

RICHMOND SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday January 11, 2022 – Hybrid Meeting

PRESENT: Peter Dillon, Superintendent; Dan Weston, Principal; Kimmie Adeline Ellis; Ina Wilhelm, Chair; Mary Shook, Spec. Ed. Dir.;

Adeline opened the meeting at 6:00 PM by referencing the Executive Order from the Mass. Governor that redefined the Open Meeting Laws during the COVID-19 Pandemic to allow meeting virtually.

Public Comment – None

Review and Approve Minutes of December 14, 2021: The only correction being a single typo, Ina moved that the minutes be approved as corrected. The motion was seconded by Adeline and adopted by unanimous vote.

Principal's Report:

School Improvement Plan: Dan noted that the cycle for creating the plan needs to be changed. Currently, the plan is delivered in January and followed until May. In the new cycle, the plan will be created in May for approval in June. This will provide time for summer professional development and the writing of goals for the coming year.

A three-year plan was suggested with fine-tuning in year 3 and 4. Dan liked that plan and will seriously consider making that change.

Under “good news’ Dan announced that the para-professional position has been filled by Lisa Schwartz and the new permanent substitute position has been filled by Courtney Norgard.

Dan then submitted his School Improvement Plan goals:

1. Early Literacy
2. Social and Emotional Development
3. Identify pandemic-related learning losses

The idea is to fill the gaps and capitalize on strengths.

Dan expanded on the Plan: Parts 1 and 3 involve collecting data and getting better at finding solutions for logistics using the tools discussed at the last meeting. Using data to identify students who need assistance and specifically what assistance is needed. Some materials for use in that process have been purchased through the ESSER 2 grant.

For Goals 1 and 2 consider adding professional development in the form of various levels of training for staff.

Dan has contacted the Wilson Language people to obtain professional development for the Early Childhood team and has set aside money to pay for that service. People need to be properly trained in the use of a program they are to implement.

It was suggested that, instead of adding a fourth goal, add physical and mental safety for students and staff, given the ongoing presence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dan thought that was a good idea.

There was a discussion of whether the role parents might play in goal #1 might be added formally. It was decided that Peter would look into having the parent-teacher conferences take place over a longer period of time so that each session could be more than the current 15 minutes and allow teachers to fully inform parents of how they could help with specific areas their children are struggling with. Dan noted that there is a requirement in the Title I Grant that parents must be involved in literacy teaching.

PE teachers' time has been increased for supervision and guidance and the CARES program has been adjusted to make social/emotional learning for grades 6-7-8 more hands on and less prescriptive. This is showing good results.

Goal #3 – Return to the use of data to guide and improve teaching practices. Look at the impact of the Pandemic in terms of weaknesses and strengths and build upon successes. This Friday, at Professional Development Day, Dan will look at the data to guide future practices.

Peter said that he and Dan will refine the Plan and bring it back to the committee at the next meeting for a vote. A draft will be sent to the School Committee for their input. Their comments could help with the next version.

Superintendent's Report

COVID-19 Update: Peter reported that the growth of new cases has been explosive: the weekly case rate has reached 1,600 per 100,000. The goal was to remain at or below 60 per 100,000. The rate of growth, which is not being widely reported, is somewhere in the range of 15% to 20%.

Peter acknowledged the staff and particularly Christina and Natalie as doing tremendous work in getting the pool test results, which are available Friday afternoon, and running everyone down to confirm with rapid tests before the end of the school day. Going into the weekend with that information reduces the possible spread of the diseases.

The Commissioner has extended the mask mandate for four weeks, through February 28th as he had done every four weeks recently. The school has a supply of the more effective KN95 masks and expects to receive more from the State along with rapid tests. He has noted that teachers and students are beginning to wear the KN95 instead of fabric masks.

In response to a question as to what would cause the school to close, Peter cited all of the bus drivers contracting the disease, the whole school or a whole class being infected, so many staff members out sick school could not continue or a large percentage of the student body.

Budget Process: Peter noted that the Town is experiencing some financial pressures this year which means that the school must be more conservative in their budget planning. At the next meeting of the School Cte., he will set an outline for next year's budget and establish a public hearing date to explain the system to those who have not previously done a budget. He noted that some items will inevitably increase as they do each year, but a careful look should be taken at new items. There will be lots of Federal Grant money available so placeholders can be created that could eventually be filled with money from that source.

Special Education Director's Report: Mary Shook reported that the IEP meetings are going well and expressed her pleasure at the return of the staff. She said she has been asked to join the MCAS Assessment Development Cte. for the Grade 4 ELA MCAS. Mary was congratulated on being asked to work on this prestigious State-wide committee.

Policy – Second Reading of Section C, First Reading of Section D:

Section C covers General School Administration. Goals in Section C. Peter noted that his goals are tied to the School Improvement Plan. He will send a draft of those goals to the Committee for discussion at the next meeting.

There was a discussion of the process for writing Superintendent's Goals and teacher's Smart Goals. A three-year Improvement Plan allows teachers to write better yearly goals.

Ca – School Administration – Role of Administration vs. role of School Cte. - No comments

Cb – The second part needs to be removed as the school writes its Annual Report as part of the Town's Annual Report.

Cb – Superintendent's Contract. Unusually, this school contracts with the Berkshire Hills School District for the Superintendent's services.

Ccb – Chain of Command and Appeals Processes. – No discussion

Ce – Temporary Ad Hoc Committees – Peter only uses these very occasionally.

Cb1 – Policy Implementation – Committee sets policy, Superintendent implements. The Principal does Practices. Practices or Procedures are sent to the School Committee if they are high stakes.

Chc – Dissemination of Procedures – the School Handbook or as memos to parents.

Handbooks and Directives are brought to the Committee before they are sent to parents and teachers. As the Policy Book becomes available online, some people may access it that way, but

it is expected that most will use the handbook. While there is a policy on weapons and assault(s) regarding suspensions, these are important items are also covered in the Handbook.

Chd - In the absence of the Administrator and the lack of a clear policy, do what makes sense using State law, common practice, etc.

Cm – Annual Report – A Regional Annual Report would be more exhaustive than a local district annual report. The local district is a department of the town. The Regional District is an independent entity that shares information with its member towns.

There is an annotated list of links with an explanatory paragraph for each link: Enrollment; Attendance; Achievement; Special Education Progress. Others not reported by the State include Art, Music and Drama and the percentage of participation in each of those categories. Richmond also includes several partnerships it enjoys with community arts organizations and where students choose to go to High School.

SECTION D – FISCAL MANAGEMENT: There is an obligation to plan what is good for the students and what will impact their education. Or, in other words, academic return on investment. Peter remarked that Sharon has been remarkable in predicting outcomes.

Budget Process Overview: Peter noted that the school’s annual budget reflects the values of the school and indicates that what we say we are doing is what we actually are doing: Small classes, Art and Music education and valuing our teachers – our salaries are among the highest in the area.

When asked what the per-pupil cost is, Peter responded that it runs from the low to the mid 20’s. The school uses resources very well and is lean in administration, which balances the increased costs of maintaining small class sizes.

Budget Deadline and Schedule: The Town asks for the School Budget in March. Advice and support from the Finance Committee and members of the Select Board means that the budget submitted to them comes with a reasonable anticipation of their acceptance.

There was further discussion of the scheduling of budget meetings, some details that will impact the budget next year, specifics about how money can be moved around, etc. Grants and Gifts above a certain amount are subject to approval by the School Committee.

Federal funds to the Richmond School District may be used only for additional expenses, not for core expenses.

Some additional details: authorized signatures: Dan signs payroll. People who deal with money for the school are covered by a blanket bond. Audits are done occasionally and have historically been fine.

Purchasing - The Chief Procurement Officer, Sharon and Amy follow complex State laws concerning the bidding process and dollar thresholds.

Dge – Procurement – Bids have been required for hiring the bus company, during the extensive heating system repair and for the playground.

Payment procedures: warrants and receipts are double-checked for accuracy. Expense reimbursement refers to the Federal mileage rate for the use of a personal vehicle in the fulfillment of the person's duties.

A second reading of both Sections C and D will be done at the next meeting of the committee.

Financial Report: Peter reported that Sharon and Amy had made some changes but that some further cleanup is needed. He remarked that although December weather was warmer than normal, the forecast from now on is for increasingly colder weather, which will create higher heating bills.

Unforeseen Items: Ina noted that the members of the Mass. Assn. for School Committee members have been taking heat across the country. Everyone is experiencing frustration and she just wanted to say that we need to continue to be civil in our responses to each other. Peter agreed and said that the behavior of the leadership of the school is a model for its students.

Submitted by Phyllis LeBeau