

RICHMOND SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday June 7, 2022 - 6:00 PM - via Zoom

PRESENT: Peter Dillon, School Superintendent; Dan Weston, Principal; Ina Wilhelm; Adeline Ellis; Kimmie Leeco; Brenda Catarette, Student Grandparent; Erin Roney; Lisa Callahan; Kristina Lenfort; Molly Gillon; Emily Condry, Student Parent

Reorganization of Committee: Adelina chose to step down as Chair and nominated Ina Wilhelm for the position. Ina accepted the nomination, which was adopted by unanimous roll-call vote; Adeline, aye; Kimmie, aye; Ina, aye;

There was a discussion of the advantages of adding two seats to the School Committee. A motion was passed at the Town Meeting to change the bylaw to reflect a change in membership for the School Committee from 3 to 5. That will go to the Attorney General and, in a few months, with their approval, attempts will be made to fill two additional seats on the Committee.

Adeline will be leaving the School Committee at the end of this meeting. Peter thanked her for her service and noted that, with her departure, an immediate vacancy was created which can be filled by appointment of the School Committee and the Select Board. Adeline volunteered to remain in her position until that is accomplished.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Brenda Catarette came before the Committee to advise them of a serious situation concerning her grandson, Colby who was a Pre-K student. On May 16, 2022, his mother was called by the teacher to talk about an event in the classroom. When Colby's mother picked him up from school, she was advised that Colby had been punished for his words.

Ms. Catarette described in detail how he had been punished for five hours with isolation, segregation and humiliation in front of his classmates. Ms. Catarette noted that all three professionals in the classroom at that time allowed this to go on for five hours; a discipline that in her opinion should not have lasted more than five minutes.

Colby's parents met with the principal, who had no idea that this emotional and psychological abuse had taken place. Mr. Weston, the Principal and Peter Dillon, the Superintendent, both advised her that there was little they could do as the teachers are protected by their union. [Peter objected to that interpretation of his response].

In Ms. Catarette's opinion, the Richmond School Code of Conduct, as well as the Massachusetts School Disciplinary regulations were violated. Those guidelines state that no student will be subjected to abuse or neglect, cruel or unusual or corporal punishment, including the following practices: Punishment that includes verbal abuse, ridicule or humiliation. Ms. Catarette stated that those violations occurred but nothing was documented in the teachers' records. She further noted that she has learned that this was not the first time staff had made formal complaints about the unsafe environment occurring in the Pre-K classroom. She said that her concerns were addressed with the school's leadership and nothing was done. Employees had asked to be reassigned from that classroom, but nothing was documented.

Ms. Catorette reiterated that for five hours, her grandson was subjected to reminders of what a bad boy he is; that's not nurturing, that's not teaching, that's not instilling confidence and pride; that's emotional and psychological abuse. She called on Dan Weston, as a leader, to face these issues and deal with them without undue concern for the conflict it may create.

Ms. Cadorette was told she would be contacted after an investigation was done and two weeks later she has had no word, leaving the family feeling insignificant in the eyes of the school. She is not sure if Colby would attend Kindergarten at Richmond, but she was sure that change had to happen.

Adeline assured Ms. Catorette that the issue would be seriously discussed and considered. Ina thanked her for the manner in which she presented her concerns and asked if she would submit them in writing. Ms. Cadorette offered to do so.

Principal's Report: Dan reported a refocus for the school on security and safety. He will be working with the Mass. State Police and the Richmond Fire Department to create safety drills for incidents of violence, extreme weather conditions and fire safety. The latest round of school violence incidents makes it urgent to review and tighten security measures.

Adeline asked about capital repairs to the building and Peter noted they are expanding the capacity of camera surveillance with more units and better placement and with mylar shades on windows on the street level to avoid being able to see into the classroom from outside, although you can see out from inside.

Molly Gillan asked for the approximate response time for the police. She was told it depends on the reason for the call. A burglar alarm going off will not engender the same

immediacy as a call concerning someone's safety on campus. Along with the State Police, adjoining towns will also respond to emergency situations.

School Improvement Plan: Dan suggested that they work on the Plan now so that staff will know in advance what will be coming up in the next school year. Four goals have been developed with the input of parents and faculty: Increase family, school and community communication; define mathematical and curriculum practices; support students emotional and psychological wellbeing; continue to increase student achievement in early literacy skills.

Suggestions to implement those goals were discussed in detail including the following: reinstitute Room Parents and create a leadership role for that group; and Monthly newsletters to parents, A lengthy discussion ensued concerning increasing the number or length of parent/teacher meetings if a reasonable way could be found to accomplish that.

Professional Development Plans: Dan reported that time had been taken to determine what was needed to focus on and math was the most often repeated response from the faculty. Teachers should be collaborating across grade levels to review students' progress and ensure that the math program is in alignment with State standards. There is a consensus among the staff that there is a need for an improvement in practice. A suggestion was made that a common professional development strategy be created for teachers from Pre-K to eighth grade so that they all have similar experiences. Dan is working with the Hampshire Professional Collaboration on Professional Development. Peter noted that math curricula and how it is taught is always expanding and changing. Currently there are two impartial organizations reviewing texts on a countrywide basis.

Support Social Emotional needs of students. Practices that were used before the Pandemic that were helping students should be reinstated. Dan wants to provide Professional Development on Trauma Informed Classrooms to help students who have experienced trauma of any kind. A skilled professional would be invited to the school twice a year to work with the staff. In addition, Peter noted that many non-profit organizations in the County offer training on mental health first aid, which could complement the in-school training.

Dan said he is working to identify development of a social/emotional approach to learning. First they must identify the needs, then find the support that meets those needs and train staff in them and then implement. He wants to move forward with this plan very deliberately to insure it is successful.

Students' achievement in early literacy skills. The work started with assessment, screening and support will continue as it is important to keep that goal.

There was a discussion of the new Trauma-Informed Classroom program. Question; what will be done during the year it will take to determine the needs to be addressed. The answer is that while the research is going on, the existing program will be utilized.

Emily Condry asked how the school will support a child who has suffered trauma at the hands of a teacher and does not want to return to school. Ina suggested that Emily meet with the teachers, adjustment counselors and Dan and talk it through. Adeline referred her to the School Psychologist.

Peter asked for a motion to accept the School Improvement Plan with the suggestions included at this meeting. Ina said she would prefer to vote after those changes have been made as it would be too vague to do so now. Peter asked if they delay the vote, could Dan still use the proposed Plan as a strong guide and Dan responded that the issues raised at this meeting were not addressed in this Plan. Peter then suggested meeting again in a week or two and the Committee was in favor of that idea as they want to be sure that what is included in the School Improvement Plan is workable and implementable. Members of the Committee will contact Dan for meeting date and time and were invited to meet with him individually as well.

Superintendent's Report: Peter reported that the Food Services program is part of a Nutrition Review and it is moving in a good direction.

COVID-19 Update - The recent surge in numbers is slowing. The number of cases has lowered and continues to drop. The vaccine for children under the age of 5 is on the verge of being approved for use in pediatrician offices.

A shift at the State level - Next year the State will no longer support weekly pool testing. Instead, they will supply rapid tests for the children's use at home and for symptomatic children in the classroom. The way COVID is presenting now it will not be worth spending the school's resources in constant testing.

Special Education Director's Report: Peter noted that in Mary's absence, there would be no report at this meeting.

Peter reported on the vote for the Teacher's Contract, noting that negotiations with the union have gone well and the teachers have voted to support the contract. He highlighted some of the issues: Choices between two longevity options has increased

the cost slightly; the Salary Schedule will go up slightly next year. The goal was to have the Richmond teachers in the top quarter of compensated teachers, which is important for recruitment and retention. Language around vacations going into long weekends and holidays to extend the time has been changed.

Adeline noted that binding arbitration has been eliminated in favor of mediation, which is fairer and more beneficial to both parties.

Peter also noted that the budget process has begun. Monies have been held in Contingency Funds to be moved about as needed. That process has been completed and should be wrapped up quickly with the ParaProfessionals.

Ina moved to approve the contract as presented. She was seconded by Adeline and the motion passed by unanimous vote: Ina, aye; Adeline, aye; Kimmie, aye.

Review of Policies: Second reading of F (Facilities):

Fa - If anything needs to be done with the school building in the future Richmond will partner with the Massachusetts School Building Authority, but there is nothing now that will require that collaboration. The heating system continues to be upgraded and repairs continue to be made to the insulation in the roof.

Ina asked about a long-term maintenance plan. Peter advised that one exists internally, but is on the back burner for the time being since COVID. Peter noted that the School hopes to have interaction with the new Town Hall/Library building project. It is hoped that the school's parking lot repair can be piggybacked on work for that building.

Retirement of Facilities - Not applicable to Richmond at this time. It might be in the future.

Ffa Naming New Facilities - Schools sometimes become memorials. Donations should create scholarships, not the naming of portions of the building.

Ina moved to accept the policies in Section F as written. She was seconded by Adeline and the motion was adopted by unanimous roll-call vote: Ina, aye; Adeline, aye; Kimmie, aye.

First Reading of Wellness policies on Physical Therapy and Nutrition. Dan said that a lengthy update on the Nutrition Audit needs to be added and that the policy does not address some things such as not marketing food brands in the school. In response to

Ina's question about coverage of religious, ethnic, cultural and allergy issues, she was advised that there is a separate Allergy Policy in place.

There was a discussion of the seemingly overwhelming increase in responsibilities for everyone on the staff for a school as small as Richmond. Peter pointed out that it is necessary to include all of them in the Plan or it will be rejected. Natalie added that the State does not see Richmond as a small entity, but as one that must follow all State laws. The State is comfortable with the policy we had and the additions made to it. In reality, it sounds like more additional work than people are already doing than it actually is.

Financial Report: Peter noted that the Committee will see a negative balance in several lines because of the time of year it is. Nothing huge or concerning and all will be balanced by the end of the year and all obligations will be met. Money will be moved around as needed and there will likely be some money to return to the Town, which puts the School in a favorable position for next year.

Kimmie asked about the salaries of non-union employees. Peter admitted that he is behind on that issue but beginning to work on it now. Those salaries are typically consistent with raises in other groups. If it is found that there is a huge difference between Richmond's levels and other towns' comparable positions, adjustments would be made.

There being no further business for the public meeting, a motion was made to go into Executive Session, invite Dan and Peter to join the School Committee and not to return to the public meeting. The motion was adopted by unanimous roll-call vote: Adeline, aye; Ina, aye; Kimmie, aye.

Submitted by Phyllis LeBeau