

**River Valley Charter School
Board of Trustees Meeting
Meeting # 288
October 18, 2022 7:00 pm**

Meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm.

In attendance:

Pam Armstrong
Erin Bradley
Nancy Durkee
Denise Herrera
Amber Hewitt
Lainie Ives
Ken Jackman
Nina Keery
Alfred Link
Catherine Martin
Tanya Murdy
Erin Seaton, arrived at 8:10
Eric Simone
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore
Jonnie Lyn Evans, Director

Absent:

Tim Letson
Chris Whitford

Public:

Lucinda Cathcart
Beth MacQuade
Ann Marks
Elizabeth Rankin
Megan Taffel

Comments from Pam Armstrong, Vice Chair:

Thanks to the board for their generosity and space as she needed time to be with family.
Gratitude to the Vice Chair and Secretary for keeping Pam in the loop and easing her return to the board.

Public Comment:

None.

RVCS Revelation:

Ali Fields gave an overview on her class' Ipswich River Canoe Trip which is an approximately 15 year tradition for her class. The class paddles to and spends the night on Perkins Island. Kids learn to set up the tents independently beforehand. The class also discusses safety by talking about risk assessment using a form and provided hypothetical situations. The class learns about the three body systems and what happens when things go wrong with them. The sixth graders do the food planning and shopping. Before setting off for the island, students learn and practice canoeing. Sixth graders prepare the meals at camp. After the trip, the class debriefs with a set of questions including new things they've done and what went well and didn't. This outing teaches lessons in community building, teamwork, independence, skill acquisition, practical life, time in nature and the 8 cs.

Vote: To approve minutes from the September Board of Trustees meeting with edits as presented at this meeting and submitted September committee meeting minutes.

Motion: Anna Wetmore
2nd: Erin Bradley

Yes:

Erin Bradley
Nancy Durkee
Denise Herrera
Lainie Ives
Ken Jackman
Nina Keery
Alfred Link
Catherine Martin
Tanya Murdy
Eric Simone
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore

No:

None

Abstain:

Pam Armstrong
Amber Hewitt

Absent:

Tim Letson
Erin Seaton (arr. 8:10 pm)
Chris Whitford

Director's Report: Jonnie Lyn Evans presented report

The Director's Report appears in the packet. Time was allowed for questions and comments.

Additional things:

Lunch numbers: DHerrera asks if there is a difference between numbers depending on providers. JLEvans says it is difficult to find a provider. DHererra asks about offering breakfast. JLEvans reports that RVCS isn't eligible. We don't have many free lunch children and the requirements don't make it possible for us to participate. This provider seems to have many more kids participating. We don't make any money, but get billed for kids who are struggling to pay for their meals. Denise wonders what the qualifications are for providers. JLEvans will circle back to the healthier options that were promised by the current provider. DHerrera offers to help with recipe design, etc.

Kristin's E2 room update: Still looking for a replacement assistant teacher for that classroom. EBradley, asks if coried parents can apply to be a sub. JLEvans, They can. EBradley, Perhaps it's a good idea to reach out to parents with this information.

DHerrera asks about the bookkeeper plan. JLEvans, several people are working to be sure that there is a smooth transition to outsourcing financial services. HR has been outsourced. The process and work is still huge. Denise: timeline? JLEvans: Deb McCrevan and Jonnie Lyn Evans meet weekly with HR Knowledge.

TMurdy asks for an update on the traffic situation. JLE, it was surprising the way that the city of Newburyport dropped it on RVCS. They came forward with three proposals:

- Take part of the playground away and have the driveway come in earlier on Low St.
- Police detail on our budget (that would come with significant cost).
- Take people off the corner to try not to block the corner to allow for better sight.

No left turn onto Perry was not entertained. Trying to noodle out some more options.

DBouchard - Things are looking a bit better with RVCS allowing people to circle the building earlier.

PArmstrong - The city acts as if this has been in the works for ages. It has not been; it has been a surprise. RVCS thought it had been resolved last year. How can we work with all of these offices to find a solution that is safe for the kids and works for the school?

JLEvans - DPW also brought up installing a traffic light which would be very expensive. Sidewalk running down Perry Way.

PArmstrong suggests a focus or support group that is not just Trustees.

Director's Goals

KJackman - Will metrics be added after the vote? Pam - We have discussed this in committee and the Executive Committee has discussed it. In the interest of moving forward, we'll vote.
KJackman - This feels like a hollow vote if there are no measurables.

CMartin - Mentions the rubric used in the current Director Evaluation as a measurable.

JLEvans - Created a running update (progress report) that could be a living document in the board folder.

KJackman gave examples of measurements that could be used. Goals are good, but there's no way to keep track of results without measurables..

ATing related these goals to the Montessori method. That a narrative is an appropriate way to evaluate something within the Montessori philosophy. There is a value to the meandering and exploring.

TECH ISSUES - Trying to fix the audio for the remote participants.

DHerrera - When was the last director's review? EBradley - August 2021. PArmstrong - The board is responsible for delivering it. DHerrera - How much of that would you use to set goals? JLEvans - Likely, a lot. DHerrera - things that get measured get done. We need to be responsible to the school. Could we add metrics to be approved at the next board meeting? JLEvans - would be willing to receive thoughts on Metrics to be used.

ESimone - agrees with a staged approach for this. The goals also need to be measurable goals. Metrics to just have metrics isn't useful.

ALink - Without the metrics, you can't evaluate the goal. Cautions against the board setting the metrics. Suggests they should be developed by administration. Some will be qualitative, some will be less so.

NKeery - Director needs her review in order to make her goals. What is holding that up?

ATing - At the end of this meeting, we can schedule the meeting to deliver the review. Data was available as of July 2022.

PArmstrong - suggests that we vote on the goals as they are and then get the metrics later. We can't keep holding this up.

NDurkee - can there be a living document that we can all refer to so we are all on the same page?

Vote: To approve the Director's Goals as presented in the packet.

Motion: Pam Armstrong
2nd: Erin Seaton

Yes:

Pam Armstrong
Erin Bradley
Nancy Durkee
Denise Herrera
Amber Hewitt
Lainie Ives
Nina Keery
Catherine Martin
Erin Seaton
Eric Simone
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore

No:

Ken Jackman
Alfred Link
Tanya Murdy

Abstain:

None

Absent:

Tim Letson
Chris Whitford

Finance Committee

PArmstrong delivered the report. Audit meeting was held last Thursday night. The audit was clean and smooth. Gratitude goes to Deb for 20 years of clean, clear, smooth audits for 20 years. Her knowledge is relied on for this process.

Vote: To Accept Audited Financial Report for Year ending June 30, 2022: We the Board of Trustees of River Valley Charter School vote to accept the representations of management and the expression of the opinions by Alexander, Aronson, Finning & Co., P.C. as embodied in the combined general purpose financial statements, supplementary schedules, and independent auditor's reports for the year ended June 30, 2022. We also certify that the representations made by management and the disclosures in the combined general purpose financial statements are accurate and have been correctly and completely disclosed as required by accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Charter School Audit Guide for the year ending June 30, 2022.

Motion: Pam Armstrong
2nd: Denise Herrera

Yes:

Pam Armstrong
Erin Bradley
Nancy Durkee
Denise Herrera
Amber Hewitt
Lainie Ives
Ken Jackman
Nina Keery
Alfred Link
Catherine Martin
Tanya Murdy
Erin Seaton
Eric Simone
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore

No:

None

Abstain:

None

Absent:

Tim Letson
Chris Whitford

Accountability Committee

ALink: The MCAS is inherit in our status as a public school. It is important to keep in mind that the MCAS is only one arrow in a quiver of assessments for students here. Used at a much more granular level by the staff.

JLEvans gave a multilayer breakdown of the RVCS results. Questions can be referred to the Accountability Committee or JLEvans.

JLEvans - If you run the numbers, kids in school 1170 hours, 8 hours are MCAS testing. It is only one small piece of the puzzle. The teachers know their students in a way that typical public schools don't. The teachers spent many hours analyzing the scores.

ALink - We had some learning loss, but it was not bad, if we're looking at how things went over the pandemic. Not as scary as when you look at the sending districts and the state. It all seems to come together in 7th and 8th grade. There are few questions where kids fall short and that is dealt with internally.

JLEvans - Can look at individual students and watch their growth. For the record, she doesn't

like putting this district analysis out there and doesn't want to say that RVCS is better than district schools. All schools have their specialities.

NDurkee - LKelley and JLEvans went into how they go into making plans for many of the students who aren't meeting or exceeding MCAS expectations. Teachers use screeners to see if they correlate with MCAS scores.

ERankin (public) - Thank you for the work the board has done.

Committee on Trustees

Goal 1: Team building among the board membership. Bringing together 2-3 trustees in groups to chat after meetings to get to know each other in the hopes that it will facilitate more thoughtful discussions. Groups and ideas of how to start conversations will be coming soon.

Goal 2: How we might add a student trustee? This is being mentioned just to put the idea in the back of Trustees' minds. Reach out to CoT with concerns. We feel it meshes really nicely with the ethos of the Montessori environment. We do understand that there will need to be support for the student.

The committee discussed qualitative versus quantitative feedback to the director in evaluations.

Development Committee

Offers gratitude to Ann Marks and Elizabeth Rankin.

Invitations went out for the Message in a Bottle event. The recycled bottles were prepped ahead of time for each teacher with a personalized note to each teacher. Teachers are also invited to the event. Already receiving rsvps and the focus will not be on presentations. There is no cost and a capacity of about 150.

ESeaton appreciates that there is no barrier by cost.

Fundraiser is one week later.

PArmstrong expresses appreciation for work to reinvigorate the school community.

Complaint Committee

PArmstong - An Open Meeting Law Complaint was filed with the board chair using the MA Attorney General process. Because we are a charter school, it became an official complaint to the board even though it was not filed anywhere else. Lauren Hajjar has rescinded that complaint. Her complaints have been heard. ATing, KJackman and AWetmore met with her. She indicated in the meeting that she would rescind the complaint. The concerns of a parent stand. The board does acknowledge that we can communicate better and we will be reviewing our processes and expectations of Trustees.

EBradley - The Grievance Committee is an ad hoc what forms when needed. She appreciates families that have come forward. The committee had a Zoom call for member introductions and to clarify the role of the committee. Two members of the grievance committee will be sitting down with Ann Marks. The second complaint hasn't been addressed yet.

DHerrera - Encourages transparency. How do we bridge the gap between the board and the parent community?

PArmstrong - Previous directors have never shared their report with the parent body. This loops back to differentiate between governance and administration.

KJackman - A valuable learning loop. If we talk to parents, it vastly improves outcomes.

JLEvans - Has been looking into virtual suggestion boxes.

ATing - We need to recognize that we are a governance board. Most questions will go to administration. It falls on the Trustees to understand governance.

EBradley - Why do you share your director's report? JLEvans sees it as a way to be accountable.

NDurkee - The content could be jarring as there is so much going on behind what is in the report. Should there be a different report sent to parents?

Public Comment:

Lucinda Cathcart - I have been at the school since the day it opened and has had three children attend. She has volunteered for hundreds of hours. I am here every day because she feels supported and affirmed. And this is mostly due to Jonnie Lyn.

We are expected to teach our children to use grace and courtesy and it feels like during the pandemic, we have lost some of that. The impact of Covid has been huge and the pressure that has been put on the staff is insane.

I came from a high-powered trainer background and transitioned to education. It was a little hard to get used to the Montessori method, but our children are lucky to be here. The social-emotional health of students is huge and RVCS supports that. I feel blessed to work with the middle school team. You have no idea the love and trust we have for your children and our director.

Elizabeth Rankin - As a parent, my son had a rough year last year. I felt empowered by the handbook as it lists the process of dealing with issues. I knew to go to the teachers while Jonnie Lyn stayed aware of what was going on. Things were addressed as they went through the process. The handbook is a great resource.

Vote: To adjourn.

Motion: Pam Armstrong
2nd: Denise Herrera

Yes:

Pam Armstrong
Erin Bradley
Nancy Durkee
Denise Herrera
Lainie Ives
Ken Jackman
Nina Keery
Alfred Link
Catherine Martin
Tanya Murdy
Erin Seaton
Eric Simone
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore

No:

None

Abstain:

None

Absent:

Tim Letson
Amber Hewitt (left meeting at 9:02)
Chris Whitford

9:20 pm Board adjourns.