

**RICHMOND SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Tuesday February 14, 2023 - 6:00 PM - Via Zoom**

**PRESENT:** Ina Wilhelm, Chair; Tom Forstner; Kimmie Leeco; Karen Youdelman; Nathan Steele, Beth Choquette, Principal; Mary Shook, Special Education Director

**Review and Approval of the Minutes of the December 13, 2022 and the January 10, 2023 Meetings:** Several changes were made in the December 13th Minutes for clarification. One name change was made in the January 10th minutes. Ina moved that the Minutes of the December 13, 2022 and the January 10, 2023 meetings be approved as revised. She was seconded by Kimmie and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

**Correspondence:** Ina received a thank you card addressed to the School Committee and students in response to the Valentine cards received by their families.

**Public Comment:** None

**Principal's Report:** Beth reported on the Vision and Mission Statement: At the beginning of the School Improvement Plan, under RCS Vision and Mission, which were developed a long time ago, there was a mistake in the Vision. It stated that, "Our mission is to provide opportunities..." It should read, "Our Vision..."

In the fall the committee saw the areas that the School Improvement Plan would be focused on when Beth shared it with them after interviewing families, staff and students. They saw that the goals would be focused on relationships, multi-tiered systems of support and family and school engagement. Those goals had been shared with the Committee previously. Now, in the School Improvement Plan, you can see the improvement strategies and what evidence of success will be used for each of them.

One thing that might be new to the committee is that every year or two the School Improvement Plan is a little bit longer. That's because we're doing a lot of Professional Development around Universal Design for Learning, Restorative practices and Trauma Sensitive Teaching; all of which are difficult to train teachers in completely in a single year. Beth began in January instead of the beginning of the school year. Rating scales (Met, Partially Met, Did not Meet) are included because Beth's experience has been that a School Improvement Plan is created, it is presented and then nobody looks at it again. Then, in the next year or two, further additions are made without ever checking on the results achieved with the previous ones. It is important to Beth that the School Improvement Plan is something the school actually uses and that we look at all our goals to see how well we did at the end of each year in order to determine if a goal needs to be continued for the next year. Since that is all new to the Committee, Beth will provide an update at the midway point and at the end of the school year.

Nathan: Asked Beth if she created the Plan on her own or had she done school-wide interviews, etc. Beth responded that she had done school-wide interviews with students, families and staff.

Ina asked for the timespan of the Plan. Beth advised her that the current Plan will be viable from January 20, 2023 to June of 2025, although it will be “tweaked” along the way by deleting some items and including others.

When Beth first arrived at Richmond, she took ideas from the existing Plan and added some from Universal Design for Learning and Restorative Practices, which are now required practice under the new Suspension Laws and Trauma Training for teachers, all of which take time. Right now we are focused on Universal Design for Learning and making sure that all students have equal access to curriculum and to create a year-long Plan and set goals. That is way too much to accomplish in a short amount of time, so we will update as we go. Typically, Plans are intended to be effective for two years with a review after the first year to see if changes are needed. This Plan is intended to be in effect into June of 2025.

Tom Forstner questioned how success is to be defined for each part of the Plan? What are the measurables?

The boxes containing the rating scales that are included are what Beth will be expecting to see if the goals were met. For example: “Feeling of community and belonging within the school,” which is Goal 1. Beth holds celebrations on a regular basis and visits classes every day. In that way, she is able to determine if certain goals are being met. At the end of the year, she will create a survey for the staff that asks for their perception of how visible she has been in the classroom, watching teaching and learning.

Some more concrete issues would be if a new Reading Program was adopted, the School Committee would receive those results. Concrete data is available from student testing. Things for which data cannot easily be gathered are included in the survey, which makes it possible to get feedback from staff as to whether she is living up to expectations.

Tom asked how any gap that might occur between outcome and goals would be addressed. Beth said her focus on engagement and family is dictated from feedback gathered from staff and families about how much engagement was lost due to the COVID pandemic. Success in that area was indicated by how we are bringing people into the school community. Beth measures success in that area by the level of response and engagement of parents, students and teachers to events at the school. Beth cannot mandate teachers’ attendance at after-hours events, but she can and does certainly recommend attendance as a way to build family, student and staff engagement.

Academics and teaching skill is measured through teacher evaluations. Teachers know what the expectations are and teachers and Beth are both held accountable by the State through evaluations.

Speaking to the material used in increasing an all-inclusive culture at the school, Beth noted that some of the processes are aimed specifically at middle schoolers. They are engaged in conversations around bullying and Mr. Wentworth and the gym teacher do team-building exercises, which are very middle-school specific. There is a Second Step program which is aimed at very young children.

We are working on a multi-tiered system of support in Kindergarten through Eighth grade which includes high-quality instruction and an appropriate curriculum. There is a committee now looking at literacy. Next year they will focus on Math and work on Civics for Eighth grade.

Nathan asked if self-evaluation is part of the assessment system. Beth explained that it is part of the evaluation process for teachers and for herself. The Department of Education focuses on two areas of evaluation: student growth and the individual's own professional practice. Part of the self-assessment of student growth is to ask the teacher to assess the things that are challenging for your students this year and what are their strengths?

In terms of the teacher's own practice - they are asked, "where are your strengths and where could you use some growth to develop your goals for the year." This is not a school-wide process, but teachers will ask students how they believe they are doing - what was difficult, what was helpful.

Karen asked how Special Education fit in. Celebrating differences, geared especially toward Special Ed. It includes disability, race, all of it.

Foundation of Universal Design for Learning - when you have a robust multi-tiered system of support, you have fewer students going into Special Ed in the first place. The goal is that all students have access to grade-level content in class and that they have the support they need before being put into Special Ed. There is a process in place to assure that happens.

Ina asked how the monthly teacher and family communication was being addressed. Families are informed weekly by the teachers. They each have their own ways of communicating with families, which is fine with Beth so long as all the teachers are, in fact, communicating regularly. Mary noted that she has also asked the Special Ed teachers to be in regular contact with parents.

Teachers are now being trained in Foundations for Pre-K through third grade. This is a phonics-based program. The rest of the reading program is working toward some more consistency. If there is a learning program in place, it can be used as a base to which teachers can bring their own ideas. This would allow for greater teacher autonomy and, at the same time, create some consistency across the grades.

Ina congratulated Beth on the Plan as intelligent and thorough. She said our vision is to provide the opportunity for everyone to become a mindful, caring individual. Ina moved

that the School Improvement Plan be adopted by the Committee for the period January 23, 2023 through June 25, 2025. She was seconded and the Plan was adopted by unanimous consent.

Beth then turned to the subject of absences (excused, unexcused) in the current Handbook. Beth has requested meetings with parents of students who fall into the State's category of Excessive. She talked about changing the need for a doctor's note after any absence caused by illness to be required only for illnesses causing absences of more than three days.

Truancy replaces guidelines from the State from 7 to 8 days. Beth outlined the State's position on chronic absence. In response to a question about age-relevant attendance, Beth explained the process in place and noted that the Truancy section of the Handbook is just law. She wants to write a model attendance policy with Peter Dillon's help and will start with a change of wording in "Excused" "Unexcused. The intent is to have a draft of the new Attendance Policy ready for the next meeting.

**Paraprofessionals Contract Negotiations:** Beth presented the negotiated resolution for the time that was worked, but not compensated. They will be paid for all of the 5-minute overtimes unpaid in the past three years. The three paras who have been here the longest, will receive 6 additional days added to accrued time. Ina noted that the contract also talks about not extending holidays, just as it does in the teachers' contract.

Ina moved to approve having the school pay to said paraprofessionals the five unpaid minutes worked each day, going back to July of 2019, on the next pay cycle after the agreement is signed. She was seconded by Kimmiee and the motion passed by unanimous roll-call vote: Kimmie, aye; Karen, aye; Ina, aye; Tom, aye; Nathan, aye.

**Special Education Director's Report:** Mary Shook had a tiered focus meeting with parents last night at which two parents, Beth and Mr. Hammond, Superintendent of Special Ed and teachers attended. She explained the overview of the program and answered parents' questions. A video was shown explaining their rating in the tiered focus review and took questions from parents on that information. Surveys have been sent to parents and Rebecca, from Hancock, said one percent had returned a survey.

There will be a Circuit Breaker Audit this year. If any money is left after distribution, the expectation is that Richmond will receive \$2,889. The Circuit Breaker money for our student who is out of district would return 75% of those costs, which will go to the Town. Mary noted that the State has approved our application since December, so Mary will include that information in her report.

Ina noted that even with the progress made, the autistic student will still require one-on-one attention. Mary said that at this time she is monitoring that student's progress and hopes that this year that will no longer be required.

**POLICIES:** In Peter's absence, Beth went over the J Policy: The State has created a new policy around suspensions. Beth has just received an up-to-date version from the school's lawyer. The difference in the new policy is that the school cannot suspend unless it is able to prove that everything possible has been done to correct the behavior using Restorative Practices before you get to that point, with the exceptions of weapons, felonies, etc. Beth recommended using the wording provided by the lawyer.

Restraints: There is a new State Law that can be added as is. Beth will get this policy ready for inclusion in the Handbook, which must be completed by March 23, 2023.

Tom asked when new laws come out, do we interpret them or do we have to train staff to those standards. Beth replied that schools must have staff members trained in restraint as indicated in the new law in order to actually restrain a student. Whenever a new law comes into effect that changes the way things are done it will always require training.

Ina asked whether there has been any conversation about remote learning on Snow Days. Beth noted that there are many districts that have done away with snow days and have made them remote days. Our students are not taking computers home any longer. If we want to discuss that possibility, we would have to include the I.T. Specialist to determine if we are capable of doing so. It would also depend on the Union's willingness to take that on.

There being no further business before the Committee, Karen moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:28 PM. The motion was seconded and adopted by unanimous consent.

Submitted by Phyllis LeBeau