there are a limited number of volunteers in Pelham. Mr. Baptiste noted that we are trying to create community and committee work is, necessarily, not the type of group that creates community. He said good, old-fashioned community events that encourage interaction and social activity may be a better solution. Ms. Marriott noted that finding a way to bring parents in seems to be the missing link, and she loves the idea of having a facilitator to facilitate conversations for parents and school staff. Ms. Geryk noted that she, Ms. Desjarlais, Ms. Brady and Ms. Hall met with Pat Romney to talk about this issue and discussed that different people will respond to different types of activities. The thought is to have Ms. Desjarlais work with her School Council to brainstorm what this could look like in Pelham. Ms. Desjarlais noted that she is planning a meeting on June 16 at 7:45 a.m. to begin looking at the school climate and equity piece for the School Improvement Plan and to begin the brainstorming work. Ms. Marriott encouraged Ms. Desjarlais to send an invitation to the wider Pelham School community to participate in the meeting.

D. Policies Approval

Mr. Modestow moved to approve policies GBGB: Violence in the Workplace; BBAA: SC Member Authorities and Duties; BBBE: SC Unexpired Term Fulfillment; and GBGC: Weapons in the Workplace. Ms. Marriott seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

6. School Committee Planning

8:59 p.m.

After discussion, it was agreed that Ms. Castenson will represent Pelham on The Collaborative Board. Next year's meetings will still be scheduled on the first Wednesday of the month beginning at 6:30 p.m. Efforts will be made to ensure that the first Pelham meeting after town elections occurs within 10 days to ensure compliance with policy. Ms. Westmoreland will double check the date proposed for the School Committee retreat and email it to the Pelham members.

7. Adjournment

9:11 p.m.

By unanimous vote, the School Committee adjourned at 9:11 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland

My name is Ron Mannino and I have volunteered at the Pelham School for the last 6 years. I have worked in the first, second, and third grades and with students in Homework Club.

During that time, I have observed the behavior of staff and teachers; they have always acted toward all students with care, respect and a true sense of professionalism. As a member of the School Council for the last 6 years I have always been impressed by Lisa Desjarlais' commitment to issues of family engagement, equity, and diversity.

A concerned parent acting on behalf of her child has suggested otherwise and the news reports of the situation have raised more questions than they have answered. As community member and a former Pelham School parent I have found these reports to be alarming and hurtful.

When will the specifics of what happened be released to the general public; until the complete story is told I don't know what to believe? Please help me understand what happened to a school that I deeply love.