

AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD

August 25, 2009

MINUTES

Approved 9/3/09

Chairman Head called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Present

ATTENDANCE

Amherst School Board: Nancy Head, Dwight Brew, Peg Bennett, Peter Maresco, and Rob Graybill.

Administrative Team: Dr. Mary Jennings, Porter Dodge, Gerry St. Amand, Elizabeth Shankel, Nicole Heimarck, Bob Thompson, and Colleen Meaney.

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

A. Principals' Reports

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Head noted that the Board received the Principals' reports in their packets and asked if the Board had any questions.

Ms. Bennett stated that she spoke with one of the teacher that participated in the differentiated instruction training and they said that it was the best training they had ever received. The Board congratulated Ms. Heimarck as the training was her project.

Mr. Graybill stated that he thinks that Mr. St. Amand's suggestion of having an open house for the community is a great idea.

Mr. St. Amand noted that the projected enrollment was 700 and as of today the actual enrollment is 712 students although two packets were picked up today and he will not know who has moved out of the district until school actually starts.

B. Superintendent

Dr. Jennings stated that she mostly gave her report at the SAU meeting last week and will have a report at the next meeting on the opening of school including the preliminary enrollment reports.

Rick Katzenberg, of 97 Boston Post Road, stated that he is looking for recognition that SAU 39 has an epidemic of overfed and under exercised children. He also asked for the reinstatement of the Wellness Committee and recognition of the data gathering that helps make the program efficient and effective. He explained that just less then half of the students at the Middle School are overweight or obese and that the data gathered from Wilkins is good but unanalyzed. He stated that the school is dealing with all kinds of problems

III. PUBLIC TIME

are a result from the under exercised condition and he thinks that the community as a whole and the school need to deal with the epidemic. He stated that theoretically there is a Wellness Committee but it needs to be reconstituted to start implementing change; hopefully without a budget change.

Dr. Jennings noted that the Board is looking at the wellness policy at the meeting in September.

Mr. St. Amand noted that previously grades 1 through 4 had morning recess but as of this year there will no longer be a 15 minute morning recess, however lunch recess has been extended a little. He explained that teachers know about the change and it came as a result of realizing that the elementary schools were barely meeting the number of instructional hours required and the recess was impacting the ability to get services to the children since it was at a dedicated time.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. St. Amand stated that he would like not to have a dedicated 15 minutes of snack time but rather a working snack.

In response to a question from Mr. Maresco, Mr. St. Amand stated that he talked to teachers about movement breaks that can be incorporated into the classroom time and noted that many other schools that have eliminated morning recess.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. St. Amand stated that the lunch times are the same.

Mr. Graybill asked if the administration can give the Board a sense of the dedicated physical activity time students have.

Wendy Kolopsky questioned whether there was any notification or communication regarding the academic achievement awards given at the end of eighth grade. She feels that it's possible that the children would work harder if the children and parents were made aware of the awards as early as fifth grade.

Mr. Dodge stated that the awards started 20 years ago but no formal announcement has ever been made.

Ms. Kolopsky questioned why an announcement is not made as it could give the students something to strive for.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. Dodge explained that the award is given for four years of grades and it used to be given if a student achieved all A's and B's but now it is given for a grade point average of 3.7 or above. He

noted that many people have come to him to argue over a grade that might prevent their children from earning the award.

Ms. Kolopsky noted that her daughter got all A's except for a B+ in art and questioned whether a class that a student takes for 30 days should be weighted equally.

Mr. Dodge explained that it is the school's philosophy that all classes are equally important.

Ms. Kolopsky noted that on the night of the award ceremony she was surprised that almost half of the class was there and it seemed wrong to her that that many students were able to get the award. She stated that it seemed like it was taking away from the students who have achieved the high academic standards. She also noted that she heard that that required grade point used to be higher but now it is lower and questioned why the school would lower the standard.

Mr. Kolopsky questioned why an A in math would be better than a B+ in advanced math and why the more advanced math is not weighted heavier. He noted that when he went to school advance placement classes used to get more points than a regular class.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. Brew asked that the minutes of June 22, 2009 and budget transfer #2010.002 be pulled from the Consent Agenda.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Graybill to accept the consent agenda as follows:

- A. Minutes**
 - 2. July 16, 2009**
- B. Treasurer's Report**
 - 1. June 2009**
- C. Transfers**
 - 1. FY09**
 - 2. FY10 (without #2010.002)**
- D. Retirement**

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A. Minutes

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to

accept the minutes of June 22, 2009 as amended.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

C. Transfers

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to approve budget transfer #2010.002.

Ms. Shankel explained that the program was larger than expected as more students were serviced than expected.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. St. Amand stated that the district only paid for the students whose Extended School Year plan specified recreation needs to go to the recreation department's program but not every student who was in the Extended School Year program had that requirement in their plan.

Mr. Brew noted that he went to the recreation department's meeting and they stated that they look forward to cooperating again.

Mr. St. Amand noted that having the program at the Amherst Middle School instead of at the elementary schools worked out well, especially since the older kids were hesitant to come to Clark and Wilkins, so they may not bring the program back to Clark/Wilkins as originally planned.

Voting 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A. 2009-10 Agenda Goals

Dr. Jennings asked the board to consider what their goals were when they ran for election. After a five minute break out, Dr. Jennings asked the Board for the goals they had come up with and they were as follows:

- Maintain & improve quality of education
 - o Implement RTI
 - o Examine organizational aspects of schools considering the declining enrollment
- Instill public confidence in the Board
- Behave consistently as the public would with the info and data that is presented to the Board
- Continue prudent use of taxpayers dollars
- Continue to improve the building and facilities
- Review curriculum to ensure that all students are challenged to their abilities

She then asked the Board members to come up with agenda items that they

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V. PRESENTATIONS / DISCUSSION ITEMS

would like to see in the upcoming year. The Board and the administration reviewed the suggestions together.

B. Update ARRA Funds

Dr. Jennings explained that the administration is bringing an update to the Board regarding the expenditure of the ARRA funds. She explained that the five day Train the Trainer differentiated instruction workshop, which was alluded to earlier this meeting, ending up costing more than planned.

Ms. Heimarck explained that the supplies and material costs caused the budget to increase. She further explained that each participant was provided a bound book and a binder of information but additional materials had to be ordered at the beginning of the training because more teachers pursued the training at the last minute and the trainer also needed more supplies such as post it notes and markers.

Dr. Jennings explained that they increased a position by .2 to track the data that needs to be reported for the ARRA grant, however this position was at a higher grade, and therefore cost more, than originally estimated.

Ms. Heimarck explained that there is now built in accountability so the coaches need to collect data for the ARRA and coaching data for each coaching interaction they have. The extended position will warehouse the data so that it can be assimilated and tracked.

Dr. Jennings also noted that the literacy software and adaptive PE program is starting and noted that Ms. Sparks can answer any other questions when she returns.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Dr. Jennings confirmed that if the cost of items comes in higher than estimated then the other items will be adjusted and the cost will not go into the operating budget to cover any the shortfalls.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Dr. Jennings stated that she will tell the Board if there is any chance of costs going into the operating budget.

C. Update Math Placement

Ms. Heimarck explained that there has been ongoing work over the summer regarding math placement, specifically placement in the advanced math classes, which has resulted in some movement of children. She also explained that the staff is looking at ways to meet the advanced needs of students in math and reading during the block of time called Core and More that is now in the new

schedule.

Ms. Heimarck stated that there have been numerous questions as to how the school will address the needs of students who have opted to pursue advanced studies outside of school and over the summer. She explained that she contacted those students who she was aware of having chosen outside advancement and who did not quite meet the benchmarks at the end of the year and offered them another chance to take the placement test and review their portfolio.

Ms. Heimarck also noted that they are bringing more information to staff, continually evaluating the students, and letting the teachers know that they should speak to the administration if they think a child is misplaced.

Ms. Heimarck reviewed the student changes that occurred as a result of the summer evaluations stating that in Grade 7 one student has moved into the one year advanced math, in Grade 8 she is projecting that four students will move into the one year advanced math, and in grade 9 she is projecting that five students will move into the one year advanced class.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Ms. Heimarck confirmed that almost a quarter of the students are placing in advance math.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Heimarck stated that the drop from 30% to 20% of students being placed in advanced math is due to the fact that there was no clear process in place for placement previously and students were enrolled more on interest but when they moved through the system the administration started to hear concern from the High School teachers that students were being accelerated when they were not ready. She noted that they are tracking these students' performances to see whether that concern is valid.

Mr. Brew was concerned with the impact that excluding this additional 10% of our students would have on the math courses that would be available to this group in high school.

Dr. Jennings noted that the High School met a few years ago and as a result the 7th and 8th grade curriculum was made more robust.

Ms. Heimarck noted that Integrated 1 and 2 were made more rigorous because some things were moved out of Integrated 3 and into Integrated 1 and 2.

In response to a question from Mr. Maresco as to whether accelerating a student means skipping the more robust 7th and 8th grade math, Ms. Heimarck explained that the students are not skipping any curriculum as most of the children being

placed have already mastered the 7th and 8th grade skills and the skills they are missing are indentified through assessments and then taught in the accelerated classes. Ms. Heimarck noted that over the summer the teachers have been reviewing the student data of the students on their class lists and creating their curriculum.

D. Revised Strategic Plan Goal

Dr. Jennings noted that in the September meeting the Board will be presented with the overall plan as to how the schools will attempt to reach their goals. She explained that over the summer the administrators in Amherst and Mont Vernon realized that they need to differentiate instruction by grade level as there are some grades that have hit the target at the 90th percentile and the goal for that grade level is that no student does not improve, where as another grade may have a different goal. She explained that the strategic plan has three more years and they are setting a goal that all grade levels will meet the target goal at the 90th nationally normed percentile.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Ms. Heimarck explained that the NWEA is normed every three years, so teachers will know the goal going into the school year and the administration will be able to plot the local data in the spring.

Dr. Jennings explained that the administration is going to expect the percentage of students meeting their target growth by grade level to be at the 90th percentile nationally in reading and math.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Dr. Jennings stated that the teachers will still need to communicate to the parents that these are measurements of growth and explain to the parents and the students where the student currently is and what there target goal is.

Ms. Heimarck explained that they are asking teachers to share the NWEA projected growth goals with the students so as to personalize the growth targets and also the School In Need of Improvement plan looks at the NECAP growth targets. She explained that they made steps to look at both growth targets because they are both individualized tests and they both have growth targets no matter where the children lies on the continuum.

Mr. Maresco questioned what will be communicated to the public and whether the tests are broad enough so that meeting the growth goals means teachers are truly covering everything that needs to be covered or are they only teaching to

obtain the growth scores on the test.

Ms. Heimarck explained that the NECAP is not a standardized assessment rather it is a criterion assessment and the student is being measured by their mastery of the Grade Level Expectations which is the foundation of the curriculum and instruction.

A. DOE25/MS25

Ms. Shankel explained that the DOE25 and MS25 are the reports that are sent to the Department of Education and the Department of Revenue. She noted that the business department spends the summer getting the year end results into the required formats and noted that these reports are unaudited and the audited reports will be done by December.

Ms. Shankel stated that the final unreserved fund balance is \$470,000 and noted that at the time of her last report she projected a balance of \$460,000. She also noted that Karen Tailor, the new Director of Finance, and Katie Hannah, the Bookkeeper, have been doing a lot of work on these reports for all three districts.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to authorize the Board to sign the DOE 25 and the MS 25.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

B. NH Teacher Retirement Legislation

Ms. Shankel explained that on June 30th the Governor signed in legislation which would require school districts and municipalities to remit more to the NH retirement fund than planned. She explained that normally they would get the amount well in advance and put the amount in the budget, but this was a surprise. She further explained that there is now a lawsuit going forward because this year really breaks with the normal practice with how much the state has committed to. She noted that the impact to Amherst School District \$56,585 for next year and will be a similar number the following year.

Ms. Head noted that at the SAU meeting there was discussion as to how far the state will go if they are willing to break this commitment.

Mr. Brew commented that the feeling at the SAU meeting was that if left unchecked the state will just back away from all of their responsibilities and leave the entire burden to the schools and municipalities. He noted that under the old system the Amherst School District pays \$905,000 into the retirement system and that a little increase can have a huge impact on the district.

VI. ACTION ITEMS

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Dr. Jennings stated that she is not sure how other districts are responding to the issue as it is just coming out and there is not s Superintendents meeting until September. She stated that she knows of another district that authorized the full amount but said they were paying it in increments and the town of Amherst has voted to move forward on the lawsuit.

In response to a question from Mr. Maresco, Ms. Shankel stated that the district is not committed to contributing anymore funds as it will always be the Board's choice if they want to contribute more if the need arises. Mr. Brew noted that he considers this money to be a contribution not a bill and noted that the district may get another request to contribute and they can evaluate the request at that time.

In response to Mr. Graybill, Dr. Jennings stated that the district has not received any legal opinion as to whether they should participate or not.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED by Mr. Graybill to contribute \$2403.89 to be a part of the litigation for additional retirement cost.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to enter into non public session. The Board members were polled and all were in favor.

VII. PERSONNEL

Chairman Head declared the Board to be in non public session at 8:18 p.m.

The Administration presented nominations of candidates for positions. The Board discussed qualifications of candidates. The Administration also discussed the topic of a Clerk of the Works.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to come out of non-public session.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Head declared the Board to be in public session at 8:32 p.m.

The Board accepted the recommendations for positions as follows:

Amy Birck as Special Education Teacher for 1 FTE. Amanda Benson as Reading Specialist for .6 FTE. Coleen Carlson as Language Arts Teacher for 1 FTE. Cheryl Greany as Special Education Teacher for .5 FTE.

The Board voted unanimously to approve the positions outlined above.

Ms. Head reviewed action items from previous meeting and the Board provided feedback on the meeting.

**VIII. REVIEW OF
MEETING/
ADJOURN**

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to adjourn the meeting.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Head declared the meeting to be adjourned at 8:43 p.m.