

Statement of Andover School Committee re High School Principal Position
(Developed by SC at the Feb. 12, 2015 SC Meeting)

In order to address some of the questions which have arisen as a result of the recent departure of the Andover High School (AHS) principal, the Andover School Committee is providing the following statement. While this statement may not address every question, it is our hope to correct some of the misconceptions which may exist and to assure the citizens of Andover and, in particular, the students of AHS and their parents that AHS remains on a very positive trajectory with a very bright future.

- **What is the recent history of people filling the AHS principal position?** Many have expressed concern at the number of people who have served as AHS principal over the last few years. While there has been some turnover, it is worth reviewing the context. In fact, there was considerable stability for a number of years and, prior to Dr. Lord's recent departure, there has been only one other principal who could be considered to have left AHS prematurely. Peter Anderson served as AHS principal for ten years, before retiring in 2009. Jonathan Harris was then hired by former Superintendent Claudia Bach. He served in that position for one year, and then unexpectedly resigned in October of 2010 to return home to Texas where he took a job with the Texas Education Agency. Following that resignation, Tom Sharkey, an Andover resident and retired principal who helmed high schools for many years in Lawrence and Billerica, agreed to serve as interim principal at AHS while a search for a permanent principal was conducted. Everyone understood from the outset that Mr. Sharkey would serve only on an interim basis; in fact, as a retired state employee he had to obtain a waiver from the state in order to take the job at all. He never sought to be considered (and was not considered) as a candidate for the permanent AHS principal position, but agreed to serve as interim AHS principal from 2010 to 2012, at which time Dr. McGrath hired Christopher Lord as the next AHS principal. Dr. Lord served as AHS principal from July 2012 until December 2014.
- **Why hasn't more information been released about the departure of Dr. Lord?** The School Committee fully understands and appreciates that many members of the community wish to know more information regarding Dr. Lord's resignation from AHS. However, in personnel issues such as this, there exists a legal right to privacy that is held entirely by the employee. Superintendent McGrath has told both the School Committee and the public everything that she is legally allowed to disclose.
- **Why wasn't the School Committee more involved in this matter?** Under the provisions of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, all matters concerning personnel management are specifically delegated to the purview of the superintendent. This being the case, personnel management in any school district is most often done entirely outside the scope of the School Committee's duties and without its direct knowledge. That said, whenever there is a personnel situation that also involves serious wrongdoing by an employee, obviously including when that conduct has had or could have a negative impact on students or the school community at large, Dr. McGrath alerts the Committee to such an issue. Furthermore, the School Committee is deeply committed to sharing that type of information with the community whenever possible and necessary, as is Dr. McGrath, and we have demonstrated this on multiple occasions. The fact that we have not had to do so in this instance speaks for itself.
- **Is there some underlying issue at AHS which is compromising the quality of the education which the students there are receiving?** Quite simply, the answer is "no." The most important responsibility of both the School Committee and Superintendent is to ensure that all of the students at all of our schools are receiving the best possible education. The School Committee can assure the community that that is the case at all of our schools, including at

AHS. Many exciting and innovative initiatives are happening at AHS, from an enhanced curriculum in numerous areas to more project-based learning to more internship opportunities to a new schedule that is under development that will provide a more personalized learning environment for all our students. Dr. Lord's departure has not negatively impacted any of these things and the school is now under the very able leadership of Steve Murray, who many students and parents know as an outstanding educator from his time as principal at West Middle School. He brings great energy and a positive and student-friendly approach to the job, and he has received very positive reviews from both AHS students and staff.