

RICHMOND SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday September 13, 2022 - 6:00 PM
Via Zoom

PRESENT: Peter Dillon, School Super.; Ina Wilhelm, Cte. Chair; Karen Youdelman; Beth Choquette, Principal; Mary Shook, Special Ed. Director

ABSENT: Kimmie Leeco, Cte. Member

Approval of the Minutes of the August 9, 2022 Meeting: Ina moved to approve the minutes with the correction of the spelling of Beth Choquette's name. She was seconded by Karen and the motion carried by unanimous consent.

Correspondence: None

Public Comment: Karen Youdelman, the newest member of the Committee, replacing Adeline Ellis who recently resigned, was introduced. She brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the position.

Superintendent's Report: Peter introduced Beth Choquette, the new Principal, who comes to the Berkshires after ten years in her position at Northampton. He turned the meeting over to Beth to speak about her plans for the upcoming year.

Beth reported that she has introduced herself to the faculty and staff of the school with her acknowledgement of what everyone went through in the past two years dealing with the COVID pandemic, and recognized the work Christina did and the importance of self-care.

On her first day, Beth shared with staff who she is as a leader: she is committed to educational excellence and to the belief that all students can be successful. She makes decisions through an "equity lens" and is committed to restorative practices rather than the use of shame and punishment. She intends to remove barriers and raise student achievement in a climate of belonging; to develop a robust MTSS framework of support that meets the academic, social and emotional needs of students through data-driven decision-making. She spoke to her reasons for returning to the Berkshires after ten years and presented her goals for Richmond School along with a complete ninety-day Entry Plan. (See attached).

Karen asked for direction as to the responsibilities of School Committee members and Peter advised that there are three areas of concern for them: Hire and Fire the Superintendent of Schools; Set Policy for the School and Approve the Annual Budget.

Because Richmond is such a small school, Committee members are welcome at other meetings, but it is expected that Beth would be given the courtesy of letting her know of an intent to attend. Beth agreed that she will welcome committee members whenever their interests coincide with what she is doing. Peter encouraged the committee to figure out ways to take advantage of Beth's extensive experience.

Budget: Peter noted that the school budget is tied to the values and achievements that the school hopes to meet during the year. Beth noted that the School Psychiatrist has started training to understand the process of supporting children who are struggling. Para educational evaluations are being worked on and the contract negotiation process has begun. There is a revised and updated Emergency Plan being worked on in cooperation with Trooper O'Neal who is working on the process of obtaining a new liaison person. Staff has been asking for "active shooter" training, and that is being looked at.

Open House Changes: In an attempt to find a way to make it equitable for all staff, Beth has instituted a "Dragon Tour." The students are given cards with all of the teachers' names - students are to visit all of the rooms to obtain the teachers' signatures on the card. The completed cards will then be placed on a big dragon head on the bulletin board. In that way teachers whose rooms are often overlooked are getting visitors for the first time.

Beth is looking at scheduling to be sure that the school is meeting State requirements for "time on learning" for middle schools. The school is currently missing one Special Ed teacher, and once that position is filled, things will need to be shifted around.

Beth has begun holding weekly PLC's and has implemented a safety template as part of the bullying policy. Lisa Callahan has been appointed head teacher/acting principal and coordinator for other programs the school had been unable to continue during COVID.

An Instructional Leadership Team has been created which will begin to meet monthly to focus on the system drivers of MTSS data and curriculum. Work is being done on a Benchmarking program in Math for K - 8th grade. Beth has begun her weekly newsletter and staff communication process. She is changing the structure of Faculty Meetings to focus on professional learning rather than dealing with "housekeeping" issues.

She has streamlined some trainings so that they can be done online and is working hard on a safer, more timely way for students to be picked up, which is going well.

Peter provided an update on the State Budget. The State has more money available than previously and everyone will be getting refunds or reductions on their taxes. This year it looks as though educational funding will be a priority. Every year the school lobbies the town for a significant investment and at the end of the year tries to return some of that money to the town. The amount returned this year was \$53,392, which will go into Free Cash and can be invested in other projects.

The Town Hall/Library project - A major connection to bring water from the school to the construction site was begun, It entailed cutting into the school's sidewalk by the front door, which has been resealed.

The school has applied for and received a grant around evaluation, part of a broader Professional Learning Community. Consultants will be brought in to work with staff on finances, curriculum, instruction assessment, values, ethics and standards.

Beth is a participant in another grant for aspiring Superintendents who really believe in diversity in the field of School Superintendent. That grant continues this year and involves a project focused on race, which in Northampton was difficult as that is a largely white community. Beth chose to focus on diversifying the workforce and that is hard to do when 80% of educators in Massachusetts are white, so she focused on Para-Professionals, who tend to include more people of color, looking at ways to create a pathway for licensure. That project could carry over into Richmond. It is important to Beth to be able to continue that work and to look forward to some sort of project completion by the end of this year.

- Superintendent's School Improvement Goals:**
1. Welcome and support the new Principal
 2. Analyze MCAS data and support growth in Math, Literacy, and Science and set clear data-informed outcomes.
 3. Expand Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and other responses to the impact of the Pandemic and measure outcomes quarterly.
 4. Conduct a School Climate Survey with students, parents, faculty and staff and target growth areas. State versions of that are available on Google.

Ina noted she will bring her goals for the School Committee and her goals as Chair of the School Committee to the next meeting.

Special Education Director: Mary Shook announced that she has been enjoying working with Beth. She is hoping to have a long term substitute for Special Education come on board shortly. That teacher was recommended by Lisa Callahan and Mary has

met and spoken with her. It is hoped she will start at Richmond on September 27th. This will entail readjusting schedules once again. Mary said she was really pleased with the work done by Jeff and Julia in picking up students that needed help.

Mary is hoping to hire a speech language pathologist for three days/week. She is following up leads but finds that most people don't want to work just three days a week.

She is working on IEP meetings. Vicky will be back on Friday to show staff how to analyze data and graph it and share it at meetings.

Ina asked about the scheduling of a substitute. Mary explained that there is one Special Education teacher out on medical leave - the sub replaces her.

Policies: Peter explained to Beth that, because Richmond had very few policies in place, the committee has been going over a Policy Book from the State, using it as a model and comparing it with those in place and making adjustments to them as appropriate.

Personnel: This policy is legally driven, but Peter thought the committee might want to be more consistent with Beth's work on diversity and inclusion and state a goal to hire staff more reflective of the students we serve.

Ga - Gdgb will be reviewed for the second time.

Ga: Personnel Policies and Goals: In number 3 - some wording was changed; in number 5 the words "faculty and staff capabilities" were added and in number 4 the word "genuine" was changed to "authentic."

Gba - No comments

Gbea - The formal requirement for training on Conflict of Interest - no change

Gbeb - Staff Conduct - Only will become important if someone begins to show bad habits. Includes restrictions on gifts and solicitations, drug and tobacco prohibitions and the authority to require a physical examination. Domestic Violence is aligned with State law.

Gbge - Employers of less than 50 people are not obligated to provide the leave stated. Other issues: political activity - cannot campaign within school grounds. Personnel records - seen as confidential in Mass and Richmond does not release them. Peter responded that the District Office is housed in the Nurse's Office and Peter has the formal responsibility but often delegates it.

Staff Grievances - The teachers' contract contains language concerning grievances. If the Principal makes an unpopular decision, it gets fielded to the Superintendent. If the Superintendent makes an unpopular decision, it gets fielded to the School Committee.

Gca - The School Committee creates positions and delegates hiring to the Superintendent. Salaries are largely done in negotiation with the two formal bargaining groups: Teachers and Paraprofessionals. Then there are the people with independent contracts; the nurse, the two secretaries, two and one-half custodians and the Superintendent sets those salaries.

Employment of the Principal - Done through the Superintendent as the School District Agent.

Discussion of extra pay for extra work; recruiting (largely done electronically now). Karen asked whether the school works with local universities on seeking to hire. Peter responded that they do and they also reach out to Schools of Education such as St. Rose and SUNY Albany. The good compensation Richmond offers and the good quality of life means people are eager to come here and they stay.

Professional Staff Hiring - Aligned with Best Practices and containing non-discriminatory language. The school has often used Search Committees and has had success with that.

Substitutes - Peter noted that the school attempts to compensate decently (\$125/day) and remarked that it is much harder to get substitute teachers now.

Staff Development - Peter said he would like to see a return to classroom visits now that the worst of the Pandemic is over so that teachers can observe different styles of teaching and learn from each other.

Ina asked about plans for teachers' meetings and Beth advised her that she will do TLC's every week.

Evaluations - Best Practices require that goals be set in the Fall, processes are observed and any changes are made. The State is changing their system to make it less cumbersome and Richmond will follow their lead.

Resignations - It is hoped that anyone resigning will remain on board for thirty days after submitting their resignation. There have been some exceptions.

Retirement - Usually takes place at the end of the year or on a birthday, which is tied to the retirement schedule.

Suspension and Dismissal - A thorough, thoughtful case must be made.

Tutoring - Teachers should not tutor their own students and tutoring for pay is not to be done in the school building, unless grant money is being used.

Support Staff - Their contract specifies how they are evaluated and discusses other details such as retirement.

Supervision and Dismissal of Support Staff

The second reading of Section G having been completed, Ina moved to adopt Section G of the Policies. She was seconded by Karen and the motion carried by unanimous consent.

Peter then advised the Committee that Sections A (Sexual Harrassment) and Ab, Ac (non-discrimination) had been vetted by the School's attorney who was fine with them as written. Ina moved to approve the School Wellness, Physical Activities and Nutrition Policies. Karen seconded the motion that passed by unanimous vote.

Financial Report: Peter explained that the budget is looked at periodically to determine how much has been paid out, how much remains and the percentage expended. As it is still early in the year, the expectation is that about 20% should have been spent. Some line items are at 100%, but those are one-time charges, which can be reconciled later in the year.

Principal Expenses - spent \$100 of \$110. Will move some money there from another line to balance.

Medical Insurance - Paid quarterly, so it's a relatively big number and percentage, but it makes sense.

Firm up School Choice with the October 1st enrollment report. These are the only funds that go to a Revolving Fund to be used for non-recurring expenses.

Ina asked about Choice Out students. Peter explained the complex system of Choice and Tuition Agreements with other local schools and the additional costs attached to Special Needs students.

Beth noted that there are warrants in her office needing to be signed and requested that the School Committee members stop by to sign them as well as the Paraprofessional contract.

There being no further business before the Committee, Ina moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:13 PM. The motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Submitted by Phyllis LeBeau