

RICHMOND SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday Jan 10, 2023 - 6:00 PM - Via Zoom

PRESENT: Peter Dillon, Superintendent; Ina Wilhelm, Chair; “Beth Choquette, Principal; Mary Shook, Director of Special Education; Karen Youdelman; Nathan Steele

ABSENT: Kimmie Leeco

Ina called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

Review and Approval of Minutes of the December Meeting: Peter explained that the December minutes were not available at this time, but he expected that the December and the January minutes would both be available for the February meeting.

Correspondence: Peter reported that he had sent the results of the Committee’s vote on Virtual Schooling to the State and they are processing it.

Public Comment: None

Principal’s Report: Beth advised the Committee that Richmond has been approved for nine programs through REEF in the amount of \$8,900.00. She is very excited to have programs in the school once again and thanked everyone involved in making that happen.

New phones and projectors have been installed over the holiday break and teachers are learning to use them. A part-time custodian, Chris Collelo, has been hired to work evenings.

Superintendent’s Report: Peter noted that the combination of COVID, the Flu and the COVID variant has caused Massachusetts’ levels to spike again. He said the school just needs to keep an eye on the incidence, and watch for the possible need to return to masking.

Teachers’ Contract Negotiations: Last year the subject of the evaluation process was left to be determined. Beth and Peter will look at the State process with some teachers and Ina.

Special Education Director’s Report: Mary reported that Julia Saborin, the full-time Special Education teacher, has moved on and Mary is looking for a long-term substitute to fill that space. She assured the Committee, however, that students’ needs are being met and she has no concerns in that area. She will continue to follow up with applications.

Mary will send an email invitation to the Special Education parents to attend an Overview Meeting in conjunction with Hancock on February 13, 2023 at 6:30 PM. Mary plans to include an RSVP on her invitations to get a sense of what parents want to

attend. She has also set up a Transition meeting for eighth grade parents with the High Schools to see if they would be interested in an Overview meeting.

POLICIES:

Section I - Instruction:

Section J - Includes some high school issues, which it makes sense to go through.

Ib - Academic Freedom: Display of flags issue

Ic - School Calendar: Ica - The State still measures work in days and hours.

Id - School Day: Peter will be providing a calendar for the school year.

Organization and Structure: The language relating to secondary schools will be removed.

Iga - Curriculum Development: Remove the reference to an Assistant Superintendent. The professional staff is responsible for the curriculum, but would check in with the School Cte. for any dramatic changes.

Occupational Education: Richmond does some Career Exploration and looks at what kind of high school would be best for our seventh and eighth graders.

Health Education: A school as small as Richmond does not have a distinct Health Teacher, but the Phys. Ed. Teacher does some work in that subject as well as the School Nurse. Beth elaborated on that to indicate that the P.E. Teacher deals with nutrition and exercise. Grades 6, 7 and 8 have a separate Health Class. There is an Exemption Procedure for parents whose religious beliefs conflict with providing that education.

Alcohol, Tobacco, Drugs: It is important to get kids in the habit of making smart choices at an early age.

Ihb - SPED-Approved Schools: Peter felt this issue was too complex to cover with policies. He and Mary will work on developing a footnote to read "See RCS SPED Procedures."

Observation of SPED Program: Parents can arrange to observe their child in the classroom environment.

Title I Funds: These Federal funds are for the economically disadvantaged student. This section discusses how those funds are used.

English Language Learner: There are none at Richmond at this time, but there may be in the future.

Homebound Instruction: This language precedes the current availability of electronic learning and is largely out of date.

Home-Schooling: The local schools have very little authority and are underfunded, but home-schooling has a large lobby and they have access to extensive information.

Alternative Programs: These relate to High School types of programs.

Remote Learning: Richmond does not offer simultaneous in-school and remote learning.

Karen raised the question of the result of several recent studies that showed the loss of educational progress due to COVID and the remote learning it necessitated. Does the school have an obligation to offer more time to bring those students back up to speed? Peter said that Richmond's achievement gaps are narrower than other schools and that the best indicators for educational success are small classes and excellent teachers, which Richmond has set in place. If a large need is discovered, we could do some tutoring. Targeted instruction and intensive tutoring get the best results. It was Social, Emotional Learning that showed the greatest loss as a result of COVID restriction. Mary noted that she has seen a lot of that.

Summer School: Richmond has never held a discrete summer school but has arranged for spots at Berkshire Hills for Richmond students and that has been seen to do well.

Instructional Materials:

Reconsideration of Instructional Resources: Need to be inclusive of the makeup of the community with a balance of multi-religious ideologies. In choosing written materials, find a balance between profanity and obscenity. In the Library the Librarian has wide autonomy for selection.

Digital Resources: Need a strong Information Technology teacher who does a lot with access to technology. Digital Use Policy - one for staff and one for students. Social Media - just requires common sense.

Outside Speakers: Like the Library and I.T. all outside speakers should be vetted. Timely feedback should be shared with parents regularly and on time. Beth noted that report cards go out three times a year and this is the time when teachers do progressive reports.

Ike - Promotion and Retention: Occasionally a student will need to spend a second year in a grade, but rarely.

Ikf - Graduation Requirements for High School: The Superintendent and the Principal share information on instructional goals and curriculum. A website is available that evaluates all curriculum in a research mode with pros and cons, based on outcomes.

Surveys: Should be more deliberate and reduced in numbers. Teachers are trying to do the right thing. Controversial issues should be put in context and balanced.

School Ceremonies and Observances: The basic issue here is separation of Church and State. No specific religious holiday observances and caution around holiday music choices.

Animals in School: Other than guide dogs, the occasional Police Dog and Therapy Dogs, Peter advised avoiding having animals in school. Peter has a policy on therapy dogs that he will bring to the next meeting.

Completion of Section I: Peter recommended that review of Section J be tabled to the next meeting, which met with the agreement of the Committee.

The question was raised about the percentage of vaccinated vs. unvaccinated in the school. Peter noted that, except for the few legitimate medical exemptions, the school is at essentially 100%. The current combination of COVID, the Flu and COVID variants makes the best course of action to watch for positive tests. A five-day quarantine and then the use of masking should follow a positive result.

Financial Report: Peter had no concerns at this time. Karen asked whether the Special Education and Substitute salaries had all been expended. Peter explained that other lines had unused resources that can be moved around to cover future costs. Karen asked also about some other line items, which Peter was able to explain to her satisfaction. He also noted that he had been nervous about the sudden rapid rise in heating costs but was relieved at the recent unusually warm weather that helped to keep those costs down. Again, there are other lines where unused funds could be reallocated as needed.

Peter will schedule an Executive Session to discuss negotiations with the school's attorney concerning the settlement before the February or March Committee meeting, at which time the attorney will present a likely settlement agreement to the Committee who will then vote on acceptance in an Open Meeting.

Karen had a question concerning the Solar contract, which Peter explained. She asked if it could provide a learning opportunity for the students. Peter noted that there is a website that teaches how solar works that teachers could use to develop a teaching program.

There being no further business before the Committee, Ina moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:11 PM. She was seconded by Karen and the motion was carried by unanimous consent.

Submitted by Phyllis LeBeau

