

**River Valley Charter School  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Meeting # 278  
December 30, 2020 7:00 pm**

In accordance with the Executive Order applying to MA Open Meeting Law, this meeting will be held virtually on Zoom ID: at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting was called to order at 7:07 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

**Director's Report**

Jonnie Lyn presented information about local numbers and described how the infection rates have gone up dramatically recently. District schools have decided to go remote until at least after MLK day.

Dr. March: agreed with Jonnie Lyn that numbers have gone up dramatically. Local hospital has sent out messages to doctors directing them to not send anyone to the hospital unless they are in dire need of emergency attention. Anna Jacques has suspended elective procedures, closed their wound center. Doesn't have official numbers on the rate of infection or occurrence in children, and they are not at risk the way adults are, but numbers among children are rising, and some children are vulnerable to a condition that is very serious. Not common.

Considering the number of people who may have traveled during the winter holiday season, it is reasonable to say that the school will experience higher rates of infection and illness, and that some adults may get seriously ill. It's not black and white – school could go ahead with attempt to reopen, though it's likely that closure may have to happen sooner rather than later.

Jonnie Lyn: has said all along that she wants students to be in school

Dr. Alon Sitzer spoke, as a member of the parent community and also as a doctor at Pentucket Medical Center. Isn't sure that the right response is to close the school. Feels that some of the testing is not as accurate as it could be, and that the mental and emotional toll on people may be as intense as the medical effects.

Dr. March feels that there is a need for normalcy, but also a need to protect the school community and the larger community.

Jonnie Lyn will be recommending that the MS stay remote.

Alfred: this is not a board decision, it is an administrative decision. We feel good about getting this far in the year. Kimberly and John March are urging caution. Everyone has a different set of factors to consider and risk appetite to take into account.

Amber: agrees with Alfred's summary. In terms of sequencing this meeting for everyone's time, it's important to capture Jonnie Lyn's perspective.

Rebecca Schwer: teachers are concerned about safety, hearing about students traveling, etc.

Jonnie Lyn – teachers in K-3 are more comfortable with staying in school, teachers of older students are more nervous about exposure. Middle School students have a much harder time staying apart and keeping distance. Teachers spend a lot of time reminding students to keep distance.

Erin Seaton – will the school consider opening for students from families who have no other options?

Rough plan is to have K-3 come back, have MS stay remote, unsure about 4-6.

Albert – was there a precipitating event that brought this meeting about? Feels like a big turnaround in terms of approach.

Kimberly – isn't hearing from families who are supposed to be following up with her about test results, etc. Makes her feel worried. Has heard about cases in community, and the strain on the hospital, and understands that numbers are going up around us and there are implications for us.

Nina – Kimberly's words have a big impact and are meaningful. If Kimberly had to make a decision, what would she suggest? Would staying entirely remote for two weeks before other plans get put into place make us safer/be more comfortable for Kimberly?

Kimberly – there is no perfect solution. She would likely bump our start date back a bit, and then bring just K-3 back, and keep an eye on numbers. Kimberly raised the idea of a staggered return, with Middle School coming back last. There is merit to the staggered approach, and she'd like to buy some time so we can keep an eye on numbers.

Anna – how are teachers of grades 4-6 feeling?

Jonnie Lyn – they'd rather be in school, but also are feeling concerned, and are eager to hear from the medical professionals about their perspectives.

Kimberly – doing contact tracing for Middle School and E2 is so much harder than for younger students, because students aren't always staying apart. Younger students are more contained by the systems in place, and younger students have less contact.

Pam – reminder that the decision about school programming is up to Jonnie Lyn, and suggests that the BOT make a vote of confidence in JLE and her administrative team.

Nancy Durkee – without knowing what the plans are, it doesn't feel possible to take that kind of a vote. Would like to know what the plan will be come next week.

JLE: inclination is to bring K-3 back, keep middle school remote, and figure out a plan for grades 4-6.

**Vote:** the Board of Trustees supports and reaffirms our confidence in the leadership and decision making of Jonnie Lyn Evans regarding the reopening of school in January.

Motion: Pam

2<sup>nd</sup>: Greg

*Yes:*

*No:*

*Abstain:*

**Public Comment:**

Chris Bryce (parent)

Public health is a balance and the goal should not be zero risk. Important to consider implications in the community and plan accordingly.

Kitten Panthera (parent)

School is a sanctuary for some students, and remote school can be very difficult. The impact of joy on health is significant, and at the same time respecting others in the community is important. Curious about indoor classrooms vs outdoor classrooms – is it possible to keep outdoor classrooms operating? Is the emotional component of joy, and the impact of stress on learning and on the immune system, being considered?

Elizabeth Rankin (parent)

Commented on the difficulty of getting tested, and the time and potential risk that was involved in getting testing done. Resources are more limited than they've been, and that's important to keep in mind.

Kevin Giglio (parent)

Everything the school has done is nothing short of amazing. The data is overwhelming, but if school is not open, people may be pushed into other choices that they may not have made before. What will the school do with February break? April break? Feels like the majority of people are doing the right thing. Knows that numbers will go up in January, but also feels that the plan in place has been working.

Khaki Paquette (parent)

Important to consider what will happen if school is closed and families start having playdates, and getting together in ways that will actually be more risky.

Lori K (parent)

Concerned about middle school – better for kids to be in school, social factors are considerable.

Stephanie Smith-Simone (parent)

Appreciates all that is being done, and hopes that a timeline can be shared soon so that parents can make plans accordingly.

Erin Cotton (parent and teacher)

Would be useful to consider the outdoor program that has been developed, and to think about how to incorporate that into grades 4-6.

Jared Hubbard (parent)

Appreciates all that is happening, and all of the hard work that has been going on. Important to look at the data and make decisions accordingly. He shared data about numbers in Newburyport, and asked what our criteria would be for going remote.

Colin Irose (parent)

Feels that the plan that has been in place has been very successful, and hopes that it can continue. Shared information about free testing sites that are accessible.

**Vote: Motion to adjourn**

Made by: Greg Noyes

2nd: Erin Bradley-Irose

Yes: all in attendance

No:

Abstain:

**9:06 pm Board adjourns**