

AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD

Final Minutes

November 6, 2008

Chairman Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

Present

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

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

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

Ms. Head stated that the Public Access Committee met the previous night and discussed the pros and cons of forming a separate corporation versus forming a committee of the town. She explained that it would be simpler to have a committee, the district would have the same representation, and there are no major disadvantages. She explained that a committee would solve the insurance and finance issues and questioned whether the Board is comfortable with the committee being a town committee with Amherst School District representation. The Board agreed that they would prefer a committee.

A. Principal's Report

Chairman Brew stated that the Board had received the principals' report in their packets and asked if the Board members had any questions or comments. Ms. Head stated that the Wilkins School Librarian, Kathie McIntyre, deserves thanks for completing the big job of automating the library. She also thanked Nicole Heimarck for getting Reed Lion to speak at the school.

Chairman Brew called for public comment.

Susan Abis appeared before the Board and thanked them for letting her speak and explained that currently the Amherst Middle School is using a pull out model and students can no longer choose to participate in both band and chorus as they would miss 40% of their regular classes. She explained that this schedule is upsetting to the parents. She explained that she received the support of her school during the beginning of her music education. She also noted that other schools do not use the scheduling model and on average they offer music every other day. She stated that she is concerned that if students do not begin their music education in Middle School they may not receive it at all.

Lisa Hansen appeared before the Board and explained that she graduated from

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Approved on December 4, 2008

I. CALL TO ORDER

ATTENDANCE

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Souhegan High School in 2004 and currently is student teaching in the music department in Hudson. She stated that she is concerned as a music educator about the pull out schedule. She stated that MEMC standards require that students receive music education for at least 45 minutes every other day, and currently students must miss one class a day in order to participate, and band and chorus never get a chance to rehearse together. She urged the School Board to reconsider the current music program.

Steven Taylor appeared before the Board and stated that he is the parent of two 8th graders who are both in chorus. He explained that they used to be straight A students but recently one of them received a D+ in computers on her progress report because of all the work she missed while she was in chorus. He explained that while the school does allow the students to make up the missed time after school some students are not able to make up the classes after school and students are being forced to make a choice between academics and activity.

Joey Abis appeared before the Board and stated that he is in band, chorus, jazz band, and the theatre program at Souhegan High School. He submitted a petition, with 160 signatures on it, to reinstate the music program at the Amherst Middle School. He also noted that the high school music students participate in the Memorial Day parade, musicals, three jazz nights a year, three concert band concerts a year and "strictly" concerts and he does not want to see a hole in Amherst's excellent music program between Wilkins and the High School.

Elizabeth White appeared before the Board and explained that she is an 8th grader at the Amherst Middle School and currently is in band and jazz band. She explained that last year she played both clarinet and piano but this year was forced to choose between the two instruments due to having to miss too many classes. She stated that she is missing academic courses as well as specials and that most days she can not stay after school to make up the work because of sports and commitments at home. She also noted that if her grades continue to suffer she will have to quit entirely.

Alex Kibby appeared before the Board and stated that she is in 8th grader and in band and that this year she has had to miss computer and art and this week she had to miss academic classes and stay after school for band. She explained that she is finding it difficult to make up the reviews and meet with students and the situation has created a stressful year for her.

Catherine Schwope appeared before the Board and explained that she is a former Amherst Middle School chorus student. She stated that last year she thought band was great as they had two practices a week, one with her instrument and one as a

whole band, but this year she chose to participate in chorus and has had to quit because of poor grades.

Mr. Brew invited Mr. Porter to speak. Mr. Porter explained that the schedule was never designed to cut the band and that band used to be after school and gradually has been put into the daily schedule and he believes that if it was returned to an after school activity then the numbers of students participating will drop. He explained that the district and the School Board have been committed to supporting the integrated arts but when the school changed to a flexible schedule it eliminated study halls and put in literacy teaching but the schedule had compliance issues. He further explained that he had an agreement with the teachers that this schedule would be a stress less as possible and that missed classes would not be held against any students. He stated that he is not sure that the school can offer everything to everybody because there are no longer any study halls.

Mr. Brew explained that the Board has not taken any action to scale back the music program in favor of something else and suggested that Mr. Porter could spend the next month before the next meeting researching the issue.

Susan Abis suggested that a committee, that involves the music faculty, students, and public, be formed.

Chairman Brew stated that he would like an update at the next meeting.

Mr. de Bruyn Kops suggested that it might be beneficial to give Mr. Porter time to investigate the issue before creating a committee.

Mr. Brew stated that he does not want to come up with a solution and find out that it does not meet everyone's needs and that it would be good to have a committee just to make sure that all the issues are understood.

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

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes

A MOTION was made by Ms. Head and SECONDED by Mr. de Bruyn Kops to approve the minutes of October 2, 2008 as amended.

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

After reviewing and agreeing to proposed changes, **a MOTION was made by Ms. Head and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to table the minutes of October 20, 2008 until next month.**

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Head and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to approve the following items:

B. Treasurer's Report

C. Donation

1. Wilkins – Target - \$204.53
2. AMS – Target - \$269.19
3. AMS Activity Fund - \$56.00
4. AMS – Hockmeyer Studios - \$2,919.75

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

D. Transfers

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Sparks explained that the transfers were due to a realignment and also because the district has contracted out for a behavioral specialist rather than a paraprofessional.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Ms. Head to approve transfers 2009-1, and 2009-2.

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A. NELMS Evaluation

Dr. Jennings stated that she appreciated that the Board approved funding for the NELMS evaluation in FY07.

Mr. Porter stated that last winter the Amherst Middle School asked a visiting team from the New England League of Middle Schools to come and evaluate the school, He explained that the team found the strengths of the Amherst Middle School to be: its dedicated and caring staff, actively involved parents, safe school environment, common team planning time, commitment to professional development, actively involved student council, numerous extracurricular activities, a food service committed to health and wellness, and clearly communicated discipline policies. He also explained that the team found that improvements were needed in the areas of flexible grouping, differentiated instruction, curriculum integration, collaborative work, Response to Intervention, and safety. Mr. Porter went on the review the improvements that had already been implemented or that he was planning to implement to focus on the suggested areas of improvement.

Mr. Brew noted that the NELMS review was voluntary and the district entered into it because they were looking for an independent assessment to identify areas for potential improvement. He also noted that the improvement process has been taking place since shortly after the report was released.

Mr. Porter stated that he would like to present to the Board, in the fall, more details

**V. PRESENTATIONS/
DISCUSSION ITEMS**

regarding the improvements that have been made.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. Porter stated that the Special Needs percentage discussed in the report is correct as it includes 504 and Special Education students. He also noted that the district may be able to reduce this number in the future.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. Porter stated that there is a process in place to make sure that students get the services they need. Ms. Heimarck explained that the district has already introduced and is implementing a screening process that also identifies the next steps that need to be taken. She noted that Reed Lion, on his recent visit, stated that the process was the best he has seen in the country.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. Porter explained that parents were given the choice as to whether they did or did not want their children to participate in the academic support classes.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. Porter explained that teachers are required to be in the halls and out at the buses during transition times and that he is working on compliance.

Ms. Head noted that she was able to substitute teach, for three months, a few years ago and she found that the teachers genuinely love the students.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Mr. Porter explained that Donna Hamel is working with the teachers as a math coach and making sure that the teachers are on the right levels and on the same path. Ms. Heimarck also noted that the district will continue to work with NELMS as they provide staff development regarding flexible grouping.

Mr. de Bruyn Kops noted that differentiated instruction can be interpreted in many ways and that some of these ways could be harmful.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Mr. Porter explained that most of the changes are systemic and that he will be using the talents of the leadership council and literacy leadership team to implement them. He also noted that these teams gave input with regards to the improvements suggested tonight.

In response to a request from Mr. Brew, Mr. Porter stated that he will include the teams' reports with his next principal report.

B. FY10 Budget – Draft #1

Dr. Jennings explained that at the last meeting the administration reviewed the budget assumptions with the Board and now they are presenting the first draft of the

budget and looking to get an idea as to what warrant articles the Board would like to add. She explained that next the Ways and Means Committee will meet with the administration and Board members they will be creating a revised draft to be presented in December. She noted that among other key drivers the district is in year 3 of a 5 year strategic plan. She explained that the FY09 budget was a 2.37% increase over the year before at \$22,710,680, and it included the interest payment for the renovation warrant article. She further explained that the draft FY10 budget is a %3.37 increase over last year at \$23,476,274; this includes a %5 increase in contracts but not an increase for the ASSA agreement as this is still being negotiated. In response to a question from the Board, Dr. Jennings stated that the proposed budget has been screened by the administration.

Ms. Heimarck explained that the science curriculum and core reading program are a driver of this budget as is the equipment required by the technology plan.

Dr. Jennings noted that the administration is not suggesting expanded kindergarten and foreign language because of budget considerations.

Ms. Sparks reviewed the early literacy benefits to preschool age Special Education students. She noted that the district's tuition and related expenses to send their preschoolers out of district has almost doubled in the last 8 years. Additionally there is a bubble of students who are turning three who will require a significant amount of intervention. She explained that it would be beneficial to both the children and the district to bring the preschool in district.

In response to a question from Mr. de Bruyn Kops, Ms. Sparks stated that the preschool would have no less than 50% typical tuitioning children.

Mr. de Bruyn Kops express concern that the district would not be able to duplicate the cost they are currently incurring. Dr. Jennings stated that she believes that there is a cost savings available, maybe not the first year but definitely in the future.

Dr. Jennings noted that the proposed budget includes the proposed preschool.

Mr. St. Amand then presented the proposed FY10 budget for the Elementary schools, in comparison with the FY09 budget, thanking Meg Trainer, Sue Baler, Janet DAbis, all the teachers, curriculum coordinators, and office staff for their work on the budget,

Mr. Porter then present the Amherst Middle School proposed FY10 budget in comparison to the FY09 budget.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Dr. Jennings explained that the district has

staff members that are employed in other districts but this work is not getting charged to the Amherst District.

Mr. Brew noted that the reduction in psychologist cost also equates to a reduction in revenue.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Mr. Porter stated that 5th grade still has only 60 days of physical education.

Mr. Brew expressed concern about having declining enrollment and still an increased budget and also noted that he would like to see the justification that they can educate preschoolers for less money than the RSEC.

Dr. Jennings noted that the budget will not change if the board decides not to go with the integrated preschool,

Mr. de Bruyn Kops stating that the kids are under government control for 12 years already and maybe people do not want to begin that any earlier.

In response to questions from the Board, Ms. Sparks stated that the 3 year old classroom would have 8 typical Amherst students and 3 Special Education students and the 4 year old class would have 9 typical students and 3 Special Education students.

Mr. Brew stated that the Board would like to see a preschool comparison cost analysis and past enrollment projections at the next meeting.

The Ways and Means Committee requested the actual preschool enrollment numbers for the last five years and the past out of district costs.

In response to a question from the Board, Dr. Jennings stated that Mont Vernon enrollments are stable.

Mr. Brew stated that he would like a list of the FY09 budget items that were one time costs and Dr. Jennings suggested that this kind of detailed analysis could be done in break out groups.

The Board discussed breakout assignments and arrived at the following list of responsibilities:

<u>Budget Item</u>	<u>Board Member</u>	<u>Committee Member</u>
Clark/Wilkins	Rob	Dave
Food Service	Dwight	Ted
Transportation	Dwight	Debra & Steve
AMS	Peg	Ted

Facilities	Nancy	Ted & Dana
Curriculum/Professional Development	Peter	
Technology	Peter	Steve
Special Education	Nancy	Mark & Dave

C. Retirements

Dr. Jennings explained that at the next meeting the Board needs to decide whether they want to fund more than the minimum 3% retirement. The Board decided to discuss in non public session at the next meeting

D. FY09 Trend

Ms. Shankel stated that interest income was a little lower than expected, state income is as expected, and Medicaid a little higher. She also explained that salaries and benefits are \$400,000 under expected expenditures.

A. Award of transportation bid

Ms. Shankel explained that currently the district is paying \$203 per day for student transportation and the incoming bids were \$209.61 for First Student and \$260 for Goffstown Truck Center. She explained that these bids went out to bid with Milford and Milford is going to go with First Student. With regard to Special Education transportation, Ms. Shankel is recommending Provider as they specializes in SPED transportation, recommending Provider for the SPED transportation,

In response to a question from Mr. de Bruyn Kops, Ms. Shankel explained that the district determines in September what the expected amount of miles is,

A MOTION was made by Ms. Head and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to award the regular education contract for five years to First Transportation and the Special Education transportation contract for five years to Provider.

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Brew noted that the Board needs to be appraised of substantial changes at the schools, such as scheduling changes,

A MOTION was made by Ms. Head and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to adjourn.

Voting: 4 ayes, motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Brew declared the meeting adjourned at 9:44 p.m.

VI. ACTION ITEMS

VII. REVIEW OF MEETING/

ADJOURNMENT