

**River Valley Charter School
Board of Directors Meeting
Meeting # 280
February 9, 2021 5:00 pm**

In accordance with the Executive Order applying to MA Open Meeting Law, this meeting will be held virtually on Zoom ID: 88074824313 at 5:00 p.m.

Meeting was called to order at 5:03 pm

In attendance

Pam Armstrong
Mark Bishop
Nancy Durkee
Amber Hewett
Erin Bradley Irose
Nina Keery
Alfred Link
Catherine Martin
Karina Moltz
Greg Noyes
Rebecca Schwer
Erin Seaton
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore

Public Comment:

Susan Martinson: parent of two current students, one who has recently graduated. It's important for the Board to consider the distinction between FERPA records and school and staff communications with parents. How is "parent" interpreted by FERPA? What is the purpose of that definition in terms of school records? There is a separation between communication, decision making, and school records.

Vote: To approve minutes from the January 12th meeting

Motion: Erin Irose-Bradley
2nd: Cathy Martin

Yes : all in attendance

No

Abstain Erin Seaton, Nancy Durkee, not yet in attendance

Director's Report

Jonnie Lyn discussed the Director's Report that she shared with the community. Lottery drawing will be done via livestream, so that people can see the names being picked live. A program is being used to randomize the process.

Question was raised about vetting the program with the Mass Charter School Association – can we check with them to see if this is a valid program that is well regarded? JLE will check with the association to see if they have input.

DEI and social justice work is important and ongoing. Jonnie Lyn will join program aimed at helping school leaders with issues related to DEI and social justice.

Typo in Director's Report – article about RVCS reopening was sent to 27,000 people, not 2,700.

SOA – Student Opportunities Act was passed over a year ago. Based on numbers of students in categories that are underserved. We were supposed to submit plans for year 1 right as COVID-19 pandemic began, so deadline got pushed back. Now schools are being asked to write a plan that illustrates the plans that is already in place. RVCS has identified two existing programs that are currently filling the requirements of the act – Math Club, and the Literacy Intervention Program. Would also like to expand what the summer program looks like, especially in this time.

Motion: To adopt the Student Opportunities Act policy as proposed with no changes

Motion: Alfred Link

2nd: Nina Keery

Yes: all in attendance

No

Abstain

Discussion:

High absentee rates for students from underresourced groups. Is that an issue of equity? Since RVCS doesn't have transportation from several surrounding towns, it could be an issue. Sample size is very small, so it can be difficult to know.

COVID-19 Update

Reviewed numbers of covid-positive students and staff (7 and 4, respectively).

38 air purifiers have been ordered. An N95 fit kit has been ordered, and Kimberly can help people make sure that their masks are fitting correctly.

February 1st, positive case in the middle school. Middle School students were picked up or otherwise got home within about 12 minutes!

BINAX testing protocol is up and running. Antigen tests, not PCR. Use at RVCS is designed to be used on staff members, to help determine if someone symptomatic is covid positive. This was

initially not going to be used for students, but it will now be used as part of the pooled testing protocol. Jonne Lyn described the pooled testing process. Meeting will take place on Wednesday evening to answer questions about pooled testing.

Pooled testing is being for a number of reasons. One is to validate that the mitigation strategies are working (if there are positive cases in the school without spread, that means that the measures are working). It would also help to determine rates of covid in school. It's also another system to monitor what's happening, and to help students feel reassured.

What is the timeline of pooled testing? Should get results within 48 hours or so. Quarantine would begin from the day of diagnosis or close contact exposure. Consideration could be made about only putting close contacts into quarantine, not entire cohorts. That would need to be discussed.

How has response been? Quite good – 186 families consented for pooled testing.

Are teachers being asked to follow the same protocols as families? Yes.

Erin Bradley Irose – Kimberly did really good research to make sure that the pooled testing protocol was effective, and surrounding schools have consistently backed up the PCR tests.

Pooled testing will take place every week. Kimberly can delegate to have teachers or students administer their own tests. If someone is positive in the pooled test, and everyone is negative on Binax, then everyone in the pooled cohorts has to be quarantined.

The majority of people who are indicating apprehension about doing this are nervous that cohorts will be put into quarantine.

Concerns about Kimberly's bandwidth – is this adding too much on to her job? Others can help with this, admin team will do everything they can do to support Kimberly. Process takes at least 3 minutes per student.

Funding for this program was covered for the next 6-7 weeks. Will it keep going after that? After the time period, RVCS should analyze how valuable the program has been, and decide if it should keep going or not. It's not prohibitively expensive, but exact cost is not clear right now. Another influx of money is coming from state and could be used for this kind of program.

Vaccine clinic – Dan and Kimberly are both working on this. A freezer has been ordered that could keep a number of doses. Kimberly is working to get the school to be part of a program that could order 200 doses for the school. School would run a clinic for 200 people without wasting any vaccines. The IC and Hillview teachers might be interested. Parents who are teachers may be able to participate. A professional development day on March 5th is aimed to run the vaccine clinic, with a follow up on April 2nd. If the vaccines can't be obtained by March 5, it'll be pushed out a week and that might adjust lots of schedules.

School Communication Policy

School Communication Policy is largely to formalize practices that have already been in place, according to attorney. The version that was drafted by Accountability is slightly different than version to be voted on. One addition is to add a specific example of the type of information that could be shared. Another addition is marked with a strikeout in the policy, since JLE did not agree with that addition, though BOT could decide they want it to be in there. Line saying that custodial parents have all decision-making authority was added.

Vote: to approve the Communications Policy as submitted

Motion: Alfred Link

2nd: Nina Keery

Discussion:

Can the parent also decide if a person cannot have access to information? Step-parents, according to FERPA, can have access to information, though the natural or biological parents can specify that the person cannot have access, and may need documentation? Records of requests would have to be kept carefully, and custodial parents would have to be notified if non-custodial parents have requested access to documents, *before* documents are released.

Legal documents can't be shared without permission from custodial parents.

The real essence of this policy is that we will uphold the law and work for the best interests of the child.

Concern was raised about the policy being confusing and unclear.

There was a lot of back and forth between the lawyer and Jonnie Lyn.

Are we being idealistic if we think that a non-custodial parent will act in the best interests of the child?

Alfred, speaking for Accountability: no policy can cover every possible iteration of family dynamics and what might happen. The policy is to provide "guard rails" for the administration, but the School would always respect legal decisions and protocols as parents work out in a legal setting. We are trying to provide guidance to the administration and staff, and also remind them that they should not adjudicate between parents.

The discussion is not about decision making, but about communication. JLE gives the example of the child who has a field trip the next day and needs to wear certain gear, and can the stepparent be informed of that?

This has gone back and forth for a long time with the attorney, but nothing that we're trying to do in any direction is breaking the law, it's just memorializing a common practice and approach.

Concerns remain about document being clear and comprehensive.

Public Comment:

Michael Zuercher – father of three children who are at RVCS, and two step-children who are also at RVCS. It would be a tremendous help for their family to have school be able to communicate directly with step parents rather than needing to forward

Susan Martinson - FERPA definition only applies to school records. For the ease of communications with teachers, there should be identified primary contacts. Most communication between parents and teachers involves educational decision-making. A caregiver can be included in those emails for communication, but almost every interaction between teachers and parents includes decision making and should be limited to custodial parents.

Amendments:

State to Commonwealth

Yes: Armstrong, Bishop, Hewett, Irose, Keery, Moltz, Seaton, Wetmore, Schwer

No: Link, Noyes, Ting

Abstain: Martin

Vote: to extend meeting until 7:30 pm

Motion: Pam Armstrong

2nd: Greg Noyes

Yes: all in attendance

No

Abstain

Development Committee

No report this meeting due to time constraints

Finance Committee

Mark Bishop presented financial status documents (included in board documents).

HVAC units require immediate replacing. Significant project. Finance Committee decided to form an ad-hoc subcommittee to determine the logistics of the ad-hoc committee.

Solar panel system – net-metering was not available in the past. We have moved one step further with a net metering process, but still need to go through a fairly lengthy application process.

Mark discussed various grant opportunities and budget details.

Vote: to increase the budget by transferring \$131,800 from our cash balances to our operating budget for this fiscal year.

Motion: Greg Noyes
2nd: Nina Keery

There is an expectation that the budget will need to be adjusted again later in the year, as stated in board documents.

Yes : Armstrong, Bishop, Hewett, Bradley-Irose, Keery, Link, Martin, Moltz, Noyes, Seaton, Ting, Wetmore,

No:

Abstain: Schwer

Committee on Trustees

Nina Keery reported out on the COT's discussion of the Jan 30th retreat. BOT members should consider the idea of reading something or listening to something every month and meeting 15-20 minutes before the start of the BOT meetings.

Can people join meetings virtually once the pandemic is over? Would depend on bylaws. COT will discuss this.

COT wants to widen the net to include more people in Board membership. JLE says that a recruitment and retention plan could be useful.

Vote: Motion to adjourn

Made by: Pam
2nd: Greg

Yes: all in attendance

No:

Abstain:

7:25 pm Board adjourns