

AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD

Minutes

March 5, 2009

Chairman Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:05 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, and Nicole Heimarck.

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

Chairman Brew called for public comment and heard none.

A. Invention Convention

Mr. St. Amand explained that 100 children from Clark and Wilkins participated in the Invention Convention and introduced Kathy McIntyre, Invention Convention Coordinator.

Ms. McIntyre stated that Amherst School District has been participating in the Invention Convention program for 21 years. She explained that the program started as a national program and although it ended nationally it continued in New Hampshire. She stated that she has been the coordinator for 14 years. She explained that after Christmas break she visits each class with a theme and brings appropriate inventions to the classrooms including one that was invented by a child, for instance this year she brought a crank radio, ear muffs, and ice scrapers to classes as they all were related to the recent ice storms. She further explained that the students have four to six weeks to complete their invention and are required to submit a back board and log book along with their invention in order to be part of the convention.

Ms. McIntyre introduced Julia Tilton, a 1st grader who in invented the Flash Pen. Julia described her invention and the motivation for it to the Board and answered questions from the Board.

Ms. McIntyre introduced Cameron Bacher, a 3rd grader, who invented the Two Top Bagel. She explained that she created the food because no one likes the bottom of the bagel and she answered questions from the Board.

Ms. McIntyre introduced Nick Marves, a 4th grader, who invented the Sweeper Claw Plus. He explained that his invention is a broom with scraper, magnets, and lint

I. CALL TO ORDER

ATTENDANCE

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS

III. ANNOUNCEMENTS

brush attached to allow for cleaning without bending for those with back pain. He also showed the Board the collapsible dustpan with extender and grabber that attaches to the broom.

Ms. McIntyre stated that she is very proud of each student who participates each year as they are using many skills in the process.

The Board thanked Ms. McIntyre for keeping the program going and the students for presenting to the Board.

B. Principal's Reports

Chairman Brew stated that the Board received the Principal's reports in their packets and asked if the Board had any questions.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Mr. St. Amand stated that next year Clark and Wilkins will each have four first grade classrooms. He explained that because enrollments are down they were able to cut a second grade classroom at Wilkins and move one first grade classroom up from Clark in order to create a better balance. In response to a question from the Board, he noted that there are no empty classrooms at Clark but that students and teachers are currently spread out more.

Ms. Bennett noted that she attended a technology class at the Amherst Middle School and she is excited as she is going to watch a math class use the technology room to complete a research project.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, the Board requested that the minutes be removed from the Consent Agenda.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

In response to a question from Chairman Brew, the Board asked that the minutes of February 10, 2009 be pulled from the consent agenda.

The Board unanimously approved the following consent agenda item: B. Donations – BCBS \$3,000.

After discussion a **MOTION** was made by Mr. de Bruyn Kops and **SECONDED** by Mr. Graybill to approve the minutes of February 10, 2009 as amended.
Voting: 6 aye; motion carried unanimously.

A. AMS Literacy Presentation

Mr. Dodge thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak to them about the progress the Amherst Middle School has made with the literacy initiative.

Mary Westwater and Patty Wons appeared before the Board and reviewed the

V. PRESENTATIONS/ DISCUSSION ITEMS

second year goal for the Amherst Middle school which is that 65% of the student's reading comprehension scores will meet the individual growth targets. They noted that the first year of the initiative was spent educating the staff and this year has been more focused on improving the literacy of the students. They explained that the staff has been using Strategies that Work as a textbook and The Key Three Routine as a work book. They reviewed the teacher components of literacy at the school including work being done by the literacy leadership team, staff development, data review by all teachers, literacy coaching, and collaboration and planning. They then reviewed the student components of literacy improvement including, instruction of Key Three Routine, differentiated instruction and materials, and dedicated time for literacy instruction. Ms. Westwater and Ms. Wons explained the Three Key Routine skills including determining the main ideas, turning main ideas into webs, determining the details of the main ideas, two column notes, filling in the details, and creating a summary. They reviewed pieces of sample teacher and student work with the Board. They also noted that the next steps include continuing to analyze data, a continued emphasis on reading and a greater emphasis on writing, and planning and staff development with greater emphasis on student work to facilitate differentiation.

In response to question from Mr. de Bruyn Kops as to how one insures that children are treated fairly with regard to differentiated work, Ms. Wons explained that differentiation does not mean more or less work but rather a different type of assignment such as a different choice of novels. She also explained that there is not necessarily more work but that the level of the work is greater so differentiation is not the quantity but the quality of the work. She also noted that having a varied amount of sources in classroom from which to learn from is another way to meet the needs of the students. Ms. Westwater noted that the school spent a lot of money to make sure that the classrooms have materials so that all students can access the knowledge. In response to a question from Mr. de Bruyn Kops, Ms. Westwater stated that grading is based on rubrics but noted that Mr. de Bruyn Kops concern is a difficult issue. Ms. Wons noted that students learn in different ways and that differentiation is not just about reading level but also deals with how students take in the information.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Ms. Westwater explained that previously she has always met with the paraprofessionals on Tuesdays but due to schedule changes she has been meeting with them whenever their schedule allows, not necessarily on Tuesdays.

In response to a question from Ms. Head as to most successful aspect of the initiative, Ms. Westwater stated that she now sees a much greater coming on board

of her colleagues and a clearer mission and common interest since she has been spending more time with the teachers. Ms. Wons stated that she sees that teachers are being more mindful and thinking more about all teachers being responsible for teaching literacy.

In response to a question from Ms. Head as to the challenges, Ms. Wons stated that it is a challenge to keep energy and enthusiasm going and the job is never done because the staff is constantly learning.

In response to a question from Ms. Head regarding the process for teacher input, Ms. Westwater explained that teachers are required to submit action plans which include their feedback.

Mr. Dodge noted that he was not sure that a literacy coach would work but because of the people in the position the program has worked wonderfully.

In response to a question from Dr. Jennings, Pam Gross, explained that she works with a cohort of students that are below grade level and she has found that the two column notes enables them to write while making it easier to differentiate because the student can work at their own pace.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Wons explained that some of the two column notes process is directed but some of it is based on what appeals to the student based on their chosen summary topic and depending on differentiation.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Westwater suspects that the initiative has lead to more reading and a higher level of reading.

The Board thanked the team for coming in and for their continued level of enthusiasm.

A. 2009-2010 Calendar

Dr. Jennings presented a 2009-2010 calendar to the Board and explained that it has been developed by the administrators and the representatives of the bargaining groups and that this proposal meets the terms of the contracts and the Department of Education. She explained that the calendar has 10 days built in for snow days, as required by the Department of Education, including 8 days at the end of the year and 2 staff development days. She also noted that Labor Day is not until Sept 7th this year. She explained that the calendar includes a two week grayed period of which any day could be the last day of school. She also noted that February and April vacation are the week after Massachusetts takes their school vacations.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Graybill and SECONDED by Ms. Heard to approve the

VI. ACTION ITEMS

proposed 2009-2010 calendar as presented contingent on approval by the other boards in the SAU.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Mr. de Bruyn Kops and SECONDED by Mr. Graybill to adjourn the meeting.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Brew declared the meeting adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

VII. REVIEW OF
MEETING/
ADJOURNMENT