

Richmond School Committee Meeting
Tuesday November 15, 2022 - 6:00 PM
Via Zoom

PRESENT: Peter Dillon, Superintendent; Ina Wilhelm, Chair; Nathan Steele; Kimmie Leeco; Karen Youdelan; Beth Choquette, Principal; Natalie Gingras; Mary Shook, Special Education; Jessica DiMario, School Parent

Reorganization: Peter called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. He noted that this is the first meeting with the newly expanded Committee, which calls for reorganization of the membership. Nominations for a Chair will be taken first and once a Chair is elected, the meeting will be handed over to that person to elect a Vice-Chair and a Secretary. Peter explained that the Secretary will have no responsibility to take notes at or transcribe meeting minutes as that is done by an outside person for Board review. It would be the Secretary's job to review those minutes before the next meeting for accuracy and, in the event that neither the Chair or Vice Chair are available to run a meeting, the Secretary would step in for them.

Nomination for Chair: Karen nominated Ina Wilhelm and was seconded by Nathan. As Ina accepted the nomination and there were no others, a roll-call vote was taken: Karen, aye; Nate, aye; Kimmie, aye; Ina, aye and Ina was elected as Chair.

Nomination for Vice-Chair: Ina nominated Kimmie for Vice-Chair and was seconded by Karen. The nomination was accepted and a roll-call vote was taken: Karen, aye; Nate, aye; Kimmie, aye; Ina, aye and Kimmie was elected Vice-Chair.

Nomination for Secretary: Karen was nominated but asked to be given some time to be better acquainted with the duties of the position. Nomination for Secretary was put off to the next meeting.

Review and Approval of the Minutes of the October 11, 2022 Meeting: Ina proposed some changes to the minutes and asked about the \$10,000.00 mentioned. Beth explained where the money came from and how it was being spent. Beth then asked to have the phrase "personal design for learning" replaced by "universal design for learning" in the report she provided at that meeting.

Ina moved to approve the minutes as amended. Karen seconded the motion, which was carried by unanimous consent only Nathan Steele abstaining as he had not been present.

Correspondence: None

Public Comment: Kimmie raised the question of Circus Smirkus which Beth had spoken about at the last PTA meeting. The school could get a grant that would allow for a short (day or week) program in which the troupe would come to the school so that grades three and up could participate. If additional monies could be found from School Committee funds, it would provide a full week of the program. A discussion followed in which Beth noted that she has written a letter of support for the program but has not yet heard back. Peter noted that the school receives money from the Berkshire Taconic Foundation every year. Peter is on the Board of that body and will contact them.

Principal's Report: Beth noted that she has begun a Student Leadership Group composed of 6th, 7th and 8th graders. They call themselves the LED 23 (Lead Every Dragon) and have created a slogan: "Pave the path for who you want to be." LED23 believes that by creating a safe environment that respects everyone, regardless of their personal, social and cultural context, all students and staff will feel respected and welcome to our community. Their immediate focus will be on verbal bullying. They are in the process of creating a bulletin board, which will be a surprise. The group meets every week and has demonstrated good insight into things going on in the school that they want to tackle as a student leadership team.

Beth noted that the unfortunate uptick in COVID cases last month made it necessary to cancel the annual Veterans' Day and Thanksgiving meals, although grab & go meals for the veterans were provided, the students all made cards and the preschool painted posters. Beth expressed her gratitude to Tammy and her crew for getting all those meals together. She remarked that the COVID numbers have since gone back down so she will see what happens after the holiday traveling and gatherings.

Beth has gone through all of Phase II for the first sixty days and found that all of those plans have been met. The School Council, however, is getting a late start as no caregivers or community members wanted to participate. Now we have Mr. Leeco and some staff members who are interested, so that will start in January.

Beth reported that she did a full day of PD on November 8th and moved fully online for our teacher evaluation system. Teachers have been trained and have begun focusing on a Universal Design for Learning in our MTSS Framework. Beth is now involved in

three PD sessions with Ginny Tate and last month attended an update on Title 9, which is supposed to be coming out soon. Tomorrow, she will be in Easthampton all day attending her annual Legal Seminar. In December, Doug Wentworth, School Counselor, and Beth will attend her 504 update online. Dr. Dillon and Ina will join Beth tomorrow for the District and School Leadership part of Influence 100.

School Safety: We now have a liaison from the Lee Barracks of the State Police, Sharon Gluileault, who will meet with Beth next week about further training with staff on school safety. That leads into the new phone system: Current phones in classrooms and offices are quite old and inefficient. Richmond Telephone gave the school a quote for updating the phone system. Safety training with Fire and Police advised that classroom phones must be able to call out to 911. Copies of the proposal from Richmond Telephone are before the Committee and Beth expressed her hope that it would be approved.

Karen asked about maintenance of the new system. All of that is included at no extra charge with the possible exception of the need for replacement of instruments somewhere down the line. Peter noted that this expense can be covered with grant funds and agreed that it makes sense to do it and plans to move ahead.

Superintendent's Report: Bids have come in on the wood chips for the playground. These must be certified against splinters. One vendor will sell us the certified wood chips and another vendor will blow the chips onto the playground. Peter is hopeful that will all be done before Thanksgiving.

Peter reported on some documents he signed relating to a federal stream of funds called E Rate. This focuses on technology, phone systems, etc. and will generate some funds to do some more complex things with wiring, etc. He will advise the Committee when we receive those funds.

Budget Update: Peter explained the process that normally takes place for the next few months when the school will begin to lay out our ideas around what our "asks" are. There will be frequent check-ins with the School Committee and at some point Sharon, Beth, Ina and Peter will go to a series of Budget Advisory Committee meetings to look at the school budget in the context of what is happening in Town. The school usually presents a fairly lean budget and the Budget Advisory Cte. asks that we try to reduce the budget further. Those negotiations usually will end in an agreement between the two parties and the BAC will agree to recommend acceptance of the school's budget. That recommendation will be given at the Annual Town Meeting where the budget is voted on by the town and it is very important that the school have that recommendation.

Peter reported that during the budget planning last year, the BAC asked that the school consider doing some modeling for the coming three-to-four years. Sharon has started doing that. Our new contract with the union protects us from the possibility of raises for a while. Peter will ask Sharon to attend the next School Committee meeting and share her ideas with the group first, then do an early meeting with the BAC. Peter believes that the new Town Hall/Library will create some budget restrictions for the next year or so but after that there should be some greater flexibility. The big item for the budget this year will be repaving of the parking lot.

MASS State Law: The Governor usually shares the State's budget in January, but Peter believes that as she is a newly-elected Governor she will be given a little more breathing room, which means we do not know what kind of funding we will get from the State. There was a discussion of how the State determines how much each district receives.

Virtual School Vote: Peter reviewed the history of this issue for the new members of the Committee. It involves the cap on the number of students who may attend virtual schools at 1%, which is lower than the State's rate of 2% and which stands in the way of a Richmond family having all three of their children enrolled in the Virtual Charter School. Peter suggested that if the School Committee votes to extend the cap to 4% it would allow space for this family to enroll their third child in that school. Peter remarked that although financially it is not the best idea, from a humane and family-oriented perspective, it is a very good idea. Once the third child is enrolled, the Committee could vote to change the cap back to 1%, which solves the problem for the family and eventually solves the financial problem.

A discussion followed concerning how the virtual school assesses attendance, how much screen time is involved for students and how technical glitches are dealt with, which Ms. DiMario, the student's mother, explained to the Committee's satisfaction.

Ina moved to set the rate for the Virtual Academy at 4%. Kimmie seconded the motion which passed unanimously. Peter noted that he will see to the necessary paperwork with the State.

Special Education Director's Report: Mary Shook reported that Grants #240 and #262 have been awarded to the school and the money will be coming in soon as well as the Circuit Breaker funds. A letter from the State that Mary received yesterday confirms that the Richmond School District meets all the requirements for Special Education.

Child Studies - teachers are now more open to the system and they are holding meetings to discuss the students. It is working well for the teachers.

Due to the slow down in COVID cases lately, Mary has been able to visit the second, third and fourth grades occasionally, which she very much enjoys doing.

Karen asked Mary to provide a breakdown for her of the types of challenges the Richmond students face, which Mary will provide.

Discuss School Committee Responsibilities and the Role of the Chair: Ina shared that the School Committee hires and evaluates the Superintendent, sets policies in cooperation with the Superintendent, follows the Open Meeting laws, supports the Superintendent and the administrative leadership of the school, champions wise decision-making and fosters and maintains educational excellence.

The responsibility of the Chair is to set the agenda with the Superintendent's input and run an efficient meeting which means she is to be prepared, to be on time, to stick to the agenda, to maintain topic relevance, to set an inclusive collaborative tone for the meeting and encourage comments from all attendees, to champion an informed Richmond School Community that supports public education. There was a short discussion of some of the aspects of the Open Meeting Law relevant to social communication.

POLICY - Second Reading of Section H: Section Ha is about negotiations. It is very straightforward and Peter recommended adopting it as written.

Legal Status of negotiations: Mass. General Law covers the aspects of negotiations such as bargaining in good faith and bargaining with positive intentions. The negotiating agent for the School is typically the Superintendent and an attorney.

Ina moved to accept Policy Section Ha, Hb and Hf as written. Karen seconded the motion, which was adopted by unanimous vote.

Financial Report: Peter reported that the wording of the Budget needs some correction, specifically around Beth's salary. The Town will generate a report and that will be corrected for the next meeting of this Committee.

Peter noted that the intent is not to overspend any account this early in the year. Most accounts should be at 30% to 40% expended except for the text book line which is spent at the beginning of the year at one time. If a line is over-expended, monies will be moved around to make up the shortfall. School Committee legal expenses, for example,

has only \$6,100.00 left and some other lines are showing zero expenditures now, but will have expenses down the line. The Massachusetts School Committee Organization is a one-time cost paid at the beginning of the year. Any overage remaining will be available to be transferred to a line that is over budget.

Sign Warrants: It was suggested that sometime in the near future the Committee begin meeting in person so that warrants can be signed at the end of the meeting. At this time, the warrants are in Natalie's office and the Committee members were asked to stop by and sign them.

Unforeseen Issues: Kimmie noted that she is a Classroom Parent for the fourth grade and would like email addresses for the families to communicate with them directly. Beth will check on creating an agreement form for the families to sign.

Adjournment: There being no further issue before the Committee, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:19 PM. The motion was seconded and adopted by unanimous vote.

Minutes approved unanimously 12.13.2022