

**River Valley Charter School
Board of Trustees Meeting
Meeting # 289
November 15, 2022 7:00 pm**

In accordance with the Executive Order applying to MA Open Meeting Law, this meeting will be held virtually on Zoom ID: 89100045832 at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

In attendance:

Pam Armstrong
Erin Bradley
Nancy Durkee
Denise Herrera
Amber Hewett
Lainie Ives
Ken Jackman
Nina Keery
Tim Letson
Alfred Link
Catherine Martin
Tanya Murdy
Erin Seaton (arrived at 7:24)
Eric Simone
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore
Chris Whitford
Jonnie Lyn Evans, Director

Absent:

None

Public:

Lauren Hajjar
Rebecca Schwer
Elizabeth Rankin
Dan Bouchard
Deb McCrevin

Comments from Pam Armstrong, Vice Chair:

None

Public Comment:

None

RVCS Revelation:

Rebecca Schwer presented a slide show about a collaborative project between science and art. She and students are working with Lucinda and local artists in an effort to bring art into the teaching of climate change. They have been recording their progress and there will be artwork on display in the middle school great room.

The science portion began with a field trip to the refuge where the students collect data (salinity, plant depth, etc.), for the marsh restoration project. Students used the data to explore the question of how restoration is impacting the salt marsh. They presented back to the refuge staff at RVCS and received feedback on their presentation and their data.

The art portion began with brainstorming themes to share in their murals and the materials they would need, highlighting recycled materials. The students then worked on their own individual pieces. They are working on two murals to be displayed initially in the middle school. Each piece of the mural will be numbered so they can be linked to artist statements. Hopefully they will be up for parent conferences. Eventually photos of the murals will be hung on Greenbelt property.

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

Motion: Anna Wetmore

2nd: Alfred Link

Yes:

Pam Armstrong

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:

Amber Hewett

Tim Letson
Chris Whitford

Absent:

Erin Seaton (arrived at 7:24)
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.

JLEvans expressed gratitude to the Development Committee for the event held in October.

She recognized and thanked Dan Bouchard for his three years of commitment to the school. She appreciated his incredible sense of humor and incredible memory. He will be truly missed.

Dan appreciated the well wishes. He is looking forward to being back in the classroom. As an NHS alum, he is looking forward to returning to his alma mater.

Discussion:

ATing - how does absenteeism compare to pre pandemic? Usually around 5%, sometimes hitting 33-35% at times. A lot of kids are getting sick at the Kindergarten level. ATing - is this a concern for DESE? JLE - It could be. Attendance numbers are one of the ways we are assessed, but she feels it is reasonable and there is nothing we can do about it.

PArmstrong - how are teachers fielding this? JLE - some are masking when the numbers are going up. This is just the situation right now and we will move forward doing the best that we can. All schools are working on making up for lost time. We will support the kids as best we can. Are you seeing the same things, Erin? EBradley - a little hard to tell with kids at that age at her school (HS).

EBradley - has the process started for looking for Dan's replacement? JLE - this is complicated because we are in the midst of a lot of other internal changes. Trying to be really thoughtful about how she moves forward. Initial draft is to have a number of coordinators reporting to JLE with components of the school underneath them. There are some internal candidates that would like to be considered. The job has not been posted yet. Two staff members have stepped up to take on some of Dan's responsibilities with a few others pitching in.

EBradley - what can the board do to support you during this transition? ALink - Outsourced HR and bill paying and bookkeeping. A section of administration is leaving, so this is an opportunity to restructure how admin works. We need to be aware that an abnormally large amount of the director's bandwidth will be taken up by this transition. JLE - prioritizing what needs to be done and what is required to be done. Not abandoning academics at all, letting

the new programs to settle in while continuing to assess without any more changes. PArmstong - timing is unfortunate, but it is an opportunity to figure out how admin should be structured and find strong internal supports and resources that shouldn't be rushed. An important board question is what is the emergency succession plan. It is in place. We can act as advisors, but it is JLEs role to make the decisions.

KJackman - feels like more and more is setting on JLEs shoulders, what does the backup plan look like? PArmstrong: it is two or three people who understand what needs to be done at the director level. JLE falls in the vein of what she's trying to do, finding a great Montessori administrator, someone that has been taking a lot of training. Someone who can work with compliance. It is the operations piece that is her main focus right now. Has 3-4 people who can step up and run the school, who understands the priorities and maintain focus.

NKeery - hopefully we can support you with competitive pay for these new positions. JLE confident that we do better and better with that.

Development Committee

This is an exciting time for Development; the kickoff was happening at the last meeting. There are now actual results. Gratitude goes to those who helped, JLE, TMurdy, Ann Marks, Elizabeth Rankin, Jarred Hubbard and Amy Hmorodka. This is a great team that is working well together.

64 families came to the event. One of every three families was in attendance. Response was that even families who had been involved in the school for a long time found the presentations informative. The event cost \$565, which was covered by a donation from an RVCS family.

Fundraising week was a series of emails with a different highlight each day. Donations totaled \$3985. This came from 38 donor families. \$99.63 was the average give.

Third prong of the effort is volunteering. "Give one day for a better year."

EBradley - is there a way to put this out there for people who aren't parents? JLE - it did go on the facebook page. Perhaps share on the alumni page. EBradley - overheard comments about how great middle school is. Is there a way to highlight middle school? KJackman - yes, as the ball gets rolling. JLE - need to be aware of asks of time of staff.

CMartin - impressed with what the committee was doing. Getting more people involved will grow the effort tremendously.

ATing - what grades were represented with attendance? KJackman - about half were younger students' families.

The Committee would like the opportunity to take the name list and overlay with the donations. Of course, with the appropriate level of confidence. Understand who has contributed. PArmstrong: Perhaps this is something to be deliberated within the Development Committee.

JLE: there is a donor database. We should be able to pull categories of donors. Advocates not to share beyond those who are bound to confidentiality. KJackman - if we have this tool, let's figure out who they are, how many kids, draft responses to them., etc.

ESeaton - am I misunderstanding this, are we going to solicit the direction of the school to people who can afford it? Kjackman - no, start at school and then approach the families who are interested in that. ESeaton - seems inequitable that the programs that are supported by people who have money. KJackman - key point is that there is a differentiation, development is looking to increase the pie available to JLEs team to decide what to bring to our community.

Grievance Committee

EBradley - lots of activity this month. Grateful to have parents who are engaged enough to help with this process. Happy to have the opportunity to make our school better.

Met to address two complaints. Ann Marks withdrew her complaint and decided it would be best to talk to a few trustees and perhaps JLE. More to come on that. Allowing Ann to drive that meeting.

Moved on to address the Hajjar complaint and went into executive session. Public was not able to be part of that portion of that meeting. After a two-hour session the Committee is asking CoT to do some of the work around this resolution. The work includes looking at what other charter schools are doing to formalize trustee expectations. Hoping to connect with LHajjar later.

There have been other subjects that have been brought to EBradley.

NDurkee - a gray area of Erin fielding smaller complaints. This won't be an effective way to channel feedback to JLE. EBradley - offered paths to people who approached her.

JLEvans - a little alarmed to think that there are a number of complaints out there. This is not the climate I want to be leading or have led in the past. Who needs to be involved in this? Usually Accountability is involved in the parent survey. They should be coming to the organization, not a parent or a board member, so that they can be addressed directly. EBradley - These are not major issues. She guided parents to look at the handbook.

PArmstrong - this was jarring to hear. As individuals, we learn to say that this is something to go directly to the teacher or JLE. Often, parents don't feel comfortable or have the communicative tools to contact the appropriate person.

ESeaton - there is no lack of data on how stressful it is to be a director at this time. Mindful of our role on the board. What can we do to support JLE in some capacity? JLE - I'll have to think about it.

Finance Committee

Numbers are on track. There is a lot of flexibility on the Covid driven grants.

JLEvans - Please comment on Central Source. ALink - we've all been impressed and happy with how things are going with that. Really good process so far.

Accountability Committee

There was no Accountability meeting this month. There will be a meeting on December 5th via zoom.

Committee on Trustees

Delivered the Director Evaluation, acknowledging that it was four months late. The cover letter and raw data is in the board packet. Pam, Erin, and Albert delivered it. Has a lot of appreciation for how JLE has guided us through the pandemic and other situations. Discussed her building a team around herself. There is a lot going on right now. Touched on exploring some challenges in an area that she feels challenged in, between getting board support or professional development.

Vote: To acknowledge that we have received and filed the 2021-2022 Director Review.

Motion: Albert Ting

2nd: Alfred Link

Yes:

Pam Armstrong

Erin Bradley

Nancy Durkee

Denise Herrera

Amber Hewett

Lainie Ives

Ken Jackman

Nina Keery

Tim Letson

Alfred Link

Catherine Martin

Tanya Murdy

Erin Seaton

Eric Simone

Albert Ting

Anna Wetmore

Chris Whitford

No:

None

Abstain:

None

Absent:

None

Also discussed how we can improve the evaluation more. How to make the data more useful.

Discussion of Management versus Governance Training

For those of us who were able to attend the webinar. What were your initial reactions to it?

ATing - what is appropriate for management and what is appropriate for governance.

NKeery - discussed past professional development.

JLEvans - talked about a focus for each month. Three strands we could cover, board, montessori,

AHewett - challenge us to design metrics that are inline with the values and the mission of the school.

Public Comment:

Lauren Hajjar - Reflect on a couple of things that were talked about tonight. Some parents may not feel psychologically safe to speak up. It isn't as much about having policy in place, but having an open line of conversation. We can build that. Be more holistic about who is able to heard. 30 parents signed a letter; none of those parents were acknowledged. That was an opportunity to create psychological safety.

Appreciates the work of so many. It will be an important discussion to figure out what accountability looks like. A board member was disrespectful to me as a woman, as a mother, as a person.

Erin was given a chance to respond to this. Asks for grace as she collects her thoughts. Kudos to you for standing up in this space. It hasn't felt like a safe space to you for good reason. Your contributions are appreciated. Also know that all the people in that executive session made sure that you were represented. It's not falling on deaf ears.

Vote: To adjourn.

Motion: Pam Armstrong

2nd: Denise Herrera

Yes:

Pam Armstrong

Erin Bradley

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Denise Herrera

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Lainie Ives

Ken Jackman

Nina Keery
Tim Letson
Catherine Martin
Tanya Murdy
Erin Seaton
Eric Simone
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore
Chris Whitford

No:
None

Abstain:
None

Absent:
Alfred Link (Left meeting at 9:05)

9:21 pm Board adjourns.