

# AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD

## Minutes

February 10, 2009

Approved 3/5/09

Chairman Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:11 p.m.

### Present

Amherst School Board: Chairman Dwight Brew, Peg Bennett, Peter de Bruyn Kops, Robert Graybill and Nancy Head.

Administrative Team: Gerry St. Amand, Dr. Mary Jennings, Porter Dodge, Nicole Heimarck, and Betty Shankel.

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

Chairman Brew called for announcements and heard none.

Chairman Brew called for public comment and heard none.

**A MOTION was made by Ms. Head and SECONDED by Mr. Graybill to approve the following items of the consent agenda.**

#### **A. Minutes**

1. October 20, 2008

#### **B. Treasurer's Report**

1. December 2008
2. January 2009

#### **D. Donations for Activity Funds**

1. Clark - \$515.40
2. Wilkins - \$2,294.89

**Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.**

**A MOTION was made by Mr. de Bruyns Kops and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to approve the minutes of January 13, 2009 as amended.**

**Voting: 5 ayes motion carried unanimously.**

**A MOTION was made by Mr. de Bruyn Kops and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to approve the minutes of January 29, 2009 as amended.**

**Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.**

#### **A. NECAP Scores- Amherst School District**

Ms. Heimarck appeared the Board to review the 2008 NECAP results. She explained that the school and district data was only released two and a half weeks ago and a full evaluation of all the data usually takes four to six weeks so this presentation is a

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

#### **ATTENDANCE**

### **II. ANNOUCEMENTS**

### **III. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

### **IV. CONSENT AGENDA**

### **V. PRESENTATIONS/ DISCUSSION ITEMS**

preliminary review. She explained that No Child Left Behind requires that the NECAP be administered to children in grades three through eight and again in eleventh grade. She explained that the test includes reading, math, and writing portions although the writing portion is only given to students in fifth, eighth, and eleventh grade and is not included in the evaluation of Adequate Yearly Progress. She further explained that the results are rated on levels one through four or substantially below proficient, partially proficient, proficient, and proficient with distinction.

Ms. Heimarck compared the reading scores for Wilkins school from 2005 to 2008 noting a net gain of four points. She compared the reading scores from 2005 to 2008 for the Amherst Middle School noted a net gain of one point. She noted that for the same period in Wilkins there was a net decrease of one point but there was a net increase in students performing as proficient with distinction and a net decrease of one point for the Amherst Middle School in the area of math.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Ms. Heimarck stated that the results are based on the scores of 577 students at the middle school and 510 students in the elementary school.

Ms. Heimarck then compared the results for the writing portion of the exam from 2005 to 2008 for Wilkins and the Amherst Middle School and noted a net gain of one point at Wilkins and ten points at the Amherst Middle School.

Ms. Heimarck then presented a grade level cohort tracking graph and noted a significant decrease in the 2008 eighth graders in both math and reading. She explained that the administration is still investigating this decline but noted that in math the mean scale score of these students when they were in eighth grade is only two points less than when they took the test in seventh grade but this put more students just under the proficient cut point. She explained that in reading this was not the case as there was a six point difference between the two years. Ms. Heimarck also pointed out that 90% of the current third graders scored proficient in reading which is the highest score in four years for the district.

Ms. Heimarck then presented an area district comparison in reading, math, and writing. In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Heimarck explained that the comparison districts were chosen based on geographic location, and socioeconomic and size similarities.

Ms. Heimarck reviewed the next steps the administration and teachers are planning on taking including data triangulation, released item analysis, disaggregation by cohort, examination of student level data, examination of test operations, and further staff development on making the data instructionally meaningful.

Mr. de Bruyn Kops suggested that the administration pay attention to the quality of

the test and noted that it is not the same test given to kids every year so there is bound to be some variation. He also pointed out that only 44% of Souhegan's eleventh graders scored proficient or higher in 2008. Ms. Heimarck explained that Souhegan had the third highest mean scale score in the state and that a decrease in performance at the secondary level is being seen state wide. Mr. de Bruyn Kops noted that the math test includes essay questions which he views as possibly lowering the math performances.

Mr. Brew stated that it is useful to analyze the data even if the Board were to decide that they were not worried about a particular part of the test.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Ms. Heimarck explained that the NWEA testing is more relative for individual students because it is a broader based assessment that measures growth and gives growth goals and instructional advice. Ms. Heimarck noted that NWEA can be used to project that a student may test below proficient on the NECAP which allows time for intervention however this function is not currently being used in Amherst.

Dr. Jennings noted that the NECAP shines a light on the performance of educationally disadvantaged and special education students to make sure that they are getting the appropriate education. Ms. Heimarck noted that professionals now know, from national research, that 97% of children have the ability to read at their grade level.

Mr. Graybill stated that he would like to know not just who dropped just below the line but also those students who jumped just over the line of proficient.

The Board discussed the state database software, Performance Pathways, with the administration.

Mr. St Amand commended Ms. Heimarck for the superior job she does presenting data.

#### **B. Update: Literacy Initiative**

Dr. Jennings explained that the Board will be hearing from the elementary schools at this meeting and from the middle school at the next meeting regarding their work on the literacy initiative. Mr. St. Amand introduced the literacy team as follows: Meg Trainor, Sue Blair, Amy Anson, Jen Eccleston, Fay Deysher, Kathie McIntyre, Katy Kennedy, Mary Ireland, Joanna Bacon and himself.

The team reviewed the SAU goals and the building goals for Clark and Wilkins and what steps they have been taking to meet the goals. Mr. St. Amand then opened the floor for questions.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, the team explained that Dibels has

benchmarks already in it based on the grade of the student and the time of the year.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. St. Amand explained that the level of professional development that has been offered this year is more significant. Ms. Ireland stated that being able to collaborate with the math and literacy coaches has been very helpful. Mrs. McIntyre explained that has been able to work with the other special teachers to make literacy a part of their curriculum as well. The Math Coach explained how it has been important to use literacy to help students to start to bring the writing connection into math at the early stages.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Ms. Bacon explained that flexible grouping is based on pre testing and that the team gets together to look at assessments, and at the child as a whole, to see what teacher and flexible group would work best for the student. She noted that the group changes each semester. The Literacy Coach explained that she uses a lot of running records and assessments to determine the group that the child should be in and noted that the child is always changing groups depending on their strengths and weaknesses.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, the team stated that report cards are based on the student's progression towards the full year goals.

Ms. Bacon noted that the tools available to the staff such as the comprehension tool kit and the training the staff has received on the tools has been really great.

The team stated that in the future the goal is to have more professional development time and that the late starts have been helpful but in the future the teachers are hoping to have more input into the content of the late starts.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, the team explained that the next steps are to work on writing and spelling while continuing to focus on science and social studies.

Mr. Dodge stated that he is thank full for the work the elementary school has been doing as it makes his job easier. He also noted that the public presentation last Thursday was tremendous.

### **C. Update: NELMS Report**

Mr. Dodge reviewed the areas of improvement needed that were highlighted by the NELMS review and the steps that have been implemented or that he is planning on implementing in order to address the areas of concern.

Mr. Brew noted that there were a lot of positives in the report but that tonight they are only discussing the areas of concern.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Mr. Dodge stated that the objective is to have all fifth and sixth graders in flexible reading groups and eventually to have all areas of curriculum flexibly grouped.

Mr. de Bruyns Kops encouraged Mr. Dodge to look at creating a culture where high achievement is accepted.

**D. FY09 Q2 Financial Report**

Ms. Shankel explained that as of December 31, 2008 the revenues were running below what they should be as the interest rate today is far lower than when the budget was made. She also explained that so far the district had an under run of \$100,000 in the salary line and \$300,000 in the benefit line. She also noted that the special education transportation costs are lower than anticipated but more than the budgeted amount has been expended for ESY and paving. The total surplus is just under \$300,000 currently.

Ms. Head thanked Ms. Shankel for all the work she did to prepare for the deliberative session.

**A MOTION was by Mr. de Bruyns Kops and SECONDED by Mr. Graybill to adjourn. Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.**

Chairman Brew declared the meeting adjourned at 8:36 p.m.

**VI. REVIEW OF MEETING/**

**ADJOURNMENT**