

RICHMOND SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday March 8, 2022 – 6:00 PM via Zoom

PRESENT: Peter Dillon, School Super.; Adeline Ellis; Ina Wilhelm; Kimmie Leeco; Dan Weston; Mary Shook; Melissa Dimassimo; Tom Forstner;

Peter opened the meeting with a roll call and then read the text of the Governor’s Executive Order concerning the changes to the Open Meeting Law in effect due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Public Comment: None

Review and Approve Minutes of the February 8, 2022 meeting: There were three corrections of the name of the person speaking from Ina to Adeline. Adeline moved that the minutes of the February 8, 2022 meeting of the Committee be approved as amended. She was seconded by Ina and the motion carried by unanimous roll-call vote: Adeline, aye; Ina, aye; Kimmie, aye.

Principal’s Report:

Mask Update – Dan reported on the response he is seeing to the ending of the masking mandate. There was a mix of masked and unmasked students and staff and acceptance by everyone for those choices. Weekly testing had no positive results and there were no reports of COVID cases from staff or families since the return from vacation. Weekly pool testing and in-home testing will continue.

Dan noted that there would be a remote concert from the Berkshire Music School, “All That Jazz!” for grades 3-5. Next week the PTA, in connection with the Mahaiwe Theatre, will present an in-person concert for grades 5-8.

Audubon will be working with students again and there is a possibility that the school will get back to gardening and other similar opportunities.

Superintendent’s Report:

Mask Update: Dan had shared information on the masking situation, which Peter will be watching carefully. If things continue to improve, restrictions can be further reduced. If the numbers go back up that might mean a return to mandated masking.

Adeline asked for the number of students seen as choosing to mask. Dan estimated it was about 25%. Staff masking was somewhere around 20%

Budget: Peter noted that he began by researching all the needs of the school and then attempting to create a balance with the increasing tax load on the residents. Peter was able to report that the school has been reclassified by EverSource so the cost per kw hour is going down and will be recalculated retroactively.

The Richmond School is a Department of the Town of Richmond, so the School Committee has autonomy to approve a budget today. The proposed budget is then shared with the Budget Advisory Committee, which is made up of the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen.

Peter will then bring it back to the School Cte. with any changes and a public hearing for feedback from the Town will take place. Finally, the budget will be placed on a warrant for the Annual Town Meeting for residents to vote on.

Some preliminary comments: Special Education Expenses. The expenses for an out-of-district placement last year will not be in this year's budget as the family has moved away, reducing the SPED expenses.

Vote on School Choice: When Richmond accepts a student from another town, that town sends us \$5,000. Per student

At the Budget Advisory Committee Meeting, Sharon will talk to minimum local contributions and the school might get some more money from the State.

The following are the line items in the budget that Peter discussed as concerning because the percentage and dollar amounts both go up: Peter shared his spreadsheet showing a total increase of 3.53%.

School Cte. Legal Expenses in fy'21 was \$9,000 (actual was \$8,700) in fy'22 was \$9,000 and the proposed amount for fy'23 will be \$9,000 – a change of 0%.

Line #8 School Committee Expenses – in fy'21 was \$3,500 (actual 0) in fy'22 was \$3,500 and the proposed amount for fy'23 was \$7,500 an increase of \$4,900. The additional amount was to allow the Committee to attend the MASC conference.

Line #9 School Committee Accounts – fy'21 amount was \$14,330 (actual was \$10,826.10), fy'22 was \$14,330 and fy23 proposed amount was \$18,330 an increase of \$4,000

Professional Services & Fees – Total amount of \$60,000 is divided among Peter (\$18,000), Sharon (\$15,000) and Steve (\$5,000) and the remainder goes to the Berkshire Hills District and a 3% increase to all contractual increases.

Line #18 Massachusetts Assn. of Superintendents – an increase of \$750 or 60%.

There was a discussion of possible raises for individual employees not included in collective bargaining.

Pupil Supplies – Special Ed – an increase from \$18,000 to \$20,00 an increase of less than \$5,000

Teaching Salaries: Cultural Enrichment - \$12,500 - \$20,000 a 60% increase to overcome a reduction in last year's budget.

Software – no increase. Professional Development – reduction in Support Staff Professional Development for a total decrease of \$2,500.

Technology Services – there is grant money available, but you don't want to underfund.

Nurses Salary and Supplies – Looking at an increase that is very greatly deserved. That increase and other individual employees' increases are being held in Contingency.

There was a discussion of the rate of increase that Peter said will be known before the Committee votes on the budget. By leaving the numbers in Contingency the school is not held to a specific number, which is helpful in the bargaining process. During the meeting with the Budget Advisory Cte., it will be easier to pull money out of Contingency rather than eliminating a position.

Transportation – expectation is that there will be a 7% increase to \$14,752 but a significant decrease in SPED transportation costs should result in a total decrease of \$25,000 or 9%.

In response to a question about a potential increase in transportation because of the rising fuel prices, Peter noted he will go back to the contract to see how the escalation clause reads.

Tuition Agreements – Some districts' fees are going up some are going down. Peter is hoping to be able to predict ongoing expenses.

Adeline noted that Monument Mtn. may have a summer school and that Richmond students will be eligible to join. Peter reported on some grants for summer school - One for 1,200 Berkshire Hills students and 155 Richmond kids.

Operations:

Custodian	}	A total increase of \$35,396.00 or 13%
Electricity		
Utilities		
Maintenance		

Peter noted that the heating system continues to need work and, combined with the need this past school year to leave windows open in cold weather to assure the staff and students' safety in relation to COVID, heating expenses increased.

Propane increased by 71% to \$2,300

Medical Insurance through MIIA shows 0% increase

Choice fees and Grants will decrease expenses and offset the total budget.

Professional Services and Fees – Physical Therapy Fee, a second printer for the middle school, technical services moved back to Brain Spiral, which afforded a savings.

Custodians – Will increase the custodial staff by one full-time night position for a total of 2 and ½ FTE.

Principal's Survey: Peter introduced the State Long Form Version that he plans to use for Dan to get feedback from staff this year so that it can provide information that is actionable. Peter will review the short form vs the long form for the future and adjust accordingly. He plans to rotate yearly between surveys on the Principal and the Superintendent.

Adeline said she is not a fan of very lengthy surveys and, since Dan's door is always open to staff for any discussion, she wondered if the short form would not be just as effective. She was reminded that there is a percentage of the staff who do not function on a face-to-face basis.

School Choice Vote – School Choice is good for the school in several ways, including financially. Peter moved that the Richmond Consolidated School participate in School Choice for the 2022-2023 school year. Available seats will be determined by the Principal and the Superintendent and they will share regular updates on class sizes with the School Committee. Adeline seconded the motion, which was carried by roll-call vote: Ina, aye; Adeline, aye; Kimmie, aye.

Discussion: Should the School Cte. expand to five members? With five members they could form sub-committees and be able to speak to each other more freely without fear of ignoring the Open Meeting Laws. A potential problem, however, is the possible inability to fill the additional seats. If the decision to expand is voted in, that vote goes to the Board of Selectmen for a change in the bylaw and then to a Special Town Meeting. Ina and Peter will research with Danielle to determine what the next steps are and bring that back to the next meeting of the committee.

Policy – First Reading Section E: Peter suggested that this item be tabled to the next meeting in consideration of the length of this meeting.

Financial Report: Peter said there was nothing problematical to report. He went over a few particulars.

Special Education Director's Report: Mary Shook reported on the Summer Expansion Grant and noted that she will be attending a Circuit Breaker Overview Webinar later in the day.

On the subject of professional development, Mary reported that there was a SPED Staff Workshop held last week, on March 23rd, she will be meeting with the Parent Advisory Cte. and has invited a speaker to talk on dysgraphia and dyslexia.

There being no further business before the Committee, Adeline moved that the meeting be adjourned. She was seconded by Ina and the motion was passed by unanimous vote.

Submitted by Phyllis LeBeau