

**AMESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
AMESBURY HIGH SCHOOL  
APRIL 2, 2013**

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Present at 7:00 p.m. were Thatcher Kezer, Chair, Debra LaValley, Stanley Schwartz, Bonnie Schultz, Gale Hanshaw, Tom McGee, Peter Hoyt, Michele S. Robinson, Superintendent of Schools and Jonah Einson, Student Representative.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The Chair called the school committee meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Ms. Schultz.

**II. COMMENTS BY VISITORS, DELEGATIONS**

The Chair invited attendees to come forward to one of the microphones, introduce themselves and make a statement. He reminded attendees that this was not the place for a dialogue with the committee but it was a place where citizens could share any concerns they may have.

Citizen #1: This parent spoke in favor of increasing the level services budget so that the third grade could add another teacher to lower the class sizes. She was also in favor of increasing the band staff at the high school.

Citizen #2: This parent was encouraging the school committee and city, state and federal legislators to invest in our children because they are our future. Her recommendation was to keep the level of services for our children a priority.

Citizen #3: City Councilor, Joe McMilleon, stated that he has attended all of the school committee budget workshops. He said that the schools take up about 50% of the whole city budget and special education takes up 25%. He said that it is a real necessity that this budget be passed but the only source of income for the City is in raising taxes. He said that the taxes couldn't be raised enough to support the school budget. He encouraged people to contact their state and federal legislators and tell them to support education as much as possible for funding the unfunded mandates.

Citizen #4: This parent thanked the school committee for creating such a responsible budget for the students of Amesbury. She stated that the Mayor has led the march in making Amesbury a community that people want to raise their kids in and send them to the Amesbury Public Schools. A positive vote for this budget all the way through the City Council will maintain the momentum that the Mayor has started. She said seeing the state budget containing no monies to improve education was disheartening.

Citizen #5: This parent has three children in the Amesbury Public Schools and works at the Amesbury Elementary School as a substitute teacher. She sees firsthand how professional the teaching staff is and how difficult it is to teach a class of 26-28 students. Class sizes this big makes it impossible for teachers to meet the demands of every student in these classrooms.

Citizen #6: This citizen is currently an administrator at the middle school. He was raised in another community but he is so glad that he relocated his family to Amesbury. He said that there is a thread throughout the citizens of Amesbury that make it such a unique place. He also said that we owe it to the students to do the right thing by voting on a budget that addresses what the schools need to do the best we can for the students in the school system.

The Chair thanked all of the attendees especially those who came up to the microphones to make a statement.

### III. PRESENTATIONS

- A. Dr. Robinson gave a PowerPoint presentation that was an overview of what drives the budget, i.e., the school Mission Statement, District Goals that focus on instruction, MCAS ranking, Student Growth Percentile and the many challenges Amesbury faces in closing the achievement gap for all students in all areas.

### IV. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

### V. COMMUNICATIONS

- A. Student Advisory Council – Jonah Einson  
Jonah reported on a fundraising activity that SAC is working on. He also spoke about the student involvement with the NEASC accreditation process.

Ms. LaValley suggested that the school newspaper and SAC partner to educate the student body about the accreditation process and how important it is that the high school achieves accreditation.

Mr. Hoyt stated that the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center held a White Ribbon breakfast for the purpose of educating men on domestic violence. He thanked Mr. Hamond and Mr. Moore for filling a table with Amesbury High School male students. The attendees were: Chris Bruno, Curran O'Connor, Wes Morris, James Sheridan, Logan Piercy, Danny Logan and Collun Holmes.

Ms. LaValley stated that a fundraiser will be held at the AHS track on Saturday, April 6th for the purposes of raising money to fight cancer in the name of a long time coach, Mike Farmer. The fundraiser is called, "Miles for Mike". There are many participants scheduled, including track students from other local districts. Ms. LaValley suggested that Mr. Gearin put an announcement about this fundraiser on the school website. The event will run from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

*Motion by Ms. Schultz, seconded by Ms. Hanshaw to approve the minutes dated March 21, 2013. Unanimous, Yes.*

**B. Business**

**1. School Choice Vote**

Dr. Robinson stated that the recommendation is that the Amesbury Public Schools will continue to participate in School Choice, however for the 13-14 school year, there are no available openings in any grade. Ms. Schultz asked how many School Choice students do we currently have in the district and Dr. Robinson said that she would get that number and share it with the committee. The Superintendent said that due to the space issues in the district, the number of School Choice students has slowly decreased every year. Ms. LaValley asked if there was a way that the school department could find out how many children move into Amesbury when there is a new building project. The Chair suggested that Joe Fahey's office would be the best source for that kind of information.

Ms. LaValley said that in the past even if a grade was closed to School Choice, choice students who had siblings coming to Amesbury would be able to enroll. She asked if that would still be the case.

Assistant Superintendent Farrell explained that there are no seats available for the 13-14 school year. She also said that the School Choice policy needed to be updated and it would be added to the agenda of the next policy subcommittee meeting.

*Motion by Ms. LaValley, seconded by Mr. Hoyt, to still participate in the School Choice program but there is no space available in grades K-12 for the 13-14 school year. Unanimous, Yes.*

**2. FY14 School Committee Budget Approval**

The Chair announced that the school committee will first look at the total figures by cost center and if any member would like to ask a question in any cost center, that number would be flagged and would be discussed after each amount was announced. Mr. Hoyt reminded the Chair that he would need to recuse himself for the vote on the Cashman Elementary School budget as he had a conflict of interest with that cost center.

Cost Center #010 District Administration	\$635,594
Cost Center #010 Horace Mann Charter School	\$639,529
Cost Center #011 Transportation	\$414,385
Cost Center #012 Amesbury Elementary School ▪ Flagged by Ms. Schultz	\$3,303,497
Cost Center #013 Cashman Elementary School ▪ Flagged by Ms. Schultz	\$3,571,858
Cost Center #014 Amesbury Middle School ▪ Flagged by Ms. Schultz	\$5,298,153
Cost Center #015 Amesbury High School ▪ Flagged by Ms. LaValley	\$4,245,240
Cost Center #015 Athletics	\$275,935
Cost Center #016 District Technology	\$379,242
Cost Center #017 Maintenance	\$1,607,472
Cost Center #018 Curriculum	\$303,233
Cost Center #019 District Special Education	\$3,230,755
Cost Center #020 Benefits	\$3,170,750
Cost Center #911	\$1,170,971

The Chair then asked Ms. Schultz to explain why she flagged the Amesbury Elementary School budget figure. Ms. Schultz asked Principal Helliesen to explain what the result would be if the elementary school did not get another third grade teacher in the final budget. He said that the class sizes in the third grade were already high and would remain at approximately 28 or 29 students in each third grade classroom. If the budget allowed him to hire another third grade teacher the classroom sizes would lower to approximately 21 or 22 students per class. He further explained that they have had at least 60 families attend the Kindergarten screening which means that these large class sizes will continue to be an issue. He also spoke about the extra time needed for the art and music classes in order to meet the required 18 hours of specialty time.

Ms. Schultz had flagged the Cashman Elementary School budget so she asked Principal Charette if she could talk about self contained classrooms and she asked her what would happen if they could not exist. Principal Charette stated that the students in these programs would have to go to outplacements. Ms. Charette is working with the Interim Special Education Director, Maureen Szymczak, to see what they can do to create programs that can support these students and to avoid the extreme costs of outplacements.

Ms. Szymczak informed the committee and attendees of the costs of sending a student to a facility outside of the Amesbury Public Schools. The Chair asked how much money we received from Circuit Breaker. The Chair reminded those in attendance as well as viewers that the best way to have a voice in expressing the needs of the Amesbury Public Schools' programs is to call or write to our legislators. Ms. Farrell said that citizens need to advocate for legislation to increase our ratio percentage to 75%, ask for extraordinary relief and ask for a larger percentage amount for schools conducting in-district programs. Ms. Szymczak also answered questions about the IDEA program. Mr. Hoyt thanked Ms. Szymczak for all that she does for the children of Amesbury.

Ms. Schultz flagged the Amesbury Middle School budget total. She asked Mr. Curry to explain the need for a language based program. He stated that the middle school has a growing population of students with language based needs. If we do not have the employees to support these students, then the students will have to be out placed. Mr. Curry went on to say that the requirements at the middle school are much more than what is listed in the budget. He stated that without all of the employees and programs in place next year that are in place this school year, the students will have to go back to sitting in study halls because staff support is not available.

The addition of the In-School Suspension Tutor for the middle school was discussed. Mr. Curry stated that they have had 70 students suspended from school already this year and without this tutor in place, the students are sent home and stay home. There is no way to keep them in school without someone to work with them. Mr. Schwartz wanted to put a motion on the floor to put this tutor position back into the budget.

The Chair said that his motion can be made later on during the budget review.

***Motion by Mr. Schwartz, seconded by Ms. Schultz to suspend the rules so that the School Committee could conduct business after 9:00 p.m., Unanimous, Yes.***

The Chair recognized Ms. Schultz with regard to her flag on the high school budget. The position of increasing the FTE on the band teacher from .2 FTE by .8 FTE to create a full time band teacher was discussed. Discussion ensued about the importance of a music program and how the whole community benefits from the high school band. Also discussed was the fact that the accreditation coming up in May would be looking at what kinds of programs that our students are involved in and the success of the course based on how students feel about a co-curricular course they participate in. Principal Hamond spoke about how the lack of FTE in the music program has been a sad reality of the economic downturn, especially in the core courses. He said that when he came here 12 years ago there were 11 English and 11 Math teachers, now there are 7 teachers in each of these important courses.

The Chair recognized Ms. LaValley for her flag of the Athletic Department. Mr. Gearin, Athletic Director, was asked about the participation in the sports that are offered at AHS. He gave a verbal list of all of the sports offered and an approximate number of participants followed by a short question and answer period.

The Chair recognized Ms. Schultz for her flag under Technology. Ms. Schultz asked the Superintendent about the status of PARCC and MCAS. Dr. Robinson explained that PARCC will replace the MCAS assessment exams. She went on to say what the district needs to do in order to be prepared for the change. The infrastructure of the whole school community must be brought up to date and is being worked on and being tested at this time. It will require updates in equipment and technology.

The Chair recognized Ms. LaValley for her flag under Curriculum. Ms. Griffin explained that the curriculum budget went down a small amount because there were items in it that there is no longer a need for, particularly, a position that no longer exists. Ms. Griffin is also waiting to hear about dollar numbers from the state level. She was told by someone at the state level that grant amounts will likely go down by about 15% from last year, however, it is too early to tell.

The Chair recognized Ms. Hanshaw for her flag under the Special Education budget. Ms. Hanshaw asked the Director of Student Services, Ms. Szymczak, about the position of an out of district special education facilitator and the need to have someone in this position. Ms. Szymczak explained that there are more than 50 special needs students in out placements that the APS is totally responsible for in every way with regard to whatever is in their Individualized Education Plan. The students and facilities must be visited and assessments made on the progress of these students and adherence to their plans. If there were not someone in the position of an out of district special education facilitator, then Ms. Szymczak would be required to make all of those visits plus oversee the multitude of students currently in our school community. This would be a herculean task. Ms. Hanshaw asked if this position were cut to half time, would the job get done. Ms. Szymczak said it was possible but it would not be done as well and as thoroughly as it needs to be. The experience an employee needs to do this job was discussed. Mr. Schwartz asked if this position was year round or the school year. It is the school year only.

The Chair explained how the voting on the FY14 budget process would take place. The school committee would vote on the total budget figure as proposed by the Superintendent.

**Ms. LaValley asked for a point of order with regarding to the fact that if the committee didn't vote per cost center, then Mr. Hoyt would not be able to recuse himself from voting on just the Cashman Elementary budget.**

**The Chair's suggestion was to deduct the amount of the Cashman Elementary budget from the total budget number first which is \$3,571,858 making the vote on the whole budget the amount of \$24,674,757.**

***Motion by Ms. LaValley, seconded by Mr. Hoyt, to approve the total budget for FY14 in the amount of \$24,674,757.***

***Motion by Mr. Schwartz, seconded by Mr. Hoyt, to amend the previous motion to include adding the position of an In-School Suspension Tutor at the Amesbury Middle School in the amount of \$28,000. Unanimous, Yes.***

***Motion by Ms. Schultz, seconded by Mr. McGee to amend the amount of the total budget to include an additional .8 FTE high school band teacher, making that position 1.0 FTE. Unanimous, Yes.***

The Chair recommended that the committee vote on the first amendment prior to adding another amendment. The first amendment was then voted on and approved. This amendment for the In-School Suspension Tutor adjusted the budget figure to \$24,702,757, which includes the deduction of the Cashman School budget.

Discussion on the second amendment to the final budget figure by increasing the band teacher from .2 to .8 ensued. Committee Members as well as Student Advisory Council Representative, Jonah Einson, expressed their thoughts about the importance of the band to the overall Amesbury School Community and the community at large. The total cost to add .8 FTE to the .2 band position is \$45,000.

Following the approval of the second amendment, the new budget figure is \$24,747,757, which includes the deduction of the Cashman School Budget

Each School Committee shared their support for the budget that is being voted on at this meeting. The Chair explained that he will vote “no” to the final budget figure due to his position as Mayor of the City of Amesbury. He needs to take all of the budgets from all of the city departments in order to put a budget before the City Council that the Council will support. He needs to look at the City revenues and the big picture prior to finalizing a budget. His vote at this meeting on the overall budget in no way means that he does not support this budget. There are still too many unknown needs for every department in the City.

The motion on the floor began with the motion below that was not taken to a vote. With the amendments voted on above, the total amount of the budget has changed to \$24,747,757.

***Motion by Ms. LaValley, seconded by Mr. Hoyt, to approve the total budget for FY14 in the amount of ~~\$24,674,757~~. \$24,747,757. This total does not include the Cashman Elementary School budget. Vote: 6 Yes, 1 No (Kezer).***

***Motion by Mr. McGee, seconded by Ms. Hanshaw to accept the Cashman Elementary School budget in the amount of \$3,571,858. Vote: 6 Yes, 1 Recused (Hoyt).***

***The final FY14 budget figure of the School Committee is a total of \$28,319,615.***

- C. Warrant  
1. \$233,075.39 (4/4/13)

***Motion by Ms. Schultz, seconded by Mr. Schwartz to approve the warrant dated April 4, 2013 in the amount of \$233,075.39. Unanimous, Yes.***

## **VI. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS**

- A. **Subcommittee Reports**  
1. **Budget/Finance Subcommittee – Mr. Schwartz**  
None.

2. **Policy Subcommittee – Ms. Hanshaw**  
Ms. Hanshaw said that the next scheduled meeting would take place Ms. Hanshaw said that the subcommittee continues to go through the policies and will meet on April 25<sup>th</sup> at 9 a.m. in the Superintendent’s Office.
3. **Personnel Subcommittee – Mr. McGee**  
Mr. McGee reported that the first Personnel Workshop will take place next week.

#### **VII. FUTURE MEETINGS AND AGENDA ITEMS**

1. Review Academy MOU (5/13)
2. District-wide Technology Overview
3. NSBA Conference (4/12 to 4/15)
4. Advocacy Initiative (5/21/13)
5. GLEC Director, Kim Oliveira (5/7/13)
6. Elementary Student Handbook (5/7/13)
7. Secondary Student Handbook (5/21/13)
8. Whittier Presentation (6/3/13)
9. Retiree Reception (6/3/13)
10. Superintendent’s Evaluation (6/13)


#### **VIII. PRESS CONFERENCE**

None.

#### **IX. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

***Motion by Ms. LaValley, seconded by Ms. Schultz to adjourn the meeting at 10:35 p.m., Unanimous, Yes.***

Respectfully Submitted,



Tom McGee, Secretary

#### **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.***