

RICHMOND SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday February 8, 2022, 6:00 PM – Hybrid Meeting

Present: Peter Dillon, Superintendent; Dan Weston, Principal; Ina Wilhelm, Adeline Ellis, Chair; Kimmie Leeco, Mary Shook, Special Education Dir.; Rachel Katz, Teacher;

Adeline opened the meeting with a reading of the Governor’s Directive extending the use of Zoom meetings as compliant with the Open Meeting Law until April 1, 2022.

Review and Approval of the Minutes of January 11, 2022: Several minor corrections were made for the sake of clarity. Adeline moved to approve the Minutes of the January 11, 2022 meeting as amended. The motion was seconded and adopted by universal approval.

PRINCIPAL’S REPORT:

Principal’s Goals: Dan sent a written copy of his goals to the committee members, advising that according to the schedule that is being transitioned to, this Improvement Plan will be in effect from now to May or June.

There are three main goals: 1. Professional Practices. Revise and fully utilize response intervention. The outcome with the response intervention process will be to reduce the number of referrals to Special Education and ensure that when referrals are made that they will have good documentation to show why that request is being made.

2. Student Performance. The goal is to increase achievement in early literacy. Tasks: Make screening tools and tools for monitoring progress specific and institute ongoing training in early literacy. Reassign staff to provide greater support in early intervention.

3. Cultural: To develop and maintain open communication involving all school staff in daily operations and academic planning. Communication is to go both ways to best utilize the human capital of the school.

Question: How many children enter Kindergarten already reading. The discussion included an explanation by Dan of how the school will support pre-reading skills in Kindergarten, which he considers more important.

Question: What will be the measurables for Dan’s goals? For early literacy, grade screening will be done to see what progress is being made. In fact, excellent progress in all grades has been seen from September to January.

Dan will look into whether RTI is being used before students are referred to Special Ed. and that proper documentation is present when referrals are made.

4. Cultural: The same School Improvement Plan, but items that were discussed at a meeting were added. Health and Safety guidelines will continue to be followed to provide a safe and supportive environment for students and staff.

Things continue to change as the State adapts its COVID protocol each time the number of cases changes. For example, the addition of the test-at-home program and communication changes to families and staff to promote the proper use of the new protocols. Test-at-Home and weekly pool tests provides two opportunities to identify cases earlier and avoid additional exposures.

Adeline noted that she would like to see more programs such as the one the Physical Education teacher is involved in with the children at recess, which she feels are far more effective. It is anticipated that the coach teaching and activity-based program will be expanded. The students will also be asked for input to see if they see the same effect.

For the next School Improvement Plan, Dan will start talking about mathematics and about focusing on refining math practices.

Dan asked Rachel Katz to speak to the Valentines project she is doing. Rachel reported that the students are creating 324 valentine greetings to go to committee volunteers and the entire mailing list of the Council on Aging. The entire school, Pre-K to Grade 8 has been involved in this project.

SUPERINTENDENTS REPORT:

COVID-19 Update: Peter reported that the good work is continuing with very low positive test results being found. The new rapid at home testing has proven to be very effective.

County-wide the numbers are decreasing. A 82% infection rate is better than 100% and the number of cases per 100,000 have come down.

Budget Update: Peter has been working with Dan, Natalie and Amy on producing the budget for next year. They are looking at current positions, costs and expected cost increases in such areas as busing, transportation, insurance and utilities. The school is currently engaged in on-going negotiations with the teachers and will be negotiating with the Paras on their contracts after that. Monies will need to be held for contingencies. There are also a couple of high level items: The obligation for the SPED tuition will end at the end of this school year and the district is expected to receive more money this year from the State than previously, which puts the school in a very good position going into the budgeting process.

The next couple of meetings will include an explanation of the draft budget and feedback from the Committee. A public hearing will take place and then meetings with the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee.

A discussion of the management of Special Education funds and School Committee expenses followed.

Peter noted that his goals align with Commissioner Riley's as follows:

Recovery and Reimagination: Under Recovery, surviving and getting out of the Pandemic. Under Reimagination, Moving the work forward.

Recovery

1. An emergency meeting will be held at the tail end of the Pandemic.
2. Plan to support the District community transitioning and recovering from the Pandemic
3. Address food insecurity by partnering with other organizations.
4. Enrollment: Social / Emotional needs. Student engagement, Student and staff well-being.

Evidence for these goals will include meals and food served, participation, enrollment trends, anecdotes, letters and an ongoing survey. Peter noted that Richmond has done a much better job of being transparent than some other districts.

Professional Practice – Reimagining

1. Support the implementation of the School Improvement Plan with a focus on accelerating wellbeing. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Expanding and improving communication throughout via surveys, Professional Development Plans, Participants' Survey Informative and Summative Internal and external Assessments.
2. Classroom visits with an emphasis on supporting new teachers. There is a three-year window in which new teachers should get feedback from both the principal and the superintendent. Assessments should be ongoing as well as end-of-year. Don't just look at test scores.

Professional Practice

1. Support for Dan along with his mentor to build structures to support teachers, staff, students and families.
2. It is important for Dan's success to check in with him frequently.

Evidence: Feedback on surveys from staff, students, families and follow-up conversations. The reason that both Dan and Peter are writing goals is so that Dan can get feedback and be evaluated in context with his goals from Peter and the Committee can give Peter feedback and evaluate him in the context of his goals.

Resource Allocation: This will be done in partnership with Sharon, Amy and Natalie. The goal is to manage resources to support the work and ever-evolving needs and support the needs connected to COVID-19 restructuring and grants. The school has been receiving more grants than ever, which need to be managed and spent on important things. Successful implementation will result in shifts in practice and potentially expanded grant revenue. Peter noted that he is in the process of writing grants in partnership with Berkshire Hills, Farmington

River and Richmond and working on a county-wide grant which will enable Berkshire Hills to create a summer school program with seats for Richmond students who wish to apply. He is most interested in grants that take the least investment for the greatest impact.

There was a further discussion of the use of COVID-19 funding and Dan offered the fact that the amount of money was modest, and it is being used for technology and mental health practitioners. The Title I grant was used for a tutor and for transportation for after-school hours, which will allow for better use of the tutor.

Survey Models: Peter described the various types of surveys available. He noted that the state-sponsored survey long form for principals would be used for Dan this year and the school would then adopt a process of alternating years in which either he or Dan would be the subject of the survey.

There was further discussion of the survey in which Kimmie suggested that it be made fully anonymous in order to ensure greater depth of responses. Peter thought it would be useful, however, to know if a survey was being answered by a family member, a student or staff. Kimmie said staff should be given surveys that require no identification of the responder. That will be more helpful in allowing Dan to know how staff are responding to his leadership.

Adeline asked about the culture at the school where she thought staff knew they could approach Dan with feedback and engage with him face-to-face comfortably. It was pointed out that, although that is the intent of the culture that has been developed, not everybody operates on a face-to-face basis or is comfortable with direct engagement. A survey helps those that are more comfortable with that model.

Peter will send the Committee a draft of the survey he plans to use and ask for their input.

Special Education Director's Report: Mary Shook reported that on March 3rd, Vickie will be doing Professional Development for the Special Ed staff. She will explain the testing and how it works, as well as discussing I.Q.s and how to interpret the data.

Mary's Goals: Increase and ensure the efficient use of Special Ed staff and request a copy of every special ed schedule each trimester to be sure all needs are being met. She noted that that program is working well.

In an effort to reduce extensive meeting times at IEP meetings, she will send a form to each of the specialists, one week prior so that decisions can be made as to what they want to contribute, particularly in the case of three-year or initial evaluations.

She is working with Amy and Sharon Harrison on her budget to be sure that questions for next year are being answered so that she will know what she must do.

She is also working with Dan to create a schedule for next year for all students and staff to be sure the special ed students are all set and ready to go.

A Summer Extension Grant was applied for last year and Mary has been successful in obtaining it. She will apply again this year.

Dan asked Mary to mention the excellent review the State shared with her via email as a result of an audit. The school is meeting all requirements and no findings were made against it at all. The State looked at the school's performance against a rubric and provided feedback which can be used to continue to improve. Mary and Dan should be very proud.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

Policy – Second Reading of Section D – Fiscal Management: Peter noted that there were no substantive changes and asked if the Committee had any questions. Ina asked about funding proposals and applications, quoting, "all grants and gifts shall be reviewed by the School Committee before expenditure." Peter said the committee should look at possible grants and decide if they are worth pursuing. If someone is writing a grant the Committee should be informed and if the grant proposal is successful, the Committee should be asked to vote to accept it. When individual generous community members donate checks, they should be brought to the Committee. In short, they will need to adjust practice to comply with the language.

There being no further discussion, Kimmie moved to approve Section D – Fiscal Management. Ina seconded the motion, which carried with a universal vote.

Financial Report: Peter noted that Sharon and Amy have been working on the budget. Ina asked about the Maintenance of Building line item that showed only \$10,000.00 remaining. She asked if other monies would be reallocated there and Peter assured her that would happen.

Unforeseen Items: None

At this point, Adeline moved that the Committee go into Executive Session for discussions concerning negotiations with Unit A and not return to public session. Ina seconded the motion, which passed with a unanimous roll-call vote: Adeline, aye, Ina, aye, Kimmie aye.

Submitted by Phyllis LeBeau