

**MINUTES
AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING
May 24, 2006
Amherst Middle School Music Room – First Floor**

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Chairperson Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. **CALL TO ORDER**

Present:

ATTENDANCE

Amherst School Board: Jim O'Mara, Pam Dudoff, Dwight Brew, Nancy Head (arrived at 6:26 p.m.) and Deborah Cort

Administrative Team: Howard Colter, Susan Ward, Porter Dodge, Nicole Heimareck, and Kathy Skoglund

Minutes Recorder: Terri Connolly

Chair Dwight Brew opened the special meeting requesting Superintendent Howard Colter to present his recommendation for the district regarding the waiver of two school days as a result of recent floods. Dwight asked if there was anyone from the public who wished to address the board concerning matters other than that of the waiver discussion, to which no public comments were forthcoming.

Dwight asked Howard to present his recommendation to the board, to which Howard presented a detailed summary of events that followed the cancelled school days of May 15th and May 16th and events leading up to the May 24th special meeting. Howard recommended the board not request the waiver and acknowledged the matter may cause substantial frustration since SCHS voted to waive the two days. Howard noted there are many teachers and families within the district that would like to have consistent decisions among the schools within the SAU 39 district.

Howard noted his first concern is teaching students, and according to the law, there are minimum of 180 instructional days to teach. Howard noted two instructional days were significant and those days could be made up within the last week of school (rather than ending on a Tuesday, school could end on a Thursday). There are other options that may have impacts and hardships, but the district should remain flexible and as generous as possible when considering those options. In terms of options, one option would be to request a waiver of two instructional days and request employees to work on those days. There are district contracts with the AEA and ASSA that need to be considered, especially for hourly wage employees. If the board decides to go with this option, and have teachers come in for professional days, a sidebar agreement would be needed. Howard

distributed copies of collective bargaining agreements and highlighted AEA Article XIII, SALARY section 13.3 and the ASSA Page 7, Section 8.8 for the board to review.

Dwight asked if there were any comments from the public concerning the superintendent's recommendation, to which the following comments were presented:

Kristin Desborough, co-PTA chair with two children in the school district and works for Mont Vernon school, noted the two days would present a problem because of work. The issue came up at the PTA, and several families and teachers have scheduled flights and vacations beginning June 21st and June 22nd. Kristin also noted concern about the days allocated for student transitions, and transporting students for Step Up Day. Kristin added the sense at the PTA meeting is that the community would go either way, but it would be helpful to have such decisions made on a district-level.

Susan Nichols, part time teacher at AMS, reported are a number of teachers with concrete plans and plane tickets for June 21st and June 22nd—many of these plans were not arranged until a month ago when the winter storms were no longer a threat. If there are a high number of teachers out, there is a concern about the substitute pool. Susan added that at the end of the school year, especially the last couple of days of school, students are not wired for learning. Susan added if the teachers need to do it, it would get done, but noted she is concerned it would all be a waste of time.

Amy Mangolis, 4th grade teacher at Wilkins, noted she was in this same position at a different school years ago; out of her 21-student classroom, there were 3 students who came to school. When this happens, there is no closure for the kids and morale would be negatively impacted.

Debbie Hendrix noted there were few community members present at the special meeting and she believed many parents are under the assumption the decision to waive the two days was made as a district; if there is a decision to extend the year, there will be backlash and more emails.

Howard Colter noted Gerry St. Amand had submitted an email, which reported there were strong feelings among a noticeable percentage of teachers that the district should request a waiver.

After hearing the public comments, the board presented their comments.

Deborah Cort noted there were many points to consider regarding this matter, including a contract with students for 180 days of instructional teaching, a teaching contract for 180 days, a bussing contract, a contract with support staff, and a budget that supports 180 days of school. Deborah added she was prepared to defend the position not to support a waiver, but she has heard some very strong points tonight, including the concerns for the substitute pools and resulting cost impact in the substitute account. Step Up Day is also valuable and needs to be taken into consideration.

Pam Dudoff added there should be consistency throughout the district but found the matter difficult. Pam also noted the importance of Step Up Day and the flexibility needed to accommodate travel plans.

Jim O'Mara noted there are two separate labor agreements, and questioned if the waiver is applied, would there need to be a request through the collective bargaining agreement, to which Howard added the board has a right to request the minimum of 180 days. If there is intent to take away wages or cut wages by per diem, than the matter has to be negotiated; if the two days are waived, than nothing needs to be done in terms of salary negotiations.

There was a note that the Mont Vernon board would vote on the matter on Thursday night. John Schwope, representing himself as Chair of the SAU board, had emailed Howard and noted he supported a waiver.

There was a question as to why the SAU district board did not make a consensus decision on the matter, to which Jim O'Mara responded each board represents elected officials who have differing opinions and represent constituents regarding these matters. Jim added he shares concern for hourly employees who would have to forfeit two days of pay. Jim added he is reluctantly willing to ask for waiver and more reluctantly to forfeit hourly employees pay and would support sticking with the current schedule. Jim encouraged the building principals to capitalize on the two days with teachers and support staff.

Nancy Head added she respected Superintendent Colter's recommendation, but as a former teacher, she knows it would be difficult to teach two extra days. Nancy added she felt strongly to request the waiver and noted there is sufficient work for the end of the year.

Deborah Cort added the ASSA should be encouraged to put in

work hours if the work is there for them to do. In light of Step Up day, the substitutes pool, and ending the year on a positive note, Deborah note supported a waiver.

There were additional comments regarding the side bar agreements with the ASSA and AEA with Howard noting he would work on writing something for the board to sign.

Pam Dudoff suggested coordinating the two days with SCHS and look at K-12 integration, to which Howard noted SCHS would be using the days to work on accreditation. Howard added he would like to not tell teachers what they should do and that the matter will be worked out, not spelled out.

Jim O'Mara moved the board approve that the Superintendent request a waiver for the two days and work with the ASSA and AEA to come up with agreement for those days, to the extent necessary to help employees who can come to work, providing work is available, at their hourly rate of pay. Deborah Cort seconded the motion. All board members voted in favor of the motion. The motion passed.

Nancy Head moved to adjourn the meeting. Pam Dudoff seconded the motion. All board members voted in favor of the motion. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.