

**River Valley Charter School  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Meeting # 253  
March 12, 2019 7:00 pm**

**In Attendance: Officers:** Chair: Mark Belanger, Vice Chair: Mason Mitchell-Daniels, Treasurer: Pamela Brockmeier Armstrong, Secretary: Katherine Brown **Trustees:** Nina Keery, Jennifer McCormick, Nat Coughlin, Todd Atanasoff, Alfred Link, Catherine Martin, Amber Hewett  
**Director:** Andy Willemsen  
**Public:** Jonnie Lyn Evans, Andrew Sorocco  
**Faculty Representative-** Jane Patterson

**Call to Order: 7:04**

**Montessori Minute:**

Mary Lytle lead the group through a math exercise with the golden bead materials.

**Public Comment:** none

**Acceptance of Previous Minutes:**

**Vote: Mark Belanger called for a Motion “To Accept Previous Minutes”**

Motion by Pam Brockmeier Armstrong, 2nd Nat Coughlin. Board of Directors vote to accept was unanimous.

**Director’s Report:**

Andy Willemsen shared the Director’s Report with the Board. See Appendix A.

Charter Renewal-

River Valley Charter School’s charter has been unconditionally renewed for the next five years, through June 30 of 2024.

Lottery-

Andy Willemsen reported RVCS had 194 applicants, almost the same number as last year. Andy reported that the lottery was successful and thanked Jonnie Lyn Evans and her team for the highly successful recruiting and advertising campaign. RVCS has extended offers to 32 Kinderhaus families.

Legislative visit-

On February 26th, RVCS hosted three legislators representing the sending districts – Senator Diana DiZoglio, Representative James Kelcourse, and Representative Lenny Mirra as well as Michael Falcone of the Mass Charter Public School Association.

Andy would like to ask the Board to encourage parents to send 10 + phone calls/ letters per month. Amber Hewett will take the lead on this.

Staffing Update-

Josh Hunt and Cea Davis are co-teaching Humanities and are receiving great feedback from the middle school students and staff. Taika Brand is out on medical leave for an undetermined amount of time. Hannah and Heather Reusse will continue with her class.

Attendance Policy-

Andy Willemsen asked for a vote on the Attendance Policy.

**Vote: Nat Coughlin called for a Motion “To Accept the Attendance Policy and Procedures as it is Worded”**

Motion by Nat Coughlin, 2nd by Alfred Link. Board of Directors vote to accept was unanimous.

School calendar-

Teacher contracts are 187 days with 180 days of school and 7 professional days. This 2019/2020 calendar is 186 days. Andy Willemsen stated he would like to keep the contract as is considering each and every teacher will be working an additional day before school starts.

**Vote: Nina Keery called for a Motion “To Accept the 2019/2020 Calendar”**

Motion by Nina Keery, 2nd Mason Mitchell-Daniels. Board of Directors vote to accept was unanimous.

Committee on Trustees-

Mason presented the topics of the committee meeting, which met directly before the Board of Trustees meeting. New Board member candidates will be introduced to the Board and voted in at the April meeting.

Board Retreat- Thursday, June 6 and Saturday, June 8 are the two potential dates. Mason asked the Board for facilitator recommendations.

Bylaws- The Committee on Trustees would like to make a revision around remote participation. DESE has provided regulations in regard to how to participate, vote, engage in Executive Session remotely.

**Vote: Mason Mitchell-Daniels called for a Motion “To Approve the Practice of Remote Participation for Board Members”**

Motion by Nina Keery, 2nd Alfred Link. Board of Directors vote to accept was unanimous.

Development Committee-

Jennifer McCormick reported on the Development Committee stating the 9th and 10th grade alumni are scheduled to meet with current RVCS 8th graders on April 2. The RVCS 100 day celebration was very successful with 50 people attending and \$5,000 raised.

Accountability Committee-

Alfred Link handed out the Accountability Committee meeting notes and reviewed with the Board. See Appendix B.

Nat Coughlin asked about the delayed action on social media and overnight trips. Alfred Link stated that these will be 2 separate policies and revisited in the fall.

Mark Belanger reported to the Board that 3 of the 4 officers from the Executive Committee will be stepping down. This will be revisited in the June Board meeting.

Andy Willemsen, Jane Patterson, Andrew Sorocco and Jonnie Lyn Evans left the meeting.

**Vote: Mark Belanger called for a Motion “To Enter into executive session per Massachusetts open meeting law executive session purpose #2: “To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel.”**

Motion by Nat Coughlin, 2nd by Amber Hewett. Board of Directors vote to accept was unanimous.

**Vote: Mark Belanger called for a Motion “To Accept Jonnie-Lyn Evans as the New Executive Director of RVCS**

Motion by Nina Keery, 2nd Amber Hewett. Board of Directors vote to accept was unanimous.

Discussion continued in regard to announcing Jonnie-Lyn Evans as the new Executive Director. Jonnie Lyn Evans will send an email to staff tomorrow morning asking for a brief meeting with the Board Director at 3:40pm. This will allow for opportunity to announce Jonnie-Lyn as the new Director to the staff.

Nina Keery and Alfred Link will create a press release to go out next Monday.

**Vote: Nat Coughlin called for a Motion “To Adjourn”**

Motion by Nat Coughlin, 2nd Todd Atanasoff. Board of Directors vote to accept was unanimous.

**Adjourn:** 8:56

## **Director's Report to the River Valley Charter School Board of Trustees**

### **March 12, 2019**

#### **Charter Renewal**

On February 11<sup>th</sup> we received formal notification from Commissioner Jeffrey Riley that our charter has been unconditionally renewed for the next five years, through June 30 of 2024. A copy of the letter is included in this month's Board packet.

#### **Lottery/Enrollment**

On February 28<sup>th</sup> we held our annual enrollment lottery. The Reverend Dr. Elizabeth J. Jordan, Deacon of St. Paul's Church, served as our name-puller. We had a total of 194 applicants, with 98 applications for Kinderhaus and 96 for upper grades. Kudos to Jonnie Lyn Evans and her team for the highly successful recruiting and advertising campaign that resulted in such strong interest. We have extended offers to 32 Kinderhaus families in order to maintain our grade level structure. We will offer enrollment to waitlisted applicants in higher grades as openings become available.

As of March 8<sup>th</sup>, we have had a total of five students withdraw during this school year, two from 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and three from 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, representing a total of three families. All of these students returned to district schools. All vacancies have been filled from our waitlists.

#### **Legislator Visit/Advocacy**

On February 26<sup>th</sup> we hosted the three legislators that represent our sending districts on Beacon Hill – Senator Diana DiZoglio, Representative James Kelcourse, and Representative Lenny Mirra. Also attending were legislative aides for Senator DiZoglio and Rep Kelcourse, as well as Michael Falcone of the Mass Charter Public School Association. Jonnie Lyn and I met with the delegation to answer questions about River Valley as well as the charter sector in general. We then toured the school, and all visitors had very positive reactions to our public Montessori program. Our place-based curriculum, hands-on materials and student independence were particularly noted. Overall, it was an extremely positive morning, with one visitor exclaiming "I wish I had gone to a school like this!"

As a follow up to the visit, we have developed a plan to have RVCS families write or call their representatives over the next few months to advocate for the charter school sector. Rather than a one-time phone & email blitz, our plan is to identify a dozen families for each of the next three months to contact all of our three legislators. I have been in contact with the MCPSA, and they have provided talking points that include information on current funding bills before the legislature. We would welcome assistance from trustees in organizing this campaign.

#### **Attendance Policy**

On March 8<sup>th</sup> I sent the revised draft of the RVCS attendance policy to the Board. The Accountability Committee has been involved in these efforts, which were initially driven by the negative rating RVCS received from DESE regarding our attendance numbers for last school year. While our initial thought was to add language saying that a student would forfeit their seat at the school if their absences reached a certain threshold, we were informed by the state that this is not an option. The updated version of the policy attempts to install greater accountability for attendance, and includes two associated documents that families would be required to complete if attendance becomes an issue.

#### **School Calendar**

I delivered the proposed 2019-2020 school calendar to the Board for the February meeting. This calendar deviates from previous years in several ways: Newburyport has decided to open on the Tuesday after Labor Day. Since Labor Day falls on September 2nd, we are thinking that this makes sense for RVCS as well. If we opened before Labor Day our teachers would report on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, which feels very early to them.

A few other changes to note:

1. We have moved the January 2nd Professional Day to October 15th (if we had left it on the 2nd, then we would have had a one-day school week on Friday January 3rd). This allows us to continue hosting the New England Public Montessori Convening (in October) and offers families a four-day weekend when the weather is nice.
2. We have reduced the number of 1/2 day PD days from 5 to 4.
3. March conferences are one week later - a benefit to teachers, especially in middle school.

Other than that, this looks much like previous calendars. The scheduled last day is June 16th, and with our blizzard bag curriculum, the last possible day for students would be June 19th.

### **Staffing Update**

When I spoke with students regarding Colin Gibney's departure, they asked if Josh Hunt could be their Humanities Teacher for the rest of the year. Josh is a graduate student at Salem State University who has done his practicum teaching in our Humanities classroom over the past two years. He has also substituted in several other middle school rooms. The students have formed positive relationships with Josh, and there was widespread student enthusiasm for having Josh join our team.

The middle school team interviewed Josh, and had a very positive reaction to his thoughtfulness and candor. As a result, we have hired Josh to join Cea Davis in leading our Humanities classes for the balance of the school year. Cea will continue to lead the advisory group, and will collaborate with Josh on the Humanities curriculum.

This model also has the benefit of allowing Colin Vandenburg to continue in the role of Middle School Coordinator, and he will be providing support to the entire team. Josh started on March 4<sup>th</sup>, and is off to a great start.

### **Green Expo**

On April 11<sup>th</sup>, the Greater Newburyport Green Expo committee will be hosting the inaugural Newburyport Green Expo as part of the national Environmental Awareness Month. River Valley E2 students will be partnering with ReVision Energy to present information about our new solar array. Middle School students will be presenting their efforts to protect and steward the Merrimack River. Event organizers anticipate over 1,000 attendees.

