

MINUTES
AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD
November 21, 2005
Amherst Middle School First Floor Music Room

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Chairperson Deborah Cort called the Board meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. **CALL TO ORDER**

Present: **ATTENDANCE**
Amherst School Board: Dwight Brew, Deborah Cort, Pam Dudoff, Nancy Head, and Jim O'Mara
Administrative Team: Howard Colter, Porter Dodge, Deborah Martel, Kathy Skoglund, Gerry St. Amand, and Susan Ward
Minutes Recorder: Lyn Jennings

Deborah Cort invited comments from the public, but none were forthcoming. **PUBLIC TIME**

Cathy Jo Butler presented the Amherst School District Treasurer's Cash Journal dated October 2005. **REPORTS**
Treasurer's Report
 Jim O'Mara moved to accept the Treasurer's Cash Journal Report dated October 2005 as presented. Dwight Brew seconded the motion. All Board Members voted in favor of the motion. The motion passed.

Gerry St. Amand presented his Principals Report dated November 21, 2005. Gerry highlighted the following: **Building Principals**

- David April, Physical Education Teacher at Wilkins, has just completed a year as past-president of the NHAHPERD, and coordinated the group's recent conference program. More than 700 educators attended the conference.
- A special thank you must be extended to Mr. Will Towner, Mrs. Patty Case, the Amherst Junior Women's Club, and the students at Wilkins School whose fundraising efforts allowed us to install a beautiful, new granite sign at the entrance to Wilkins School.
- Results of a recent world language survey reflect that many parents support instruction in a second language at the elementary level.
- A special thank you to all of the volunteers from the Amherst PTA who provided teachers with a wonderful lunch on the Friday of Conference Week. Not only was the food wonderful, but it also allowed teachers the opportunity to

connect with one another.

- Recent interpretations about “HQT” – highly qualified teacher and it’s implications for elementary level teachers, such as the requirement to take and pass the Praxis II have caused definite anxiety among our very capable teaching colleagues.
- Thank you to all the students and families who supported our recent fundraising efforts for SHARE. Members of our school communities donated many food items, gift cards, and Shaw’s “turkey” certificates. Kathie McIntyre, media specialist, coordinates this fundraiser in conjunction with our Book Fair.
- Nicole Heimark continues to provide staff members with timely, accurate, and helpful information specific to “HQT” and its requirements. Nicole, along with the support of Kathy Skoglund, provided valuable and necessary information to staff members of Clark and Wilkins Schools on Wednesday, November 16, 2005.
- Thank you to all the students, staff members, families, and community members who have supported me during several recent challenging situations that my family has faced.

Gerry St. Amand provided Board members with a copy of the survey that was sent home to parents regarding World Language at the Clark and Wilkins Schools. Gerry told the board they could review the results on their own. He said overall, there is support for a “before school” program.

Jim O’Mara thanked the teachers that represented the Amherst District for attending the SAU meeting on November 15, 2005. He said they did an unbelievable job in opening the board’s eyes on the range of learners they deal with on a daily basis.

Porter Dodge presented the Amherst Middle School Report dated November 21, 2005. Porter highlighted the following:

- Budget Preparation – The last several weeks have been spent preparing the budget. The Curriculum Coordinators were asked to take a hard look at all requests to ensure they were asking for not what we want, but for what we really need. As a result of their scrutiny we have been able to come in flat or below what was budgeted last year in every account over which we have control. Porter said everyone did a great job and thanked them for all their efforts.
- Parent-Teacher Meetings – Parent-teacher meetings have been on-going for the last several weeks, but were highlighted last Thursday and Friday afternoon. Teachers report that these are valuable opportunities for sharing student achievement face-to-face with parents and/or guardians. The PTA provided staff with a wonderful lunch on Friday. Porter

said the teachers really appreciated the event provided by the PTA.

- Outside Lighting – New lighting was installed on the side of the new wing and by the gym. Safety is certainly enhanced with the additional lighting. They have received complaints from neighbors that the lights are too bright. They are working on the issue and have already made some changes, which have helped.
- PTA Grants – Once again, the PTA fall grant will provide bus transportation at the end of the year to assist in the transition of fourth grade students to the middle school and sixth grade students from Mont Vernon to the Amherst Middle School. The fall grant is also being used to purchase an additional basketball pole, backboard, and hoop to give the Middle School two full courts, which will make a nice area for recess.
- Porter said Nicole Heimark and Kathy Skoglund spoke to the staff regarding getting them to the status of HQT. Porter said the Praxis II exam is very much on the minds of the teachers in order to get them to HQT status.

Deborah Cort said Board members were very impressed with the representation at the SAU meeting as well as the presentations that were done.

Deborah Cort asked Nicole to briefly speak about HQT.

Nicole told board members about an audit that was done by the Federal Government in the spring. The audit assessed whether New Hampshire schools were meeting HQT status, which is a component of the No Child Left Behind Act. It was determined NH is not in HQT compliance for grades K-6. Teachers must be able to demonstrate content area of knowledge. The Federal Government said content knowledge applies to all teachers regardless of how many contents they are teaching.

Teachers have two options to achieve HQT status:

- 1) HOUSSE Process – It's designed to create a uniform portfolio process for teachers. The Housse process is not portable and is signed off by the Superintendent.
- 2) Praxis II – This is a K-8 test which tests in the key content areas. Nicole said they are encouraging their teachers to take this exam. They believe this is the best option for the teachers. The exam lasts two hours and contains 120 multiple-choice questions. It is a portable exam within the state and it has portability to another thirty plus states in the country.

Nicole told Board members about a new page on the SAU website where teachers can go to search and get information on HQT.

Jim O'Mara asked what the state mandated deadline was for teachers to be at HQT status? Nicole said as of now, it's June 30, 2006. Nicole believes this will change for Elementary Education Teachers. She thinks there will be about a year extension.

Howard wanted to acknowledged Nicole and Kathy for the work they've done in getting the facts out to hopefully help take away some of the anxiety and reduce the amount of misinformation around the subject.

Howard said there was another meeting tomorrow in Concord that he and Nicole would be attending that will also assist them in getting information out to the teachers.

Nancy asked what would happen if a teacher didn't pass the Praxis II? Nicole said teachers have three opportunities to pass the exam. The Education Commission is pursuing what happens if a teacher does not pass the exam and achieve HQT status. For now, the Commissioner has asked that you send the teacher directly to him.

Howard said if teachers do not achieve HQT status by the deadline, a notice would have to go home with students informing parents of the teachers who are not at HQT status.

Howard said teachers should not worry about loosing their jobs.

To take the Praxis II test, it will cost teachers \$25 for the book and \$135 to take the exam. There is no cost to take the practice exam online.

Teachers can use Professional Development monies to cover these costs.

Howard said unfortunately, their objectives and initiatives are being put aside because the state was notified NH teachers are not in compliance with HQT.

- C. FY04 Management Letter Update – Susan provided Board Members with a copy of the FY04 Management Letter Update dated November 4, 2005. Susan said she has received nothing back from the Auditors yet regarding the FY05 Audit but anticipates she will receive something in December.

Dwight questioned why they hadn't received anything back yet from the Auditors. Dwight said last year they asked if they could receive a report earlier in the fall and were told it wouldn't be an issue. Susan said she didn't have a date as to when a report would be available. Dwight asked Susan to contact the auditors to get a target date for the report. Susan said she would contact them and report back to the board with the date.

DISCUSSION
Brick School Porch
Repair

Will Ludt, the Chair of the Amherst Heritage Commission wanted to speak to the Board regarding repairs to the Brick School. Also at the meeting from the Heritage Commission were Dotsy Bohama and Carolyn Quinn.

Board members received a letter in their packets dated November 14, 2005, outlining the topics Will wanted to discuss with the Board.

Will said he briefed the SHS school board on October 20, 2005 and the MVVS board on November 10, 2005, to help raise awareness of the need for repairs to the porch roof and in getting the school boards advocacy for support.

Last year, the Heritage Commission raised \$3,000.00 but had to return a \$1,000.00 donation to a town organization and might lose an additional \$2,000.00 pledge from another town organization since the funds aren't being utilized quick enough.

Will requested the Amherst School Board and/or the SAU board assist the Heritage Commission in funding an appropriate amount (estimated \$12,000.00) to fix the Brick School roof. Will wanted the board's approval to spend some money out of the Brick School Maintenance line to share some of the costs.

Will told the Board, the Commission still plans to pursue grants and retain commitments, if possible from town organizations.

Pam asked how much they were looking for from the Brick School Maintenance line. Will said between \$7,000.00 and \$9,000.00.

Dwight asked who would be doing the work. Will said they would put it out to bid.

Dwight suggested the Commission get bids and present them to the board. If they have an actual cost, then the Commission could ask the board for an exact amount of money which would be offset by grants. Dwight said he preferred the Commission present the repairs with actual cost basis information.

Pam asked where these repairs fell on the NESDEC list. No one had the NESDEC list at the meeting however, Deborah read from a list Jim Rines had put together which included a fire alarm upgrade, repairing the front porch and roof, and re-pointing the masonry. The only item from the list that has been completed was the work that was done to the chimney.

Board members wanted to know what needed to be done from a safety perspective.

Deborah said this is where the Buildings & Grounds Director would come in handy because they would be able to prioritize the list of repairs in order of safety and need.

Howard said the Board should look at this issue in two ways:

- 1) What is needed to preserve the building?
- 2) What will it take to make the building look presentable for

the employees and improve the quality of their work environment as it relates to ventilation, heat and air quality?
Board members agreed to put together a list of maintenance needs for the Brick School based on recommendations from the board and SAU Staff. Will Ludt will get some quotes to determine how much it will cost to repair the roof. The Board was unable to commit to a dollar amount; they wanted to wait to see what the bids were first. The Board agreed to put the Amherst Heritage Commission back on the agenda in January to discuss the bids Will received for the roof repairs and to accept the donations from a town organization for two benches at the Brick School. Jim O'Mara agreed to install the granite post that is needed at the Brick School Walkway. Will also wanted to know the status of the swing set in the Brick School playground area. Susan said she would check on the new swing seats and swing set repair.

Deborah Cort met with Gerry St. Amand and they looked at putting the Announcer's Booth at the fiftieth yard line. Deborah said the structure looked fine, it would be usable for kids and she didn't find anything negative about it. Deborah said she spoke with Nancy McMillan, the new Recreation Director. Deborah said her concern was if they bring this structure in for the Football program, would they have to bring it in for some other sport as well. She said she would prefer they have it belong to a private organization. Deborah asked if the Recreation Department would be willing to be responsible for the structure. Nancy said she was open to the idea but they would have to meet with Dana Redmond, the Recreation Commissioner to discuss.

Announcer's Booth Update

Susan Ward provided Board Members with a copy of the Amherst School District FY07 Preliminary Budget Proposal dated November 18, 2005. Susan said they believe the mission across the districts is: "To Engage, Support and Challenge All Learners." Susan said prior to the opening of school in August 2005, the administrative team for the SAU 39, consisting of principals, directors, and administrators from all schools in the SAU, as well as central office staff, met to begin to address some educational opportunities. As a result of the meeting, a five-year district plan will be driven by two SAU wide goals.

FY'07 Budget

Nicole summarized the District Goals and 5-Year Plan for 2005-2010 as follows:

- Differentiate instruction and programs to meet the needs of all learners.
 - The curriculum offers both breadth and depth in order to meet the needs of all learners.
 - Teachers are prepared/trained to meet the needs of individual learners.
 - Authentic assessment is crafted to provide all learners continued and varied opportunities to show what they know and are able to do.
- Improve performance in reading, writing, math and complex thinking in all content areas.
 - Teachers in all content areas K-12 design curriculum to include clearly articulated learning expectations / standards in reading, writing, mathematics, and complex thinking.
 - Teachers indicate how they develop student skills in reading, writing, math and complex thinking in all area.
 - Assessment in all areas is drawn from a variety of sources, and informs instruction and curriculum design.

Nicole emphasized the SAU A-Team believes these are the goals that drive their work. She said these goals are at the heart of what is best for all of our students.

Nicole said the budget initiatives for FY07 directly link to these two goals and in many cases both of them.

Susan said the FY07 Baseline Budget includes:

- Salary components of the AEA contract.
- Includes no salary increases for ASSA members pending the outcome of negotiations these will be presented on a separate warrant article.
- Reflects substantial increases to energy costs. (Electricity and Heating Oil)
- Reflects an increase of 9% - 10% for insurance premiums. (Susan included a 10% increase in this budget)

Susan presented the FY07 Initiatives and said the SAU would demonstrate to the Board how each of the initiatives they were proposing was driven by the goals they have introduced. Performance and accountability go hand in hand with goal setting and achievement, and they expect to demonstrate progress toward achieving these goals throughout FY07 and the years to come.

- NWEA Testing – Nicole Heimark told Board members NWEA stands for Northwest Evaluation Association.

Nicole said NWEA measures individual student academic progress in grades 2-12 immediately providing teachers with student data on learning styles, strengths, and weaknesses.

Nicole said it is a smart test, because kids don't "ceiling out", and you can't on the NWEA test. Nicole said this test, gives you incredibly valuable information on each student's grade level performance. For example, you may learn that a 4th grade student performs at a 7th grade math level. By using the NWEA test, the SAU is able to link back to their goal of Differentiated Instruction where teachers will be able to meet kids' individual learning needs.

Nicole said teachers receive immediate results through a short report once a student has completed the exam. Within forty-eight hours, a full report is received detailing what the student has mastered, not mastered, strengths, weaknesses, etcetera. A student can take the test up to four times per year. The SAU would like to test once in the Fall and once in the Spring. This would allow teachers to diagnose and determine progress made during the school year.

Nicole said they would like to pilot the program in the Spring of 2006, testing 850 students in the District either from the Middle School only or from the 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th grades.

Nicole told the board there are currently 83 school districts that employ NWEA testing in NH. Surrounding districts currently using NWEA include: Bedford, Hooksett, Litchfield, Milford, Nashua, Wilton-Lyndeborough, and Wilton.

Dwight asked how long the test takes and how it is taken. Nicole said it lasts 30-45 minutes and it is administered on a computer.

Dwight asked if we were limiting the number of students to 850 because of budget constraints. Nicole said yes, that is why they were limiting it to 850 students. Nicole said the cost for 850 students to take the exam is \$20,103. For a Professional Development Day it costs \$3,500. The test costs \$13.50 per student per test. If fifty percent of the district takes the test, the cost drops to \$13.00 per student and if sixty-five percent of the district takes the test the cost drops to \$12.50 per student.

In the Spring, the SAU plans to test 425 students through Title Funds so the cost per student will be \$6.25.

- o Addition of Assistant Principal/SPED Coordinator at Wilkins Elementary School.

Gerry St. Amand researched the need for this position. 85% of the districts in NH that have an equivalent population to the Wilkins School have a full time administrator to support the Principal. Gerry said Brenda Martucci's primary responsibility is the Clark School.

Gerry said he could definitely benefit from additional support at the Wilkins school. Gerry said he spends a significant amount of time on behavioral and discipline issues. This year Gerry has 17 non-tenured teaching staff, which requires 51 formal observations. Gerry said he believes a combination position would be best.

Kathy said hiring a SPED Coordinator would be effective and supportive for the district. Kathy highlighted how the coordinator would help the district:

- 1) Technical Assistance – Laws are constantly changing and the coordinator could offer support to the regular and special education staff. Kathy said it's critical that staff is up to date on procedures and timelines.
- 2) Parental support
- 3) Conflict resolution
- 4) Behavioral support

Kathy Skoglund said by hiring an Asst. Principal/SPED Coordinator at the Wilkins School, they would be able to return the Principal to the job he is supposed to be doing. By hiring an Asst. Principal/SPED Coordinator, it will help achieve the goals in both areas and it offers a compromise that will aid both Special Education and the Principal.

Jim asked Kathy if she could identify what lines would increase if this position were not filled. She will provide this information at the next meeting.

Howard said by hiring an Assistant Principal/SPED Coordinator they believe this is a compromise. Currently, Gerry St. Amand, is handling all the issues involving teachers, parents, buses, etc. This is management not leadership. Howard said he doesn't know how the principal can lead if he is handling all the management issues.

- o Addition of Library Aid at AMS – Porter said the Library Aide was cut four years ago from the budget.

By cutting this position, it has impacted the library's ability to function as the "Center of the Universe."

Porter said Suzanne and Mary have done a terrific job but it's very difficult for just two people. Porter said many students are using the library after school and every computer is being used as well.

Porter said by having an extra person come back it would serve them greatly. Porter invited members of the Board to look at the Library during the day and after school. He said the students need adult supervision and would appreciate it if the Board would look at putting the position of a Library Aide back in the budget.

- Support for Resource Officer at AMS – Porter told members of the Board the Resource Officer is a very valuable part of the school and he really hopes the position will continue to be supported.
- Facility Manager Stipend at AMS – Porter said Roger has taken over the position of “Facilities Manager” at AMS. Porter said a lot of the equipment is old in the building and Roger does all the work himself, which is a significant savings. Porter said with a large savings in the long run, the Board should really consider the stipend to be well worth the money to run the building.
- Technology Professional Development – Susan said these funds would be used to assist in training the Technology Support Staff among three buildings. Susan said they believe it’s a good investment in these individuals to provide them with ongoing professional development.

Susan provided Board members with a document binder containing a substantial amount of information across all districts. The binder included information about Enrollment, Staffing, and Special Education.

Susan said the document is not complete, it continues to be a work in progress and she would appreciate all questions be directed to her. Susan asked that everyone have patience as they continue to build the book.

Deborah thanked Susan for the book and said there was a lot of valuable information in it.

Howard wanted to publicly thank Susan for the amazing amount of thought and extra time that went into the binder. He said it was way beyond what he expected and he appreciated her effort.

Deborah asked Susan when they would be receiving the revenue sheets so they could get a feeling for the tax impact. Susan said she would have them at the next budget presentation.

Deborah asked if the district has done a cost benefit analysis on Project Safeguard. She said it is a program that is done in two days and is used for one grade level at a cost of \$19,000. She was questioning if it was the best use of the money.

Porter said no analysis has been done yet.

Dwight said one-time charges should not be in the baseline budget.

Howard agreed, one time only expenditures should be described as just that but he believes they need to be shown in the budget because the voters approved them.

Deborah said Board members would want to meet with their subcommittees, and Ways and Means. She said if at all possible, Board members should set up meetings so the first meeting is prior to the next board meeting.

Deborah said everyone should have a copy of the Proposed Budget Process and Meeting Schedule.

Howard provided the Board with a handout dated November 14, 2005, detailing the Administrative Salary Structure. Deborah asked what percentage goes to Administrators. Howard provided board members with three general paths to calculate and budget for administrative salaries. Howard said they currently take salaries and increase them by the cost of living. He asked if the Board liked this way or should they look at it freshly?

**Administrator's
Payscale**

Howard suggested a pay scale that factors in responsibility based upon enrollments, staff, budget, work year, etc.

He said they could look at salaries based on a comprehensive study of similar school districts. Howard said he would also want to look at health and life insurance benefits, professional development budgets, and work demands.

The board agreed to put this item back on the agenda for the December 5, 2005, meeting.

Howard will get input from the principals.

Pam would like some examples from other districts using a pay scale.

Pam Dudoff moved to accept the minutes of November 7, 2005. Nancy Head seconded the motion. The minutes were approved with the following amendments:

**Approval of Minutes
of November 7, 2005**

Page 1372, 1st paragraph, Hope Depot to Home Depot.

Page 1372, 4th paragraph, change to read: "Pam Dudoff noted she appreciated this effort and added there has been some concern from neighbors regarding the noise level, to which Jack reported the proposed design would minimize the noise because the speakers are more high-tech and wireless and would be placed closer to the ground."

Page 1372, last paragraph, second line, change the word "can" to "cannot."

Page 1374, 3rd paragraph, change to read: "Deborah Cort noted the Expendable Trust Fund (ETF) Committee had addressed the snow guard at Wilkins and added the Committee had been waiting for information from Jim Rines before he left."

Page 1374, 4th paragraph, change to read: "Kathy Skoglund highlighted the NWEA program and added this assessment may be used as a supplement to the NECAP assessment."

Page 1375, 3rd paragraph, last sentence, and change to read: "Deborah also encouraged the Board and Administration to not focus on percentage and dollar increases."

Page 1375, 4th paragraph, change to read: " Nancy Head added student enrollment is not going up, which will be difficult to justify new staff.

Page 1377, 3rd paragraph, 1st sentence, change Dole to Soule.

Page 1377, 3rd paragraph, 2nd sentence, change to read: “Margaret Ann Moran would cover Special Education and Tom Flygare would cover labor issues.

Page 1377, 4th paragraph, change to read: “The Board noted receipt of the FY’04 Management Letter and requested it to be put on the next agenda.”

The Board voted in favor of accepting the minutes as amended with one abstention. The motion passed.

Pam Dudoff moved to enter into a Non-Public Session, under the provision of RSA 91-A:3,II(b). Dwight Brew seconded the motion. By a roll-call vote, each member of the Board voted in favor: O’Mara-yes; Dudoff-yes; Cort-yes; Brew-yes; Head-yes. The motion passed. The Board went into a Non-Public Session at 9:00 p.m.

**NON-PUBLIC
SESSION - Personnel**

The Superintendent updated the board on a leave of absence request.

Dwight Brew moved to come out of Non-Public Session and Pam Dudoff seconded. By a roll-call vote, each member of the Board voted in favor: O’Mara-yes; Dudoff-yes; Cort-yes; Brew-yes; Head-yes. The motion passed. The Board came out of Non-Public at 9:02 p.m.

Nancy Head moved to enter into a Non-Public Session, under the provision of RSA 91-A:3, II(e). Pam Dudoff seconded the motion. By a roll-call vote, each member of the Board voted in favor: O’Mara-yes; Dudoff-yes; Cort-yes; Brew-yes; Head-yes. The motion passed. The Board went into Non-Public Session at 9:04 p.m.

**OTHER NON-
PUBLIC SESSION
Legal Matter**

The Board discussed a pending legal matter. No action was taken nor were any motions made.

Nancy Head moved to come out of Non-Public Session and Dwight Brew seconded. By a roll-call vote, each member of the Board voted in favor: O’Mara-yes; Dudoff-yes; Cort-yes; Brew-yes; Head-yes. The motion passed. The Board came out of Non-Public at 9:30 p.m.

Discussion of Possible Meeting Dates for January – Board members agreed to meet on January 3, 2006 and if needed, they will also meet on January 9, 2006.

OTHER

- A. December 5, 2005 – Regular Amherst School Board Meeting
- B. December 13, 2005 – SAU 39 Board Meeting – Public Hearing/Approval of Budget @ SHS
- C. December 19, 2005 – Regular Amherst School Board Meeting
- D. January 3, 2006 – Regular Amherst School Board Meeting
- E. January 9, 2006 – Regular Amherst School Board Meeting (if needed)
- F. January 16, 2006 – Public Hearing on Budget

NEXT MEETINGS

- A. Memo from Howard Colter regarding 2005-2006 Procedures for Cancellation of School due to Emergencies and Inclement Weather.

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CORRESPONDENCE
AND
INFORMATION

Jim O'Mara moved to adjourn. Dwight Brew seconded. All Board Members voted unanimously in favor of the motion. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT