

**Joint Meeting of the Union 26 and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committees
August 17, 2016
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

In Attendance:

Laura Kent, Region Chair/Union 26
Darius Modestow, Union 26 Chair
Phoebe Hazzard, Union 26/Region
Katherine Appy, Union 26/Region
Trevor Baptiste, Union 26/Region
Anastasia Ordonez, Region
Vira Douangmany Cage, Region
Stephen Sullivan, Region
Emily Marriott, Region
Sarah Dolven, Region

Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Jo Ann Smith, Student Services Administrator
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Diane Chamberlain, FR Principal
Shari Conklin, CF Assistant Principal
Rachel Bowen, Human Resources Assistant Director
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Public and Press

Absent:

Tara Luce, Union 26

Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

1. Call to Order and Agenda Review

6:03 p.m.

Mr. Modestow called the Union 26 meeting back to order at 6:03 p.m. and Ms. Kent called the Regional School Committee to order. Mr. Morris then shared sad news that Charlie Read, ARHS 11th grader, passed away on Monday night. He said that many faculty members have reached out to share their deep connection with Charlie, noting that counselors will be available for students and faculty when school opens. Mr. Sullivan shared personal memories of Charlie, who was his neighbor in Shutesbury. He noted that he was the type of student that every coach would want on his team due to his outstanding sportsmanship. A moment of silence was then observed in Charlie's honor.

2. Adjourn to Executive Session

6:08 p.m.

Ms. Kent noted that the committees will adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21(a)(2) to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for contract negotiations with nonunion personnel (Assistant Superintendent Mike Morris) and to review Executive Session minutes of 7/13/16, 7/20/16, 8/1/16 and 8/9/16. By roll call vote, as follows, the committee entered Executive Session at 6:12 p.m. with intention to return to open session:

Modestow—Aye
Hazzard—Aye
Appy—Aye
Kent—Aye
Baptiste—Aye
Ordonez—Aye
Douangmany Cage—Aye
Dolven—Aye
Sullivan—Aye
Marriott—Aye

At the time of his roll call vote, Mr. Baptiste noted that there may be questions about the ability of Union 26 to go into Executive Session since there is no policy on the books regarding the Union. Ms. Kent noted that, in the absence of policy, the committee follows Massachusetts General Law and quoted MGL 71; Section 63 regarding School Unions, noting that Union 26 has been in existence for more than 100 years.

3. Return to Public Meeting

9:17 p.m.

The committees returned to public session at 9:17 p.m. Ms. Kent noted that the approval of Executive Session minutes is being tabled and will be taken up again when the committee goes back into Executive Session. Public comment will be moved up on the agenda.

4. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of 7/13/16, 7/20/16, 8/1/16 and 8/9/16

Tabled

Tabled

5. Response to Open Meeting Law Complaint of L. Kelley, Received 8/10/16 (against Union 26) **9:23 p.m.**

Ms. Kent noted that Mr. Kelley removed his open meeting law complaint based on an email correspondence she had with him; however, a formal response will still be mailed to Mr. Kelley tomorrow. Ms. Appy asked to make a statement. She

noted that she is the longest sitting member on the committee, and she is profoundly disturbed by the public attacks on public servants in this town, particularly the new Chair of this committee. She said the attacks are unconscionable, the level of vitriol is completely intolerable, and we as a school committee and a community must learn to disagree and advocate in a civil and respectful manner. Mr. Baptiste noted that he is the second longest serving member of the committee and the immediate past chair. He stated that Ms. Kent has his confidence and respect and she is doing superbly under the attacks and vitriol. Mr. Baptiste said he wishes the same accolades had been made for him when he was Chair. He stated that our community has a lot of healing to do. As a committee moving forward to unite our town, everything must be transparent. As a search for a superintendent goes forward, Mr. Baptiste said he wants the public to look at old and current school committee members' negotiating stance toward five year contracts, noting that he was in the minority of members who were, and continue to be, against that. Mr. Baptiste said he wants to publicly thank the former Superintendent for her service, and he wishes her well as she moves on to a good career in life and happiness. He said this committee puts their faith in their chairperson, public discourse is welcomed, and asked that no one impugn people's integrity. Ms. Douangmany Cage said she hopes that gone are the days that fellow school committee members attack one another in public or private, that they do not support or stand up for fellow members when they are being attacked by someone outside the committee, and members do not share communication in private that attempts to censure the voice of fellow members. She said that the committee has an exciting announcement about our superintendent this evening, and she wishes she had been a part of the conversation about it instead of just learning about it this evening. Ms. Marriott said that she fully agrees with Ms. Appy's statement, noting that the same statement should have been made four months ago when similar things were being said about another school committee member, and she wanted to publicly apologize for not speaking up then.

6. Public Comment

9:29 p.m.

Whitney Battle Baptiste stated that she is coming with a message to the School Committee, noting that what she has seen here is that some people's feelings and what they say are more important than others. She said the School Committee wants to be honored and supported for the work they do, but no one has thought about standing up for her husband. She said they need to understand that it is she and her family that they have allowed to be attacked. Kathleen Anderson, former School Committee member, noted that she has received hundreds of emails from community members about various topics related to the school district, noting that the mission of the school district is to educate all students in a socially just and culturally competent way. What she sees from the School Committee is the maintenance of white supremacy, which she sees in the schools and the district. Ms. Anderson said that she has stated that everyone in the district should be fired, noting that she would like to see the district have a Human Resources Director with a degree in the field, rather than just a secretary who has moved up the ranks. Ms. Appy made efforts to have a point of order regarding the district's public comment policy, and Ms. Anderson continued to speak. Ms. Kent requested during Ms. Anderson's comment that she not discuss individual employees of the district in her public comment. Ms. Anderson stated that adults in this district attack little kids in the classrooms every day. She said she is disgusted by the level of disrespect and lack of concern for our children.

7. Financial Memo regarding Geryk Settlement

9:39 p.m.

A vote was taken on whether to table the Financial Memo agenda item due to the time. Ms. Douangmany Cage moved to have the report. Ms. Dolven seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Mangano distributed and reviewed a memo outlining the ways in which funds for the settlement agreement with Ms. Geryk will be covered. Ms. Kent thanked Mr. Mangano and Ms. Mazur for their work in finding funds. Mr. Baptiste asked what the timeline is for releasing the funds. Mr. Mangano explained that the vacation pay will be released with the next regularly scheduled pay and the remainder would be released at the following payroll period, per the wording of the agreement. Mr. Baptiste asked if there should be any discussion of whether to wait for release until we hear from the Attorney General regarding complaints that have been filed by citizens. Ms. Kent noted that there is a deadline included in the settlement agreement. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked what impact pulling these funds will have on the budget next year. Mr. Mangano explained that it will have very little impact unless we have to pull from reserves, which may be the case in Pelham, because that would leave very little wiggle room in the budget. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked what would be an example of a need for "wiggle room." Mr. Mangano and Mr. Morris reported that it can include something like the broken pipe that happened in the high school recently, FMLA leaves and changes in employee's degrees/salaries.

8. Appointment of Acting Superintendent of Schools

9:50 p.m.

Ms. Kent asked for a motion to appoint Assistant Super Mike Morris as Acting Superintendent per the terms discussed in Executive Session, which use the same methodology used by the Town of Amherst in appointing an Interim Town Manager. Ms. Appy seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Dolven asked if specific terms can be specified. Ms. Kent noted that Mr. Morris will be paid a weekly allotment while serving as Acting Superintendent, consistent with the amount the Interim Town Manager is paid. Mr. Sullivan noted that the committee has not discussed this. Ms. Kent explained that the committee is legally required to appoint an acting superintendent when the Superintendent resigned from the role and it is part of the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent's contracts. This is a formal way to have Mr. Morris serve in the role until an Interim can be appointed. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked which School Committee members and staff members Ms. Kent

spoke with about this agreement. Ms. Kent noted that she spoke only with Ms. Mazur in her role as Human Resources Director, noting that it is a legal obligation to appoint an acting Superintendent. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that she does not object to Ms. Kent's right to move forward, but she encouraged her to report to the committee when such discussions take place. The motion was then unanimously approved. Mr. Baptiste congratulated Mr. Morris and said he trusts his leadership. Mr. Morris thanked the committee. He said that in six days new teachers will begin work, in nine days all staff members start, and in 10 days students report and that is what everyone in the district is working toward. He stated that his goal is a seamless start to the school year.

9. ARPS District Update

9:59 p.m.

Mr. Morris distributed and reviewed highlights of work that has been done in the district over the summer. He noted that there are many teachers who work during the summer getting ready for students. Ms. Douangmany Cage thanked Mr. Morris for agreeing to be the Acting Superintendent. She asked if it is possible to get information on class size soon after school starts, particularly the Math Flex class. Mr. Morris noted that the size of Math Flex fluctuates more than other classes due to the nature of the class. He said he is happy to provide a report.

10. Process for Interim Superintendent

10:10 p.m.

Ms. Kent stated that she would like to appoint a subcommittee of three members who will meet with the Human Resources Director and report back to the full committee in two weeks on the process of appointing an Interim Superintendent. She noted that the formal committee that will be appointed for the permanent superintendent search will include more people, including community members. Mr. Morris explained the scope of tasks coming up in this year which necessitates a short-term Acting Superintendent role for him. He noted that he believes what he can do best for students is get the school year off to a good start and support the new administrators at the building level. The Interim Superintendent would take on the role of negotiations and the Superintendent search. Mr. Baptiste, Ms. Douangmany Cage and Ms. Marriott will serve on the subcommittee. Discussion of the process for a permanent superintendent search will be on the next agenda.

Ms. Dolven moved to table items 14 and 15. Ms. Douangmany Cage seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

11. Adjourn to Executive Session

10:29 p.m.

Ms. Kent noted that the committee will enter Executive Session pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21(a)(1) to discuss complaints or charges brought against a public officer, employee, staff member or individual: discussion of OML complaint vs. Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee received 8/1/16 and 8/15/16 from M. Hootstein, not to return to open session. Discussion will also continue regarding the Executive Session minutes, the documents attached to the minutes and potential release. By unanimous roll call vote, the committee entered Executive Session at 10:29 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland

Approved 9/6/16