

**River Valley Charter School  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Meeting # 264  
March 24, 2020 5:00 pm**

In accordance with the Executive Order applying to MA Open Meeting Law, this meeting will be held virtually on Zoom <https://zoom.us/j/309379100> at 5:00 p.m.

Meeting was called to order at 5:05

*In attendance:*

Pam Armstrong  
Mark Belanger  
Mark Bishop  
Nancy Durkee  
Ali Fields  
Amber Hewett  
Alfred Link  
Catherine Martin  
Jennifer McCormack  
Karina Moltz  
Erin Seaton

Jonnie Lyn Evans

Absent: Nina Keery

**Members of the public:** Dan Bouchard, Deb McCrevan

**RVCS Revelation:** no RVCS Revelation this month

**Public Comment:** none

**Vote: motion to approve February minutes when corrections are made**

**Amendments to minutes from last month: CHANGES**

Recent explosion – state address of where the explosion happened

Dr. Fayre, not Fair

Mark Belanger not Mark Bishop made the last two statements

Record votes of both approval of minutes and adjournment

*Motion:* Mark Belanger

2nd: Pam

*Vote*

Yes: everyone in attendance

No:

Abstain

**Director's Report (see report) highlights:**

- Reviewed dredging (see report)
- Aftercare: since the start of the year, JLE and Dan have been working on the aftercare program. Goal is to reduce the burden on school personnel in relation to the afterschool program. Billing, collection, awareness of medical issues/allergies, all require a great deal of time and work.
- Dan researched aftercare options at other schools. Parents were very upset. Three components – changed the fee structure to make it more straightforward, One fee structure for before care, another for aftercare. Tried to get people to register for what their needs would be in a given week. Very hard to staff when you don't know what the enrollment will be.
- Compared to other programs, RVCS's afterschool was somewhat more affordable, and significantly more flexible. Other programs require that parents commit to set days, and don't change that no matter what. Parents were very upset at the thought of losing flexibility. RVCS changed fee structure but left flexibility in place.
- Current afterschool program demands a lot of time and attention from multiple RVCS teachers and staff.
- Other options:
  - let the YWCA run the program. Very strict rules around this program, space:child ratio, etc.
  - Second option - ? Leave program as is?
  - Bus kids to Salisbury to the Boys & Girls Club, let the program be run from there
- JLE sent out a survey recently and found that flexibility was the most important factor for families. Looking for feedback from Board about program.
- Jen: how many students are attending aftercare?
- Dan: on any given day, anywhere from 15-30 kids. Varies, but average is probably between 20-25 kids until about 4:30/4:45
- Jen: would changes be made to before care also?
- JLE: before care would remain the same
- Ali: seems reasonable to say that changes are going to be made, this is how other schools do it, and families will have to make other plans for afternoons. With that said, what happens if a kid is not picked up?
- JLE: if someone is not registered, and are not picked up, they will typically be kept in Dan or JLE's office so that they are not in after school without medical info, etc being shared.
- Dan: on any given day, we don't know who's coming to aftercare.

- JLE: has made it a requirement for there to be two teachers there at all times, even if there's only one child.
- Mark Belanger: what is the trigger point to go from 2-3 teachers?
- Dan: depends on age of students, etc. They typically start with 3 teachers per day just to make sure that ratio is appropriate.
- Mark Belanger: could we do a soft exploration, and see if there are other providers interested? Seems like there should be a more effective way to do the bookkeeping. Worth taking a closer look at systems to see if we can make it work.
- Debbi: most QuickBook entries are very automated. Bulk of time is spent collecting money from parents who do not pay. Some families owe upward of \$500. Tried to put systems in place, like barring some families from using services.
- Mark Belanger: is there a correlation with free/reduced lunch and lack of payment for afterschool? Without naming names can we look at that?
- JLE: not a correlation. It's a collection issue.
- Amber: why has it not worked to have it be a system of booking in advance?
- Debbi: this is more of a Dan question. I don't know why Dan's effort in the fall didn't work.
- Amber: so compelling that what is provided could be so much better. Programs, field trips, etc.
- Debbi: parents mostly appreciate the cost and are very stringent about asking to pay more.
- KM: as a parents, appreciates the afterschool program as a resource, also knows that it can't continue as it is.
- JLE: Problems with using the YWCA: gym would be totally blocked off from other people using it. Cap would be 30 if they couldn't use the gym. Cap would be 18 if they did not use the gym. Cost is \$35/kid/day
- Nancy: Increasing the price of after-care and moving it offsite would be hard on families.
- Jen: could we keep our afterschool program and also have access to the Boys & Girls Club?
- Dan: timing doesn't quite work to connect with kids coming from other schools to the Boys & Girls club. 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders can go to NYS via a bus after school. Could kids go to Salisbury after school on a bus? Definitely possible.
- JLE: parents aren't going to want a change. Everyone really appreciates the flexibility, and there are so many last minute calls for after school.
- Alfred: could we offer both? Those people who are looking for after school programming/cost efficiency can go with Boys & Girls club, and others can go with a higher priced, space-limited backup afterschool program can go with the program at RVCS. How many families are not paying for the current program – are we turning things upside down for just a few families?
- Debbi: people are grateful that we have the drop-in feature, families with smaller bills tend to pay more quickly, families with multiple kids and many days of attendance typically wind up not paying.
- Alfred: having a system of several options is okay. It's like finding an oil well in the backyard – it's awesome, but has run out, and another plan needs to be made. People will adjust to what is available.

- Catherine – at her school, there are several options. The first ends at 4:30, playing outside, etc, and from 4:30 on it's more like downtime. Staffing is based on ratios, so families have to pay in advance and commit in advance. If someone needs care last minute, they have to pay a higher fee, and they may be told there is not a space available. Parents have to pay an immediate fee to parents who arrive past 5:30, when the program ends. Likes the idea of having two options.
- Amber: a lot of what Cathy said makes sense and sounds reasonable. The last minute calls that Jonnie Lyn described are compelling, and show that families are using tis system in a way that could be shifted. Online booking should be investigated.
- Dan: we tried pre-registering and pre-paying, but there was a lot of pushback and families registering before paying bc they weren't certain of their plans. Drop-in fee was \$5 per week, not per day, and still families pushed back a lot.
- Pam: this is a decision for management, with board support. There is natural resistance when people's lives are going to be changed by an impact, and families have to learn how the current system is impacting the school. Any change that is made has to be rooted in why the change is needed or being made. Question is what is reasonable and what is not. Parent response will be difficult, we can all start thinking about how we're going to introduce the changes that we're making.
- Mark Belanger: if anyone is interested, Dan/Jonnie Lyn could check in and talk further – look at pricing, consider different options. If you really want to pass on responsibility for this, a soft exploration would be useful. Secondary use of the building would need to be run by the Foundation. If there is a group that wants to take this on and run it, that's good.

### **School Closure:**

- staff have been amazing, very willing to help and to collaborate to connect with kids
- community meeting (virtual) last week had approximately 80 families in attendance. A good turnout. Recording got glitchy.
- First mandate was to maintain connection and engagement with children.
- We are anticipating that we will likely be closed at least through the end of April. It will likely go on longer than that. Concerns about equity have meant that schools have been holding off on instruction so that groups of students are not being left behind.
- RVCS rolled out connection/enrichment, and now the teachers are feeling like they want to be more connected.
- Kinderhaus groups have come together and made websites for each class. MS teachers are using google classroom, working in advisory groups, trying to deliver a scaled down curriculum. E2 is modeled somewhat after MS, but offering more choice. Just getting google classroom up and running across the classrooms. These teachers are very skilled, but their skillset does not lie in distance learning. E2 has been really good at collaborating. E1 has just set up Zoom meetings, and will be collaborating. Specialists met today, trying to figure out how to all get on the same page and deliver the services needed.
- 80-90% certainty that RVCS won't be participating in MCAS. Federal government has already granted a waiver, but the state would also need to grant a waiver. Commissioner of Education is asking for utmost flexibility in deciding who takes the MCAS.

- Nancy: On March 2nd during our Accountability meeting we discussed whether planning for the continuity of teaching and learning was being considered, in the event of school closure. Since that time, our school has closed and we are in summer vacation mode with optional work, as noted in the community meeting last week. What are the plans to move forward with the continuity of teaching and learning for this next phase of the school year while the building is closed?
- JLE: it's a school based decision. We are right now building the system that will let us deliver instruction. Using "making it count" doesn't really work, because if a child doesn't do any of the required work, they will still matriculate.
- Nancy: are we planning to teach remotely?
- Karina: the confusion about communication can't come at Jonnie Lyn – the communication from the Commissioner has been really unclear.
- Nancy: I'm not trying to blame Jonnie Lyn. I know there is a need for flexibility.
- Erin: works with the federal and state government and agrees that the communication has been very confusing. Students who don't have English as a first language, who have special needs, etc
- Mark Belanger: you're being aggressive to Jonnie Lyn right now. Your tone is aggressive and we need to move back into support mode.
- Nancy: feels attacked, and doesn't appreciate the comment.
- Pam: stopped conversation, reminds everyone that it's an incredibly difficult time. We have a robust board, several other people want to speak. Jonnie Lyn has been doing a lot of listening over the past two weeks. Pam wants to reassure Nancy that Jonnie Lyn has been listening, and wants to give other people a chance to speak. Time to lend support to each other – our threads are very thin right now,
- Ali: agrees that we should have a time when we decide that now we're moving into this other mode. We've been providing this "menu" and asking students to do work, but at some point we need to move into a zone where we know when we're coming back. As Erin said, the plan has to be flexible. This week. E2 is using this week and next week to put into place what the plan is going to look like. A menu will remain, but families will know what they have to do. Outdoor activities, classroom tasks, different activities for different levels will be provided. If families want to pursue different paths, they can. Ali thinks that families should communicate with school about if they are using the structured plan or the unstructured plan.
- Amber: supports everything that Ali just said. As a non-teacher, and non-parent, is hesitant to speak on the issue. Some teachers have 4 kids at home, some parents are going to work in health care every day. There is no "normal" in a pandemic. Nothing is going to be received by anyone in the same exact way. We are lucky to have a director of the school who is not home with young kids, and is available to help the school community. We are heading into a harder time than we've been in, and people are going to start getting sick. This is a very emotionally intense and draining time, and we have to be very flexible and get through it.
- JLE: acknowledging that we are working really hard. There are lots of things that we weren't ready for, no matter how far in advance we could have helped. Example: when kids see their teachers and hear their teacher's voices, it's powerful. But who is supporting the staff, and what is the system if a student says that a teacher did something

inappropriate? Trying to balance needs of students and teachers. What if people start getting sick – are we going to test each student who comes into the school to see if they have temperatures? What about students with special needs? DESE keeps saying that guidance is coming. RVCS is trying to build a system without having the guidance in place. JLE is connected to a bunch of list serves that are working on what the plan will be and how it will work.

- Erin: in support of JLE's comments, we also have to discuss the needs of students and how they are feeling. Those connections with school can't be minimized. Social-emotional support is paramount right now – parents are stressed, students are very stressed.
- Pam: is there any other support that you need right now?
- JLE: once the shelter-in-place advisory went into effect, a decision had to be made about allowing teachers to go into the building. There are many class pets, etc that need to be taken care of. Some teachers also want to go into school to make photocopies, get materials in place, etc. Some staff members are in high risk categories. Dan has put systems into place so that people are in the building at different times, and using precautions (like gloves, hand sanitizer) when using shared resources like the photocopier. Kimberley, Katie, Jen, many people are working actively remotely. Most staff have children at home, and they are trying to manage their home responsibilities along with their work responsibility
- At the last meeting, Mark Belanger asked about prep for a COVID-19 outbreak. JLE wouldn't have really been able to do anything differently in advance – messages are changing so often.
- Erin: is there a plan in place in case any senior staff get sick or are incapacitated?
- JLE: we are sharing laterally a great deal. If a teaching team member gets sick, teachers are ready to take over for each other. From an administrative side it gets harder. Jonnie Lyn has asked Debbi for passwords to accounts, etc – information needs to be documented and records should be kept so that plans are in place.
- Mark Belanger: as people are starting to use available public spaces for child care, bed triage, etc, do you know if schools are a possible location for that kind of care?
- JLE: not privy, and not aware. Kimberley monitors the dept of public health and JLE has been in touch with the Mayor's Office. Kimberley could be called to serve in the city as a whole – then her role at RVCS would have to be covered somehow. If anyone were to come to ask to use RVCS as a physical resource, we would likely say yes, but Debbi would need to be accommodated. She maintains payroll, has insurance info, etc, and it's critical that those systems continue.
- Debbi: is working from home most of the time.
- Mark Belanger: if people are exposed and then have resistance/immunity and are willing to provide childcare/support after they are recovered, are we willing to approve secondary use of the school? Do we approve the use of the staff who are willing and able to jump in to support the community?
- JLE: foundation should be consulted on these questions.
- Pam: the Foundation meeting was cancelled and has not yet been rescheduled.
- Amber: our attention needs to be on how we can help in the coming days/weeks.
- Debbi: DESE will give guidance about all of this also

- Nancy: If we repurpose the building to be used for Covid-19 support as Mark suggested, we need to be aware that the pandemic might not be over in the fall. We should consider the possibility that school will not begin in the fall as planned due to Covid 19.
- and it would be proactive to plan for remote learning in case the school building needs to be closed in the fall at some point.
- Pam: this question (of building space) needs to go to the Foundation.
- Mark Belanger: Jonnie Lyn should know that she has her support. Given our cash position, can we pay out the staff in a lump sum? Can we pay staff out in advance, so that Debbi doesn't have to keep working on payroll, etc?
- Debbi: this will depend on DESE. On a webinar almost every day. Has to be a wait and see. For now, we are paying everyone and that shouldn't have to change.
- JLE: do we have flexibility to do that?
- Debbi: there may be rules about this.
- Alfred: this could be set up as a cash advance. Thinks that advancing salary to the staff would be great.
- Mark Bishop: would this proposal be salary until June?
- Mark Belanger: we could provide calendar quarter 2 paid out in one lump sum.
- JLE: the maximum would be til June.
- Mark Belanger: banks are closing every day. There may be a clogging up of financial systems. Since we have the cash and the authority, might be a good idea to do.

**Motion (Mark Belanger):** to authorize the administration to pay out teacher and staff salaries through the end of the school year immediately, pending any DESE regulation that may impact this decision.

#### **Discussion:**

- Debbi: many implications, including health insurance, would be very complicated.
- Mark Bishop: appreciates the intent of the motion, thinks we need to think through some different scenarios before we make that kind of decision. So much uncertainty right now.
- Pam: Finance committee doesn't meet again for the next few weeks. Would it be reasonable for Finance to look at this before the next BoT meetings?
- JLE: have other organizations been doing something similar?
- Mark Belanger: No, but we have the luxury to be able to do this. He anticipates problems with the banks. Risk of Deb being a single point of payment.
- Mark Bishop: is the primary concern the access to funds through banks? We are trying to keep a continuity and keeping payments aligned with tuition payments from the state is the wisest approach. What is the goal?
- Mark Belanger we need a backup for Deb. If something were to happen to Deb, nobody else right now holds the payroll information.
- JLE: this is a weakness that we should have thought of before. Discussions have happened about Deb someday retiring, but we did not know to prepare for this moment.
- Debbi: payroll is pretty automated. Jonnie Lyn can call the payroll company if something happened to Deb.

- Alfred: less concerns about something happening to Deb, mainly thinks that it would be a reassuring approach to staff to have the payment in advance and not have to scrape by.
- Mark Bishop: appreciates the intent, feels like we need to think through options. If someone gets paid out through the school year, and then decides to take another job, what do we do? Can we focus on plans to support Deb? We could communicate with staff about the solvency of the school and assure them that they will continue to be paid.
- Mark Bishop appreciates Mark Belanger bringing this question up. If there are deeper concerns or questions of which we might not be aware,
- Amber: if staff members rely on second jobs like childcare or service industry, and are having trouble paying rent, etc, that is a conversation that had to be had.
- JLE: at least one staff member has approached JLE about wanting to be sure that her salary will remain the same – if not, she needed to apply for unemployment. JLE reassured her that her job was secure, and staff member was very grateful.
- Nancy: do we have flexibility to pay a bonus to all staff members?
- Erin: do you know if there are families that need assistance? Can RVCS reach out to families?
- JLE: we have communicated around needs for food, for technology access, etc. There are families who have close relationships with teachers/staff members who may have needs but haven't communicated it to the school yet. RVCS has done a first sweep of trying to arrange support, but not a deeper exploration.
- Dan has reached out directly to families who have needs of which he is aware, and has sent out a bulletin about available resources. He will send out a more broad message to the community to see if anyone needs more support.

### **Decision was made to not have vote**

Pam: meeting has lasted for 2 hours. Is there anything that Jonnie Lyn or Committee Chairs need to pose or ask? Proposes that we meet again before our next scheduled meeting.

- Debbi: information about the audit should be shared now, so that board members are aware before the audit is contracted.
- Mark Bishop: we got a bid, and Foundation has to be involved as well.
- Pam: would it work for us to review this at an emergency BOT meeting in two weeks?
- Debbi: that would be fine.
- Mark Bishop: letter of engagement has not been made public yet, but will be ready for the next meeting that we have in two weeks.

Jonnie Lyn: is working on calendar for 2020-2021 school year. Is going to propose that the start date is August 31<sup>st</sup>, Monday before Labor Day. Please consider before the next BOT meeting.

Date for next BOT meeting is TBD.

Jonnie Lyn: if by some chance we go back to school on April 7<sup>th</sup>, we would have a few days of school and then April vacation. Jonnie Lyn proposes that we cancel April break if we go back at that time.

**Vote: motion to authorize the administration to cancel April break should we be in school at that time.**

Made by: **Mark Belanger**

2nd: **Mark Bishop**

**Vote:**

Yes: all in attendance

No:

Abstain

Pam thanks everyone for making the time and being present and engaged. Pam talks with Jonnie Lyn on a very frequent basis, and the EC has been looped in as well. If Board members have particular concerns, please reach out to Pam, Amber, or other EC members.

**Committee reports postponed to next meeting**

**Vote: Motion to adjourn:**

Made by: Ali Fields

2nd: Mark Bishop

*Vote:*

Yes: all in attendance

No:

Abstain: