

**AMESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
AMESBURY HIGH SCHOOL  
March 2, 2020**

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Present at 7:00 p.m. were Mayor Gove, Chair; Peter Hoyt, Kate Currie, Jana deBeer, Mel Webster, Maryann Welch, Elaine Bucher, Alice Dragnea, Joan Liporto, and Jared Fulgoni, Superintendent of Schools.

**I. Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Mission Statement**

**Amesbury Public Schools Mission Statement**

*The Amesbury School District is unconditionally committed to every child, ensuring that all students experience success through the development of attitudes and skills necessary for lifelong learning by providing the highest quality staff, meaningful learning experiences, and a vitally involved community.*

*This meeting will be broadcast live on ACTV and will also be recorded.*

**II. Joint meeting of School Committee/ Student Advisory Council**

Members of the Student Advisory Council (SAC) gave a presentation (attached) on the “Flex Schedule” being implemented at the High School. Additionally, SAC members recommended being able to opt out of AHS finals if students reach a specific grade, covering vaping in health classes, making compost bins, and counting sports as gym credits.

Mr. Webster commented at the conclusion of the presentation that if a district charges user fees for athletics, students are unable to count those sports as credits.

Ms. Welch asked what those who didn’t participate in current flex times do with their time. Ms. Ratner indicated some students may have answered the question in jest.

Mr. Webster asked how long the flex block would be next year. Flex is currently taken either directly before or after the lunch period.

Mr. Hoyt thanked the SAC members for their leadership.

**III. Comments by Visitors and Delegations / Student Opportunity Act Spending Recommendations**

- Gretchen Marinopoulos, 12 Sanborn Terr.  
Ms. Marinopoulos stated she was speaking to address a violation of her son’s privacy by the school district. She summarized the process of hiring then interim Superintendent Fulgoni, approximately a year ago, as a rushed process. As a result of her views on the process she was the only member who voted against moving into the negotiation phase of the hiring process.

She discussed motions she made during the FY '20 budget process to reduce costs, one such was a motion to eliminate a .5 assistant principal position. This motion passed. The next morning Ms. Marinopoulos resigned from the School Committee. Approximately a week later an email about her son was shared with the Daily News. This led to an independent investigation. At the conclusion of the investigation Ms. Marinopoulos paid for a redacted version of the report. It was determined she was overcharged for the report and was refunded over \$202 by the business manager. A GoFundMe had been established to pay for the cost of obtaining a copy of the report and as such Ms. Marinopoulos donated the refund check back to the district to be used towards the Model U.N. Club. She also requested that the district share a copy of the report on its' website and requested a full refund of her payment.

- Greg Noyes, 8 Clark's Rd.  
Mr. Noyes stated that with the various construction and repair projects planned at the school, now was a good time to install solar panels on school roofs. He would like to see this included in the capital plans.  
He also reiterated a comment he made at a previous meeting that schools were not holding site council meetings. He directed members to view the Haverhill Public Schools website for a good example of active site councils.

#### **IV. Presentations and Administrative Reports**

##### **a. Superintendent's Report**

The Superintendent discussed the growing concern over the Coronavirus. The district has been working with the state and local boards of health, as well as, the Department of Education to prepare and educate families. At this point the district has been told to continue to emphasize handwashing, staying home if sick, as well as, continuing current cleaning and disinfecting protocols. The Superintendent had Mr. Bennett and Mr. Papas demonstrate the districts disinfectant protocols including use of electrostatic sprayers twice daily.

Mr. Webster asked if there were shortages of disinfectant. Mr. Bennett indicated the district had a good supply.

The Superintendent also mentioned the upcoming public open forum on the Student Opportunity Act (SOA). This meeting is taking place on Thursday March 5<sup>th</sup> in the High School auditorium. After this public meeting there will be a meeting of stakeholders that will discuss options. The plan for the \$61,000 is due April 1<sup>st</sup>.

The Superintendent also drew the committee's attention to the Superintendent Goals (attached). Once these are discussed by the personnel subcommittee, they would be asked to be approved by the full committee.

Mr. Webster asked members to send him feedback within the next two weeks.

Ms. Welch stated the goals were good for the begins of a districtwide plan but questioned why there weren't also goals for continuous improvement by the Superintendent. At the Nov. 25<sup>th</sup> Superintendent Evaluation Training held by MASS and MASC, they recommended having one professional practice goal, one student learning goal, 2-4 district improvements and 6-8 aligned focus indicators.

Mr. Webster stated he would like to have shorter and longer terms goals and that it could lead to a Superintendent evaluation in about 6 months, possibly in October.

- b. Report on New High School Schedule – Principal McAndrews  
Principal McAndrews was joined by Assistant Principal Ricci to give a report on the new High School schedule beginning next year. (presentation attached).

At the conclusion of the presentation, Mr. Hoyt thanked the principals for their dedication to researching and planning this change since 2013. He stated he thought the new opportunities may encourage more Amesbury students to attend the High School.

Mr. Webster asked about credit requirements, and Principal McAndrews indicated free credits would allow for addition flexibility. Courses were also being shorted from 87 to 55 minutes.

Ms. Ricci also stressed that new schedule will increase equity.

Ms. Bucher asked about language classes and Ms. McAndrews indicated that in many schedules there was the ability to take language classes in back to back semesters.

Ms. Bucher also pointed out that there is less flexibility still exists in band and chorus programs because that block will be a blackout for other course opportunities. Principal McAndrews indicated that with the band teacher being a middle school teacher it is hard to add flexibility currently but as the middle school schedule evolves it may increase opportunities at the high school. Ms. Bucher added that it is an example of why it would be good to add a band instructor at the high school.

Mr. Webster stated that he was not a fan of making start times 20 minutes earlier when most schools were moving in the opposite direction. Principal McAndrews stated that due to contractual obligations it would currently be harder to move to later start times.

Mayor Gove stated she thought it was great that as a result of the new schedule 12 new courses would be offered for students. It provides for more variety without adding additional staff. She also stated she strongly supports the option for students to learn in a college setting with other high school students.

Ms. Bucher asked what transportation options were available for students taking classes at the community college. Ms. McAndrews indicated there were currently some vans available for group transportation and that some seniors may be able to transport others with parental permission.

**V. Communications**

a. Student Representative

No further update at this time

b. Other

1. Chair

Mayor Gove shared with the committee several points of interest that were communicated to her at a recent meeting including:

- Shifting of vocational schools to career technical institutes. This would include the ability to run the school in 3 shifts over the course of a day, including an afterschool shift for high school students and an evening shift for working professionals. This may also lead to an increase in transportation funding for schools such as Amesbury. This could potential lead to more 8<sup>th</sup> graders choosing to go to Amesbury High School.
- Innovative Pathways: Programs are operational in 26 schools with over 50 focus areas. State is putting a lot of money behind these initiatives.

Mayor Gove then read the following statement: *At the May 6, 2019 School Committee meeting, a complaint was brought forward regarding the manner in which the Amesbury Public Schools responded to a public records request made by Richard Lodge, the Editor of The Daily News. More specifically, the Complainant alleged that private student information was released.*

*On June 3, 2019, the School Committee voted to retain Discrimination and Harassment Solutions, LLC to conduct an investigation into this complaint. The investigation was completed in August 2019 and concluded that District personnel properly responded to Mr. Lodge's April 11, 2018 public records request, and that emails released by District personnel in response to that request did not include any of the emails identified in newspaper articles that disclosed personal student information.*

*Following this investigation, several individuals requested copies of the investigation report. The District responded to these requests by producing the report, with redactions to ensure that there was no violation of the privacy rights of any employee, student, parent, or witness. After review by the Commonwealth's Supervisor of Records, it was determined that the report should be released with only student record information redacted. A copy of this report is now available. Typically a report like this would be available by a public records request, due to the heightened public interest in this report we will be making it available on the District's website for the next 30 days. After that time anyone wishing to receive a copy will need to make a public records request through our records access officer who is our City Clerk, Christine Dixon.*

*The School Committee is committed to serving the interests of Amesbury's students and school community in a transparent manner. The School Committee also takes the allegations and conclusions of the investigation report seriously, and it has taken steps to ensure that all District employees and officials are familiar with their obligations under the relevant records and ethics laws and School Committee policies.*

2. Mr. Webster made statements concerning the following issues:
  - Requested that contracts be posted online in a place the public can easily find.
  - Superintendent's contract has several dates that need to be fixed.
  - List all subcommittee appointments online
  - Requested an update on future plans to update/overhaul the website.
  - Stated his desire that the School Committee hold 2 meetings a month at least 6 months out of the year. This would help key issues maintain momentum. This would also allow more issues that are currently discussed in subcommittee meetings to be discussed before the whole committee.
  - Attrition – Approximately 41% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders are applying to leave the district for high school. This is unacceptable. Requested an in-depth report on attrition going back 5-10 years.
  - Need status on AMS Principal Search and APS policy manual review.
  - Requested improved communications from the Superintendent's Office. In the future the School Committee should receive advanced notice of correspondence being sent to district families via Blackboard connect and the School Committee should be consulted prior to setting dates for meetings concerning spending of Chapter 70 funds.

Mayor Gove stated the new communications director was working on making website improvements.

Ms. Currie said the cost for the MASC policy review would be \$10,000 over three years.

Mr. Hoyt added that the middle school principal search was progressing. 34 applicants initially responded after being contacted by the search committee of those 8 were identified for in-person interviews which were currently being scheduled.

Also, the Amesbury Educational Foundation Hall of Honor dinner will be held on May 8<sup>th</sup> at Northern Essex Community College. The Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center annual White Ribbon Breakfast is being held at the Georgetown Country Club on Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup> and a few AHS staff and students will attend. The fundraising campaign started in Canada as a way to combat domestic violence.

## **VI. Items for Approval or Early Consideration**

- a. Past Meeting Minutes: 2/3/20

*Mr. Webster moved to approve the minutes, second by Mr. Hoyt. Vote: 6 yes, 1 abstain (Bucher).*

b. Business

1. Vote to authorize participation in School Choice Program for 2020-2021 school year.

Superintendent Fulgoni stated this was an annual decision made by the School Committee. His recommendation to the committee is to approve school choice for the coming year.

*Mr. Hoyt moved to continue participating in School Choice for the coming school year, seconded by Ms. Welch. Vote: Yes, unanimous.*

2. Vote to re-appoint or open the Whittier Vocational Technical School Committee Representatives Term Expiring 3/30/20

Mayor Gove stated that the current representative, Charlie LaBella, has expressed an interest in continuing his service.

Mr. Hoyt thanked Mr. LaBella for his service over the years and stated the importance of having someone with institutional knowledge in this role.

Mr. LaBella was invited to introduce himself to the committee.

Mr. LaBella has lived in Amesbury for 40 years, all 3 of his children went through the Amesbury school system. He has a BS in Chemical Engineering from Northeastern, an MBA from Fordham and an Associates Degree in Statistics from Princeton. He works part time in retirement as an usher at TD Garden in Boston. He worked previously at the Newburyport Elementary School, Malden Mills, and served on the Amesbury School Committee for 12 years. He has served as the representative to Whittier for over 12 years. He is a firm believer in public education.

Several facts he shared about Whittier include:

- Amesbury has the second largest enrollment behind Haverhill. 11 Communities make up the Whittier district.
- 23 vocational programs are offered.
- Recently invested in a childcare facility onsite.
- 65-70% of graduates continue on their vocational track continuing to get a 2-4 year degree
- All students are in-district
- Over 700 applicants have been received for the coming year for 352 placements

Mr. Webster asked about the plans for the new school project. Mr. LaBella indicated it was a renovation on the existing footprint.

*Mr. Hoyt moved to reappoint Mr. LaBella to another 3 year term, second by Ms. deBeer. Vote: 6 yes, 1 abstain (Bucher), passes.*

3. Vote to approve subcommittee changes

Mayor Gove stated that due to the addition of Ms. Bucher to the committee she would be filling some of the vacancies on the subcommittees.

*Mayor Gove recommended appointing Ms. Bucher to the Policy Subcommittee which currently only has 2 members.*

*Motion was moved by Mr. Webster, second by Mr. Hoyt. Vote: Yes, unanimous.*

Mayor Gove also indicated several other positions may be available on other subcommittees in the future.

- c. Approval of Warrants: 2/13/20 - \$204,946.00  
2/27/20 - \$746,489.39

Mr. Webster thanked Joan for her prompt responses to his questions regarding the warrants.

Mr. Webster moved to approve the 2/13 warrant in the amount of \$204,946.00, second by Ms. Welch. Vote: Yes, unanimous.

Mr. Hoyt moved to approve the 2/27 warrant in the amount of \$746,489.39, second by Ms. Currie. Vote: Yes, unanimous.

## **VII. Informational Items**

### **a. Subcommittee Reports**

1. Finance Subcommittee – Mr. Webster stated the level services budget was up over 5% from last fiscal year. Even that number will be hard to meet. A large portion of the increase, about \$700,000, is due to special education costs. The Fincom reviewed recommendations made by the administration and the desire is many, if not all, of the teaching position be kept in the budget. When all requests were considered the budget request was over a 9% increase. The committee asked the Superintendent to reduce the amount to a 7.5% increase. However, this amount was still unlikely to be approved by the City Council. The committee also recommended a 4.1 million dollar capital request budget.
2. Personnel Subcommittee – Mr. Webster stated the committee had met about 3 weeks ago and discussed Paraprofessional negotiations which will take place on March 30, as well as, superintendent goals.

The capitol requests needed to be submitted on March 3 and Joan Liporto requested the full committee vote to approve them.

*Mr. Webster moved to approve submission to the City Council a capitol improvement request in the amount of \$4,381,900, second by Mr. Hoyt. Vote: Yes, unanimous.*

3. Building and Grounds – Ms. deBeer stated that due to a website issue the previously scheduled meeting had to be cancelled and has been rescheduled for March 10.
4. Policy Subcommittee – Ms. Currie stated that the subcommittee was unable to

meet as planned due to the website outage. The meeting would be rescheduled.

5. Teaching and Learning – Ms. Welch stated the subcommittee has last met on February 13 and discussed the following topic:

- DCAP and Learning goals for the 2019-2020 school year
- That data was being placed in pivot tables to allow for viewing in a historical and varied context.
- Teachers would also be coming to a consensus on which literacy program to implement by the end of the month.
- The subcommittee strongly supports the purchase of a new literacy program, as well as, the purchase of ST-Math for the middle school
- The district has been awarded \$30,000 to implement the STEM program “Project Lead the Way” which will begin in grades 5-7 next school year
- The first issue of districtwide newsletter was published, designed to celebrate and inform students, staff, and the public.
- Next meeting is Tuesday, March 24 at 6pm in room 146.

b. School Building Committee Report

Mr. Hoyt stated the committee met on February 6<sup>th</sup> and voted to submit the design development documents to the MSBA. The next meeting is on March 26 at 6pm.

c. New School Committee Member Orientation Update

Mayor Gove shared that the first workshop had taken place and several more were scheduled and listed under “Future meeting”. Trying to schedule a facility tour.

## **VIII. Future Meetings**

The next regularly scheduled School Committee meeting will be held on April 6, 2020 at 7:00pm.

Subcommittees and other meetings will be held on the following dates:

1. AES School Building Committee – March 26, 2020 at 6:00pm
2. Finance Subcommittee – April 6, 2020 at 6:00pm
3. Personnel Subcommittee – TBD
4. Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee – March 10, 2020 at 5:00pm
5. Policy Subcommittee – TBD
6. Teaching and Learning Subcommittee – March 24 at 6:00pm.
7. MASC District Governance Workshops: March 28, 2020 from 8-10am, April 4, 2020 from 8am-12pm
8. Student Opportunity Act Public Informational Meeting – March 5, 2020 at 6:00pm in the Amesbury High School Auditorium.

Mr. Webster also reminded the committee a Joint Education Committee meeting would be held on March 12 at 6pm. Mr. Hoyt, Mr. Webster, and Ms. deBeer serve on this committee.



**IX. Adjournment**

*Mr. Hoyt moved to adjourn, second by Ms. deBeer. Vote: Yes, unanimous.*