

MINUTES
AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD
Thursday, March 6, 2008
Amherst Town Hall Meeting Room

**I. NON-PUBLIC
SESSION –
RSA 91-A:3, II (a)**

Present:

Amherst School Board - Dwight Brew, Pam Dudoff,
Nancy Head, and Peg Bennett. (Jim O'Mara – Absent)

Administrative Team - Lisa Ambrosio, Barbara Bellipanni,
Porter Dodge, Nicole Heimark, Mary Jennings, Becky
Ladeau, Kathy Skoglund, and Gerry St. Amand.

Minute Taker – Susan M. Frenette

Public Hearing begins at 6:05 p.m., called to order by
Dwight Brew.

ATTENDANCE

II. CALL TO ORDER

A. Administrator's Reports - Principals

Dwight Brew announced that the PTA information forum about the proposed renovations to the schools would air Friday, March 7 at 11:45 a.m. and again at 6:30 p.m. on ACTV- Channel 20. The forum will be rebroadcast several times on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday.

Mary Jennings reported that the voter's guides for Souhegan High School and Amherst School District were mailed Monday, March 3. If needed, additional copies are available at the SAU (Brick School), Library, Town Hall, and all schools.

Dwight Brew asked if any board members had questions for the principals.

Pam Dudoff asked Gerry St. Amand about Kindergarten enrollment.

Gerry St. Amand addressed the question of projected enrollment based on current registrations. He stated that to date we have 100 registered students, last year at this time there were only 76. Based on this trend we may have more than the 108 students that were projected.

Pam Dudoff questioned if more than 108 students are enrolled, would we need another classroom.

III. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Gerry St. Amand said that could occur and that it was being monitored closely as each Kindergarten class plans to have 18 students per classroom.

Nancy Head asked Gerry St. Amand if the needs of the advanced students were being addressed by the members of The Mathematics Task Force. Gerry St. Amand replied, "Yes, most definitely."

Dwight Brew asked Mary Jennings if this question would be addressed in tonight's presentation.

Mary Jennings stated that it would. The presentation included interim reports for Grades 4-5-6 and further, a written report would be submitted on April 24 at the SAU board meeting presented by the K-12 Math committee.

Dwight Brew thanked Mary for the information. He invited any interested member(s) of the public to attend the SAU39 board meeting in April.

Pam Dudoff asked Porter Dodge about the comment on overcrowding space needs made by the NELMS (New England League of Middle Schools) representative's visit to Amherst Middle School.

Porter Dodge shared that the NELMS representatives were at Amherst Middle School for three days. At a preliminary discussion at the end of the visit, they mentioned to us, how great the school looked – the condition, the wonderful children but that the overcrowding of the materials in the halls was of concern. He stated that no extraordinary measures were taken for the visit, the space was not set up any differently, the materials noted in the hallways what it looks like on any given day. He advised the NELMS representatives that space needs are being addressed by the administration and that efforts are underway to resolve the space needs at Amherst Middle School.

Pam Dudoff commented, "It is interesting that external assessors clearly noticed the overcrowding." She thanked Porter for his remarks.

Dwight Brew asked the board members if there were any other questions for the principals regarding the Administration reports and none were forthcoming.

IV. PUBLIC TIME

Dwight Brew asked if there were any members of the public that would like to address the board. None were forthcoming and Dwight proceeded to the consent agenda.

Dwight Brew asked for items that need to be pulled from the consent agenda. Pam Dudoff asked to pull the January 3, 2008 board minutes.

V. CONSENT AGENDA

Dwight Brew stated that will leave the remaining consent items: the January 14, 2008 minutes, the December 2007 and January 2008 Treasurer's Reports, and Acceptance of Donations to the Student Activity Fund.

Nancy Head made a motion to accept the remaining consent agenda items; the January 14, 2007 minutes, the December 2007 and January 2008 Treasurer's Reports, and acceptance of donations. Pam Dudoff seconded the motion; no further discussion. All members voted in favor of the motion; the motion passed unanimously (4-0, 1 absent)

Dwight Brew stated that the January 3, 2008 minutes were pulled to allow the Administration more time for their presentations. Pam Dudoff stated that the Administration will review these minutes and that the board will look at them at the next meeting.

Dwight Brew asked that they move onto the next agenda item, 'Presentations'.

A. Differentiated Instruction and Flexible Grouping

VI. PRESENTATIONS

Mary Jennings introduced Barbara Bellipanni and Becky Ladeau, First Grade Co-Teachers at Clark Elementary School who presented 'Differentiated Instruction and Flexible Grouping'. This is also a key part of the district wide testing, the NECAP (New England Comprehensive Assessment Program) and the NEWA (North West Evaluation Association).

Becky Ladeau began the PowerPoint presentation (copy attached) with a definition of 'Flexible Grouping' and a description of how it is to be implemented in the

classroom.

- Benchmarks are done every 6-to-8 weeks
- Reading levels and skill ability are determined and are dynamic. Students move in and out of groups throughout the year, as the student needs progress.
- All students receive direct skill and reading comprehension instruction based on the level of student need.
- Teachers are careful to keep material appropriate and not to push them into 2nd or 3rd grade level. All reading books are appropriate to their instructional level and knowledge base.
- Flexible grouping is done in both math and reading.

Barbara Bellipanni presented a PowerPoint Presentation of Differentiated Instruction (copy attached).

- Affects both aspects of 'Teaching' and 'Learning'
- Differentiated Instruction meets the needs of the learners without changing content. Rather than going up to the next level, students are given opportunities to expand their knowledge base.
- Examples of 1-digit number methodology using Differentiated Instruction are presented.
- Teachers are able to expand the process and pacing to meet the learners individual skills.

Barbara Bellipanni also noted the significance of the support of classroom assistant, Donna Sadkowski. She works well with both teachers and students and provides direct support whenever or wherever needed.

Dwight Brew asked if the board had any questions.

Nancy Head asked how planning time is allocated to prepare for the demands of co-teaching and student review.

Becky Ladeau explained that it is done during a common planning period at lunch, and informally throughout the day.

Barbara Bellipanni advised that Differentiated Instruction offers teachers the opportunity to take a broad group and teach with more focus because the combined classes can be structured with fewer small groups than if all groups were represented in a single classroom; further, the instruction of

the students in small groups is more effective.

Pam Dudoff asked how often groups changed, in reading and in math.

Becky Ladeau stated that typically every 6 to 8 weeks or as the needed by the student's progress.

Pam Dudoff shared how impressed she is with this teaching philosophy. She observed that this method can enrich the curriculum and allows students to be challenged.

Barbara Bellipanni commented that children with varying abilities and skills, including those with special needs, benefit and can be challenged using Differentiated Instruction.

Becky Ladeau shared that all classroom centers are designed to be open ended to meet the various learning abilities of the students. All student levels can participate at the centers and can be challenged based on their needs.

Peg Bennett asked if all first grade teachers are paired and doing the same level of Differentiated Instruction.

Barbara Bellipanni replied that we are all different, and bring different skills and strengths to the classroom. We have described what works for us.

Pam Dudoff underscored the strength of 'team-teachers' vs. 'teacher & aid', or 'teacher & volunteer'. Differentiated Instruction with 'team-teachers' is better because the quality of instruction is enriched by 2 classroom teachers.

Dwight Brew asked if different textbooks or handouts are used. "How can or how do you do this?"

Barbara Bellipanni replied we use a little of everything.

Becky Ladeau shared that guided reading books range from Level 1 to Level 25 (Kindergarten – Second Grade). We make up things using teacher resources. We follow the math textbook curriculum and we use other resources and materials to supplement.

Peg Bennett asked, "How do you alter processing and pacing in reading, as you are able to do in math?"

Becky Ladeau replied, “We have the same core program, but also literature circles and activities, based on the skills of the students.”

Barbara Bellipanni explained that literature circles can do more with vocabulary, identifying good word choices and visualization to demonstrate comprehension. A question we might ask students is “Can you compare or connect what you read to your life experiences?”

Becky Ladeau stated that ‘background knowledge’ is key because “Third grade humor is not always appropriate for a first grade student.”

Dwight Brew, on behalf of the board, thanked the teachers for their presentation.

Dwight Brew introduced the second presentation, School Performance Metrics by Mary Jennings and Nicole Heimark.

B. School Performance Metrics

Mary Jennings presented a PowerPoint Presentation of School Performance Metrics (copy attached). She described how the presentation was prepared for the subcommittee to illustrate standards, achievement and performance assessments.

Briefly, assessment data is used for a variety of purposes:

- teachers use to show student progress
- students use to measure their work and expectations
- schools use to match curriculum
- community uses to evaluate their schools

The current assessments used by SAU39 are:

- Local: Grades, Progress Reports, Benchmarks, and Rubrics – “The 6 Traits of Writing”.
- State: NECAP and AYP (No Child Left Behind measure = “adequate yearly progress”)
- National: NWEA and DIBELS (K-12 Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills), and PSAT/SAT

The data results are triangulated (compared against each other and analyzed) to reflect on what it represents. This analysis allows us to measure more specifically what is and

what is not working. Mary Jennings states that data is only useful if it is understood and used as tool to improve learning. She introduces Nicole Heimarck to give more information on recent NECAP results.

Results of NECAP 2005-07

Nicole Heimarck presented information on the NECAP 2005 through 2007. Review of scores and analysis were shared with the board. (PowerPoint presentation attached).

Dwight Brew asked if there were any questions.

Pam Dudoff stated that prior NECAP data was not always useful because one grade from the next is an ‘apples-to-oranges’ comparison. She asked, “Is the quality of data better with a three-year review, does it offer greater insight?”

Nicole Heimarck confirmed that three-year data not only reports scores but also trends (i.e. commonalities in strengths and weaknesses). Results from NECAP 2005-2007 give a variety of information, and allow us to follow the progress the students are making over time.

Pam Dudoff posed that Mont Vernon notably improved their writing scores, “Are we at a point, as an SAU, to collaborate and to learn from each other? Is the administration working towards sharing successful strategies with all schools in-district?”

Nicole Heimarck replied, “Yes of course, we know what strategies and resources MVVS used and their implementation.” She noted although the MVVS data reflects excellent improvement, the AMS population is quite different (25 students at MVVS vs. 250 students at AMS).

Dwight Brew thanked the administration for an excellent presentation of our K-12 metrics and assessment results. He said that often he is asked if we are doing too much assessment and asked Mary Jennings, “Is NECAP the only assessment we are required to do?”

Mary Jennings replied, “Yes, but we are using a variety of other assessments so we can challenge our students to their individual levels.”

Mary Jennings referenced an article from *The School Administrator, January 2007* “Growth Measures for Systemic Change by Allan Olson. The article explained, “at the policy level school boards must create a culture that

is focused on values and principles that foster constant improvement in learning.” (copy attached).

Dwight Brew thanked Mary Jennings and Nicole Heimarck for their presentations and moved onto the next agenda item.

C. Donation of the Coca-Cola Scoreboard

Mary Jennings stated that, we are considering accepting a donation of a scoreboard at Amherst Middle School gym. The donation is contingent upon pending contracts, but is in compliant with our mission, to provide strong extracurricular activities. There would be no ‘*Coca-Cola/Coke* - soda’ advertising but it would advertise ‘*Dasani* - water’ only.

Pam Dudoff asked for affirmation that the sign does not display *Coke* anywhere on the scoreboard and that only *Dasani* is advertised.

Mary Jennings confirmed her understanding and stated that the program is an incentive to sign a 5-year contract.

Discussion ensued.

Dwight Brew asked the business administrator to review the contract and offer their recommendation at the next meeting.

D. 2nd Quarterly Report

Lisa Ambrosio presented the 2nd Quarterly Report (Through December 2007). She reviewed the shortfalls and surplus changes in the report in detail.

Pam Dudoff asked about rental income.

Lisa Ambrosio clarified that it is for other community organizations using school buildings for meetings.

Pam Dudoff confirmed that it is for costs used for the facilities and staff, and to break-even.

Dwight Brew verified that rental income is not for ‘private use of school buildings. Lisa Ambrosio stated that was correct.

Dwight Brew asked about the 2nd Quarter Report, reflecting actual costs were less than the budgeted amounts, and if the

expenses continue to be conservative, “Would it affect the end-of-year surplus, and tax rate?”

Lisa Ambrosio stated that if the actual costs hold, and there are no significant changes between now and the end of the year, the tax impact would be reduced.

Dwight Brew moved onto next agenda item, ASB policies.

VII. ACTION ITEMS

A. POLICIES – 2ND READING

Pam Dudoff reviewed policies and asked for questions or comments from members of ASB.

School	Community	Relations	Policies
KA - School	Community	Relations	Policies -- none
JH - Student	Absences	and Excuses	--none
JI - Student	Rights	and Responsibilities	-- none
JLCF	-	Wellness	-- none
JLDBA – Behavior Management and Intervention			

Pam Dudoff stated that Policy JLCF did make the change, on page 2, “E. Food Sales” second paragraph, last sentence, strike the words “or through programs for students after the school day.”

Dwight Brew asked for a minor change on JLCF on page 1, “Nutrition Guidelines: A. School Meals”, first sentence, replace “New Hampshire School Administrative Unit 39” and change to “The District” to be consistent within the document.

A motion was made by Pam Dudoff to adopt School Community Relations Policies: KA - School Community Relations Policies, JH – Student Absences and Excuses, JI – Student Rights and Responsibilities, JLCF – Wellness, JLDBA – Behavior Management and Intervention; seconded by Dwight Brew with no further public comment or discussion. All board members voted in favor of the motion; the motion passes unanimously (4-0, 1 absent)

Pam Dudoff brings up policy JLCF 11/02/06 wellness policy. We need to rescind this policy, as we have adopted a newer wellness policy tonight.

A motion was made by Pam Dudoff and seconded by Nancy Head to rescind the JLCFD policy adopted 11/02/06. No further discussion and all board members voted in favor of the motion; the motion passes

unanimously (4-0, 1 absent)

Mary Jennings will submit the new policy to comply with requirements by the State of NH.

A. POLICIES – 1ST READING

Pam Dudoff reviewed policies and asked for questions or comments.

Discrimination Policies

AC – Non-discrimination

Dwight Brew asked if we have the staff to have the (2) compliance officers. Mary Jennings replied, Yes, and this language was recommended by counsel. The administration is prepared to implement it as revised.”

GBAA/JBAA – Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence

Pam Dudoff reminded the board that the policy committee requested all policies to be in one place and not in separate sections, in order to avoid omission if a policy is revised later. This policy is recoded appropriately to the General Policy section as it covers both Students and Staff. The only change was the recoding.

Discipline Policies

JICFA - Hazing

Pam Dudoff clarified that the policy is different from the high school due to state laws and statute; the language is appropriately revised for the Amherst School District.

Information and Technology Policies

EGA – School District Internet Access for Students
EGAD – Copyright compliance

Pam Dudoff reported that these policies will not be presented tonight because the administration has not reviewed the recommendations made by counsel.

As there were no changes to the first reading, the policies will be presented at the next SAU meeting and placed on the agenda for a 2nd reading at the next meeting.

Dwight Brew thanked Pam Dudoff and called attention to the next agenda item, Other. He asks if there are any Other items and none were forthcoming.

Dwight Brew called for a motion to adjourn, into Non-

VII. DISCUSSION ITEMS

IX. OTHER

Public Session – RSA 91-A:3 (a)

A motion was made by Nancy Head to go into Non-Public Session under RSA 91-A:3, II(a). The motion was seconded by Pam Dudoff. By roll call vote, Dudoff-yes, Head-yes, Bennett-yes and Brew-yes board members voted in favor of entering into Non-Public Session at 7:59 p.m.

A discussion on the compensation of district employees ensued. No action was taken in Non-Public.

A motion was made by Nancy Head to come out of Non-Public Session and seconded by Peg Bennett. By roll call vote, Dudoff-yes, Head-yes, Bennett-yes and Brew-yes board members voted in favor of coming out of Non-Public Session at 9:18 p.m.

A motion was made by Peg Bennett and seconded by Pam Dudoff to adjourn the meeting. All board members voted in favor of the motion. (4-0, 1 absent) The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

X. NON-PUBLIC SESSION – RSA 91-A:3, II (a)

IX. REVIEW OF MEETING/ ADJOURNMENT