

Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, November 20, 2014
Library, Amherst Regional High School

In Attendance

Trevor Baptiste, Chair
Stephen Sullivan
Dan Robb
Sara Dolven
Katherine Appy
Kathleen Traphagen
Amilcar Shabazz
Lawrence O'Brien
Rick Hood
Myles Olmsted, Student Representative

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Michael Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Jo Ann Smith, Special Education Administrator
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
David Slovin, SEC Principal
Maureen Fleming, ARHS School Climate Coordinator
Jean Fay, APEA President
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

1. Welcome and Agenda Review

6:07 p.m.

A. Call to Order and Agenda Review

Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

B. Approve Minutes

Mr. O'Brien moved to accept the minutes of August 26, 2014 and October 14, 2014. Ms. Dolven seconded, and Mr. Baptiste asked that the names of the policies he references in the August 26 minutes be added. The motion was approved with Mr. Hood abstaining from the vote on October 14 and Ms. Traphagen abstaining on the August 26 vote.

2. Public Comments

6:09 p.m.

Carol Sharick, ARHS parent, spoke in support of the schools stating that the "us against them" attitude is incredibly damaging to everyone here. She encouraged everyone in attendance to sit one-on-one with a person with a different skin color to learn about other people's experience. Henry Chang, ARHS parent, noted that he has always been a minority as a student, as a faculty member when he teaches, and is probably a minority in the room tonight. He said he truly appreciates the schools in Amherst and he believes Amherst does a very good job of respecting the diversity of all groups. Matt Cornell, ARMS parent, noted that based on what has been made public it looks like the schools have made good faith effort in the current situation. Jean Sherlock, parent, read a letter from the Amherst NAACP (full text attached) which was then submitted to the Regional School Committee. Max Page, parent, read a statement stating that some in the audience and on the School Committee have the agenda of firing the Superintendent and Mr. Jackson and kicking Ms. Appy and Mr. O'Brien off the School Committee. He encouraged everyone to move beyond political and personal agendas to focus on implementation of the District Improvement Plan. Katie Lestowski, spoke about the need to challenge racism and the status quo. She distributed and a group read the text of a petition in support of Carolyn Gardner, encouraging the School Committee and administration to meet with Ms. Gardner. Carol Ross, Media and Climate Communications Specialist, noted that racism is real but, as a community, we cannot afford to get stuck in it. She stated that we cannot silence our children because it is about our youth and allowing them to take the future where it should go. Sara Aurbach, parent, read a letter on behalf of a community member, Chris Brashear, who is working this evening. The letter expressed his hope that the School Committee will focus on civil discourse and remember that they were elected to serve the community and the Amherst Public Schools. Ms. Aurbach expressed her admiration for the schools, for Ms. Geryk and Mr. Jackson and the excellence of the Amherst schools. Matthew Cunningham, UMass graduate student, spoke about Mr. Jackson's "gag order" noting that it is a violation of Massachusetts labor law. He stated that he is not making any judgment about the administration as people in their personal lives, but that their actions in their professional positions are racist and oppressive. Terry Larasha, parent, read a statement from her husband and herself regarding the way in which diverse students work together in the Amherst Public Schools. She expressed appreciation for the way in which the administration has worked to support Ms. Gardner while attending to the other needs of the schools. Amena Jordon Mendez, Amherst alumnus, spoke about her experience growing up in Amherst and as a student at ARHS. She spoke about how racism impacts people of color, particularly the impact on the health of black Americans, and about the experience of Ms. Gardner. Jill Hathaway, parent, spoke about the action and support provided to Ms. Gardner during the incidents last year, noting that it was disheartening to hear that she is suing the school. Mecces Sogarden, community member, spoke about her outrage when she heard about what happened to Ms. Gardner and the school district's decision to place her on unpaid leave. Vira Doughamany Cage, parent, stated that when teachers cannot exercise their freedom of speech, it teaches students that they cannot do so. She encouraged School Committee members to support teachers in their right to reach out to and speak in support of their Union sister, Carolyn Gardner. Johnny Mohammed, Minister of the Springfield Mosque, noted that he is in attendance tonight in support of his sister, Carolyn Gardner. He asked if Jesus would be pleased with the way in which we are treating our sister Carolyn. Ali

Wicks-Lim, parent, expressed concern that the media and the discourse have set up a belief that you are either in support of Carolyn Gardner or are in support of the community's children. She asked that we be more careful about how we talk about this issue, noting that part of what is best for our children is modeling how we should come together to support an adult who have been wronged within our community. Sonji Johnson-Anderson read statements that were made by members of the School Committee and administration after the incidents against Ms. Gardner last year. She stated that there was a time when we all agreed that a wrong was committed and needs to be righted and asked what happened to that agreement. Mr. Baptiste thanked Ms. Johnson-Anderson for reminding them of their own words. Jeff Napalitano, employee of the American Friends Service Committee of Western Massachusetts, noted that he cannot help but observe the disparity in the tone and words, as well as the racial makeup, between the two halves of the room. He encouraged those in the front of the room to reflect upon that divide and to reflect, as white people, that we do not always have the answers or the sense of empathy needed. He noted that the sense from the room is that some degree of healing is needed. Mr. Baptiste thanked everyone who spoke.

3. Superintendent's Update

7:18 p.m.

Ms. Geryk recognized the ARHS boy's soccer team for their win over Ogonquin in the State Semi-Finals, noting that Mr. Olmstead is a member of the team. She noted that the team next plays in the State Championship match against Needham on Saturday at Worcester Polytech Institute. Ms. Geryk recognized ARHS students Ethan Bakuli, Rory Lambert-Wright and Sajo Jefferson for being honored by the National Achievement Scholarship Program for scoring among the top 3% of all Black-American students who took their SAT in their junior year. Ms. Geryk noted that November 19 was National Education Support Professional Day which recognizes paraeducators, clerical, custodial, transportation and other staff members who support the education of students daily. Leslie Lomasson, ARHS Librarian, has been named Western MA Co-Director of the MA School Library Association. Finally, Ms. Geryk noted that the Middle School cafeteria is getting a salad bar, which will open February 1, through a grant from Whole Foods.

4. Student Advisory Update

7:23 p.m.

Mr. Olmstead reported on the November meeting with Mr. Hood and Mr. Shabazz, noting that the conversation focused largely on support for students dealing with depression, stress and other like issues. He noted that the advisory committee plans to meet with the guidance staff and administration to discuss ways to inform students about resources available to them. Mr. Olmstead stated that it can be difficult for students of color to find staff members of color to go to for support. Mr. Hood noted that it was interesting to hear the comment from the council that white teachers can be good at sympathizing with students of color, but not at empathizing with them. Mr. Olmstead introduced other Student Advisory Council members in attendance which included Josiah Vazquez, Nina Wolf-Landau, and Kendall Dalrich. The next Student Advisory Council meeting will be December 9, and Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Appy plan to attend.

5. Subcommittee Updates

7:28 PM

A. AEF—Mr. Hood noted that the 20th annual Trivia Bee on October 30 was very successful and raised \$8,000. Valley Gives Day is coming up on December 10th.

B. Budget Subcommittee—Mr. Hood reported on the November 10 meeting where the topics discussed included fees, the Capital Plan, the budget timeline and OPEB. Future topics will include per pupil costs. Mr. Hood noted that he would like to step down as Chair of the Budget Subcommittee so he can focus more on the Trends Subcommittee work. Mr. Baptiste noted that, in the spirit of healing perceived divides in the School Committee, he would like to ask Mr. O'Brien to serve as Chair of the Budget Subcommittee. Mr. O'Brien said he would be happy and honored to do so.

C. The Collaborative—Ms. Dolven expressed her apologies that she was unable to attend the last meeting. Mr. Baptiste, Pelham representative, reported on the meeting, noting that the major agenda topic was setting up a procedure for allowing employees of The Collaborative to be let go based on a vote of the Board. Mr. O'Brien noted that there was also a report by the auditors and things are going well.

D. Policy Subcommittee—Mr. Robb noted that there was a meeting last week, although a quorum of members was not able to attend. Discussion centered on the Investment Policy and OPEB. The next meeting is scheduled for December 1 at 5:00 p.m. in the PD Center. Mr. Baptiste clarified that there was actually a quorum at the meeting since he was able to attend and the Chair serves as a de facto member.

E. School Equity Task Force—Mr. Shabazz asked for time during the budget discussion to present information from the SETF. Ms. Traphagen noted that the SETF meets on the second Wednesday of each month from 6:00-8:00 p.m.

F. Data Trends Subcommittee—Mr. Hood reported that the subcommittee met on Tuesday, November 18. He distributed and reviewed the current draft of trends the subcommittee is planning to track and answered clarifying questions from the committee. Ms. Appy recognized the enormous amount work that has gone into developing these measurables for the district.

6. New and Continuing Business

7:57 p.m.

A. SEPAC Update

This item was tabled until the next meeting.

B. Regionalization Report

This item was tabled in the absence of Andy Steinberg, RAWG Chair.

C. FY15 First Quarter Budget Update (Written Report)

DOCUMENTS: *Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Fiscal Year 2015 First Quarter Report; Budget Update 11/20/14 Handout*

Mr. Mangano distributed and reviewed a handout outlining mid-year cut of more than \$65 million announced by Governor Patrick on December 19. For the schools, the cuts will impact the districts by reducing Regional transportation reimbursement by \$18.7 million, Special Education Circuit Breaker by \$3.86 million, vocational school transportation by \$2.24 million and charter school reimbursements by \$1.2 million. Mr. Mangano answered clarifying questions regarding the written first quarter report that was provided to the School Committee in advance.

D. FY16 Fees and Capital Plan

DOCUMENTS: *Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Ten Year Capital Plan Draft 11/7/14; FY2015 Fee Review and Proposed Changes for FY2016*

Mr. Mangano distributed and reviewed the draft ten year capital plan for the Region focusing on the Fiscal Year 2016 projects and the ways in which they will be financed. For the High School, projects include an access control upgrade, replacement or refurbishment of the gym bleachers, replacement or update of the intercom system, purchase or build outdoor storage and seal the parking lot. The only FY16 project for the Middle School is an upgrade to the elevator. Mr. Hood reported that the Budget Subcommittee is discussing the potential of setting a percentage of the budget for capital expenses on a yearly basis. He noted that all of the four towns would have to agree to that and funds would have to be built up before it could be implemented. At Mr. Baptiste's request, Mr. Mangano reviewed the process through which capital projects are proposed and approved. Mr. Mangano reported that there were no requests for fee increases this year.

E. FY16 Budget Guidance Discussion

DOCUMENTS: *FY16 Budget Priorities; Memorandum and Materialsto the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee from the School Equity Task Force Regarding Recommendations for FY16 Budget Priorities Related to Equity Issues*

Ms. Geryk distributed the draft of the FY16 Budget Priorities noting that is important to have input from the School Committee as the budget process goes forward. Mr. Baptiste opened the floor for discussion. Mr. Hood noted that under Cost Savings it is important to look at potential staffing reductions since the district has a higher staff-to-student ratio than the state average. At Ms. Traphagen's request, Mr. Hood outlined the timeline/process of the budget process.

Mr. Shabazz and Ms. Traphagen, with the assistance of SETF members David Refsin and Susan Theberge, gave a Powerpoint presentation providing budget guidance suggested by the School Equity Task Force. The four recommendations include:

- Funding to bring the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program to the Regional schools;
- Funding to provide Challenge Day for a large number of students at ARHS;
- Increased funding for ongoing professional development (beyond what occurs in staff meeting) for all faculty, administration and staff with regard to race, class and other equity issues;
- Funding for development of a Race and Other Equity Issues course now through the initial term of 2015-2016 and for teaching several sections of the course in the Spring of 2016.

Mr. Baptiste expressed appreciation for the presentation and discussion.

F. Enrollment Update

DOCUMENTS: *Regional Enrollment Projections October 2014*

Ms. Mazur distributed and briefly reviewed how the data is compiled for the Regional enrollments, noting that she uses a five year rolling average method. She noted that the enrollment projections are used in the budget planning process.

G. Superintendent's Evaluation Goals

DOCUMENTS: *Superintendent Evaluation 2014-2015 Self-Assessment, Goals and Action Plan (updated 11/14); Department Abstracts and Goals; District Improvement Plan September 2014; Sample Superintendent Goals from other Massachusetts Districts*

Ms. Geryk briefly reviewed the evaluation goals and action plan she presented to the School Committees, noting that they have been discussed by the Amherst and Pelham School Committees, which have both provided feedback. She explained that the priority elements in the District Improvement Plan and Department Goals have been color coded to show input from the School Committee as a whole, individual school committee members, and members of the community and SETF. Mr. Morris provided a brief orientation regarding the Superintendent Evaluation process under the new Educator Evaluation

System. After clarifying questions and discussion, Mr. O'Brien moved to approve the Superintendent's Goals 2014-2015 as presented. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

7. School Committee Planning

9:58 p.m.

A. Calendar—Ms. Dolven cannot attend an Executive Session that was scheduled for 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday. It was agreed that it will be rescheduled for a date on which the full committee can attend. Ms. Westmoreland will contact the attorneys to determine their availability. Ms. Geryk reminded the School Committee of the Four Towns meeting on Saturday and encouraged them to attend. At Mr. Robb's request, Mr. Baptiste reaffirmed Ms. Westmoreland as a voting member of the Policy Subcommittee.

8. Adjournment

10:02 p.m.

Mr. O'Brien moved to adjourn at 10:02 p.m. Ms. Dolven seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland

Approved 2-24-15



Amherst NAACP

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November 17, 2014

Dr. Trevor Baptiste, Chairman
Amherst Pelham Regional School Committee
15 Gulf Road
Pelham, MA 01002

Re: *NAACP v. John Hanson, et al.*
United States District Court for Massachusetts
Civil Action No.: 92-30241-F

Subject: AGREEMENT: Dated October 1, 1993

Issue: **BREACH OF AGREEMENT:**
VI. REMEDY FOR BREACH OF CONTRACT

Dear Dr. Baptiste:

Pursuant to section VI. REMEDY FOR BREACH OF CONTRACT; 1., the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Plaintiff, and hereinafter referred to as "NAACP"), is writing to the Amherst Pelham Regional School Committee ("APRSC"), as the only other signatory to the AGREEMENT. In accordance with the terms of the AGREEMENT the NAACP is hereby notifying you that the APRSC is in a material and substantial breach of the AGREEMENT as it has not in any meaningful way, fulfilled the requirements of section V. DISCIPLINE. In that section of the AGREEMENT "The School Committee agrees to initiate a process with the NAACP to discuss and examine the concerns the NAACP has about the discipline process in the schools. The parties will work together cooperatively in this area to promote the just and fair administration of discipline in the school. This process will begin in October 1993 and the parties will develop a schedule for completion of the tasks" (I have attached a copy of the Agreement for your reference.)

Attached are two excel spreadsheets that clearly, and without any error, demonstrate that there has been absolutely no change in the "unjust and unfair administration of justice in the schools". APRSC was first made aware of this bad behavior with the filing of a complaint with the Massachusetts Department of Education in October 1990. Notably, the Massachusetts Department of Education found many violations of state law by APRSC in the areas of Racial Harrassment & Abuse; Hiring Practices; Educational Tracking; Administrative Response to Racism; and, Active/Passive Staff Racism. In a Final Report - Complaint GS163, transmitted to Superintendent Gus Sayer April 11, 1991, the Massachusetts Department of Education made several Required Corrective Action(s) and Recommendations for Noncompliance Issues: Responses to acts of Racial Discrimination, Required Corrective Action five (5), and Recommendations: five (5); Educational Tracking: Required Corrective Action, three (3), and Recommendations: four (4); Discipline, Required Corrective Action,



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two (2), and Recommendations four (4); and, Active/Passive Staff Acts of Racial Discrimination, Required Corrective Action, one (1). The APRSC told the State it would implement those corrective actions before the filing of the NAACP complaint. It appears that APRSC remained in violation of the requirements of the Final Report, as evidenced by its request to the Department of Education in July, 1993 to close the NAACP complaint, even after the commencement of the NAACP litigation.

In that intervening 24 year span, the non-white student population has continued to suffer an unfair, unjust and, arguably, illegal application of disciplinary measures within the jurisdictional area of the APRSC. While this demand is clearly centered upon the student discipline issue it can not be separated from all the other complaints about the structure and management, climate, and safety within the APRSC schools. Clearly, this issue speaks to the larger issue of how racism has been institutionalized and protected by the APRSC with its failure to abide by the terms of the AGREEMENT.

Accordingly, pursuant to the requirements of the AGREEMENT: VI. 1., and 2., within the next ten (10) days, please provide me with dates and times when you are available to have a "face to face" meeting to discuss this egregious violation of the Agreement and "attempt to resolve it."

We look forward to finally addressing and resolving this disparity that has been ignored for more than twenty years.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Anderson

President

NAACP, Amherst Area Branch

ENCLOSURES:

JOINT MOTION FOR THE ENTRY OF A CONSENT JUDGMENT; 10-1-93 Allowed, Friedman, S.J. (2 pages);

AGREEMENT, Dated September 17, 1993 (9 pages);

FINAL REPORT - Complaint GS163; The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education, dated April 11, 1991 (13 pages).