

Richmond School Committee Meeting

Tuesday October 11, 2022 - 6:00 PM - Via Zoom

PRESENT: Peter Dillon, School Superintendent; Ina Wilhelm, Chair; Kimmie Leeco; Karen Youdelman; Beth Choquette, Principal; Mary Shook, Special Education; Christine Lenfest, R.N., School Nurse; Jessica DiMario; Lisa Callahan

Ina called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Approval of the Minutes of September: After some corrections were made, Ina moved to approve the minutes as corrected. She was seconded by Kimmie and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

Correspondence: A note from a parent will be an item on the next agenda.

Public Comment: None

Principal's Report: Beth reported that actions from the first thirty day entry plan have been accomplished. Those are continuing and the actions in the plan for the first 60 days have begun to be implemented.

Many activities have returned to pre-COVID times such as field trips, seniors are visiting and having lunch with the students again, the Berkshire Theater Group is beginning work with the sixth graders and the Berkshire Botanical Gardens is working with the grades that work out in the garden. The Annual Craft Fair, Veterans' Day, Thanksgiving, etc. are all coming back.

Beth has written letters of support for various grants and they are under way. Title 1, 2 and 4 Grants were awarded for in-school and after-school enrichment programs and for transportation for after-school enrichment. Beth noted that Cristina applied for and received a grant of \$10,000.00 from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission for the health and well-being of students, staff and community members.

Teachers have approved and the school has adopted an online teacher evaluation program (Teachpoint). Training and practice sessions with that will be scheduled.

Beth is creating a Literacy Curriculum Committee to begin a reading and writing program that addresses the science of reading and curriculum standards. This year samplings of various programs will be reviewed and one will be adapted for the 2023-24 school year.

Beth has arranged with the State Police to assign two officers, who are currently in training, to be School Liaison Officers and there will be some additional training for staff around safety drills.

MCAS issues: Since 2019 there has been a drop in scores across the state. Fifty-three percent of students in grades three to eight met or exceeded expectations, which was a decrease from sixty-eight percent in 2019 and sixty-one percent in 2021. Richmond outperformed the State by twelve percent, but more work has to be done across grade levels. In Massachusetts, our scores increased from 2021 in Math by about twelve percent, but that is still lower than the pre-pandemic score of fifty-one percent in grades three to eight. In Science, thirty-eight percent of eighth graders met or exceeded expectations and fifth graders by ninety-three percent, outperforming the State by fifty-three percent.

This year the focus will be on a reading and writing program, making sure it is grounded in the science of reading. Special attention will be given to the math and science scores of students with disabilities. Beth is building a more robust MTSS framework and a personal design for learning will provide students with high quality teaching and curricula.

Superintendent's Report: Peter advised the Board that he has received a request from a local parent to raise the level of Charter Enrollment to 4% so that she can send her youngest to that school. Peter is awaiting a response from the State. He outlined the situation and the history of the vote on this issue of the School Committee, and provided some calculations that will result in changes to the cap of Charter School Enrollment. He then turned over the discussion to Jessica DiMario, the parent making the request.

Ms. DiMario explained her situation to the Committee, noting that her first two children are already enrolled in the school and she would like to have all of her children attend the same school. There was a discussion of the financial consequences to Richmond of increasing the cap on Charter Enrollment.

Peter recommended that the School Committee take no action at this time. He wants to await the response from the State before any decision is made. The School Committee needs to weigh the tensions of the community to manage its financial obligations with the needs of individual families to exercise the opportunity to choose where they want to send their children to school.

Ina asked Ms. DiMario if her other children had attended Richmond school to begin and then changed and why. Ms. DiMario explained the difficult experience her daughter encountered at Richmond, the emotional cost of that problem and the fact that it was never resolved. Her next child was automatically enrolled in the same school that her oldest was removed to. Ina then asked about the cultural aspects and socialization as the Charter school is a virtual classroom. Ms. DiMario outlined the various ways that those issues are addressed and satisfied.

Peter reiterated that the vote on this request will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

Peter had some additional information about MCAS scores and analysis. On the Commissioner's call he was reminded of several things: Richmond had a baseline in 2019 going into the Pandemic. Every district's scores went down in 2022, and that is now a new baseline. Schools should start at that point and go forward. Even though Richmond was open during the pandemic, attendance in Richmond and across the Commonwealth was down significantly. A normal school year is 180 days with an average of 5 days out. That number rose to 15 days out with teachers and staff out for various reasons connected to COVID. Altogether, the result of those fewer student days and the loss of teachers, scores in English went down, but Math increased.

Open response questions did poorly as students were out of practice with writing. There needs to be work done on written work and the ability to respond to open-ended questions. Peter will send the Committee links to the site where they can view the information. Richmond is such a small school it is difficult to desegregate data by subgroups such as larger schools do. Ina noted that it was impossible to compare results as the same test was not given to each student. Peter added that there is no previous measure of accomplishments for third graders. This year's fourth grade would normally have last year's results as a baseline, but that was not available this year. Peter said there is pressure at the State level for MCAS to evolve and it will be interesting to see how tests evolve going forward.

Special Education Report: Mary Shook noted that everything is settling in nicely. She is having a number of meetings that are going well and grants 240 and 262 have been submitted. A long-term substitute teacher for Special Ed has been hired to replace the teacher who will be out for the remainder of the year. On Thursday all Special Ed teachers and Mary will meet to reorganize schedules to make the best use of everyone's time.

Mary has a Special Ed Parent meeting scheduled for next Tuesday at 6:00 PM and she is involved in the School Level Administrative Rubric Community of Practice which provides her information on instructional leadership and curriculum throughout the year and the opportunity to share insights with other professionals.

School Policy Review: Peter noted that they have gotten halfway into the entire Policy: A to G dealing with the Board, Fiscal, etc. This evening they will deal with Policy H - Negotiations and after that there will be Instruction, Students, Community, Education.

Ha Negotiation goals - Create a public trust that the school is providing opportunities for young people.

Hb Legal Status - Directly from the Mass. Policy Book and referring to MA General Laws. It also mentions integrity in negotiations.

Hg School Committee negotiation: On the teachers and paraprofessionals' side the unions are involved. On the School Committee side, historically the Chair of the School Committee as well as the School Attorney participate. As the Committee expands its membership, an additional two members of the Committee could be involved.

Ina asked about the inclusion in that section of the ability of the School Cte. to hire an agent (an attorney?), which would change the atmosphere of the proceedings. Peter pointed out that the Teachers' Union uses their Representative, who is as knowledgeable as most attorneys.

Financial Report: At the last meeting Ina asked if the amount shown as the Principal's salary was correct. Peter said that the \$115,750.00 amount represents an increase over the original amount budgeted of \$15,000.00 because finding a candidate as qualified as Beth justified a higher salary. Peter noted that at this time of the year, with the exception of one-time expenses such as memberships, the budget is usually at 30% expended. Karen Youdelman asked about a budget item. Peter explained that it was an amount set aside for School Committee members to attend a conference, which as it happened they did not go to for various reasons. Peter went on to explain some other line items and reminded the Committee that, at the end of the year, the school will return a portion of the unused budget to the Town.

Ina asked about the \$14,000.00 budgeted for Professional Development. How is it shared? The Teachers' Union has the authority to disperse those funds and it is common for younger teachers just starting out in their careers to attend more training sessions.

Unforeseen Items: Peter apologized to the Committee for once again having to ask for the authority to pay some invoices that were not paid within the last fiscal year due to communication issues. Ina moved that the invoices from last year be paid out of the School Committee fund. Kimmie seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote: Kimmie aye, Ina aye.

Peter reported that an attorney had reached out to him about young people and smoking, which had almost been eliminated in this country until vaping was developed. The situation now is worse than ever and this attorney is doing a Class Action suit for corrective funds. A settlement at the Attorney General's level will provide corrective funds to the States. The share that Richmond School will see might pay for a Guidance Counselor for a few years. Lawsuits change things, especially when they hit a company in the pocketbook. Peter suggested that the School Committee join the Class Action suit as it could prove very helpful. Ina moved to have the Richmond School Committee join the Class Action suit against Jule. She was seconded by Kimmie and the motion was adopted by unanimous consent.

There being no further business before the Board, Ina moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:11 PM. The motion was seconded by Kimmie and passed by unanimous vote.

Submitted by Phyllis LeBeau