

**River Valley Charter School  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Meeting # 248  
October 23, 2018 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, John Siegfried, Catherine Martin, Todd Rasmussen, Josh Porter, Alfred Link, Karina Moltz

**Director:** Andy Willemsen

**Public:** Deb McCrevan, Jonnie Lyn Evans

**Faculty Representative-** Jane Patterson

**Call to Order: 7:05**

**Public Comment:** none

**Acceptance of Previous Minutes:**

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

Motion by Pamela Brockmeier Armstrong, 2nd Katherine Brown. Board of Directors vote to accept was unanimous.

**Director’s Report: Andy Willemsen**

Andy Willemsen updated the Board with his monthly Director’s Report (see Appendix A).

MCAS Results-

Andy Willemsen shared a handout charting the sending district and RVCS MCAS Score Comparison for Spring 2018.

Jonnie Lyn Evans presented on DESE Accountability with a comparison report for RVCS and surrounding districts. New system with Accountability and Achievement reports includes four indicators: achievement, growth, english language proficiency and absenteeism. Jonnie Lyn Evans discussed the categorization of schools with the Board.

Massachusetts Charter Public School Association Regional Cohort Meeting-RVCS is Hosting leaders from regional charter schools tomorrow (10/24/18)

Montessori Audit- taking place in December of this year

Green Ribbon Application-National recognition. Andy Willemsen is meeting with parents, with knowledge in the arena, tomorrow.

RVCS Wellness Policy- (See Appendix B)

School Nurse Kimberly Putney and the RVCS Health and Wellness Advisory Committee have drafted proposed updates to the school’s Wellness policy. The goal is to bring the school up to date with current policy/events.

This policy update will be mentioned in the next Happenings and will be included in the Family Handbook.

**Vote: Mark Belanger called for a Motion “To Approve the RVCS Wellness Policy as presented at the October 23, 2018 Board of Trustees meeting”**

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

**Committee Updates-**

Finance Committee- Pamela Brockmeier Armstrong reported on Finance Committee notes (see Appendix C)

positive highlights-

-Auditors state RVCS has a “clear and consistent” audit

-School comparison document shows 5.6 months of operating costs in reserve for RVCS

-Refinance for RVCS is locked in at 3.7% for 15 years.

Pamela read the following passage from the Audit Draft “the \$100K anonymous pledge commitment was not reflected in the Foundation accounting records. As Board minutes reflect discussion of the pledge, it is clear that intentions were all in good faith.”

Pamela stated that Deb and the Foundation have discussed the internal control process to remedy the deficiency

**Vote: Mark Belanger called for a Motion “To Accept Audited Financial Report for Year ending June 30, 2018.” 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, 2018. 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, 2018.**

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

Accountability Committee- Alfred Link reported on the Accountability Committee meeting notes ( see Appendix D) Alfred Link and Karina Moltz will be co-chairs and reviewing the Accountability Committee schedule for the year. Committee on Trustees will continue to review the bylaws.

Committee on Trustees- Mason Mitchell Daniels reported the group had a meeting directly before the Board meeting and therefore, no notes for the group.

The Committee discussed a 360 review and a spectrum of ways to improve the process for the Director review. The Committee would like to hire a professional consultant to assist in the process.

Development Committee- Jennifer McCormick presented updates on the Development Committee report. RVCS is hosting the Chamber of Commerce with Todd Atanasoff taking the

lead. There will be a parent mixer on November 8th. Jennifer also discussed effortless giving such as Coins for a Cause, Amazon Smile and Learys.

**Vote: Mark Belanger called for a Motion “To Adjourn”**

Motion by John Siegfried, 2nd Josh Porter. Board of Directors vote to accept was unanimous.  
Adjourn: 8:25

Appendix A.

**Director’s Report to the River Valley Charter School Board of Trustees  
October 23, 2018**

**MCAS Results**

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, I met with the Accountability Committee to review the RVCS 2018 MCAS results. This was the second year of the Next Generation MCAS assessments, and all RVCS students in grade 4 through 8 took the tests online (third grades took paper and pencil tests). Our results are similar to previous years in that student scores are lower in our early grades and quite strong in our upper grades. Many factors contribute to this trend, primarily our emphasis on concrete representations of concepts in the early years, and our reluctance to rush students toward the abstraction required to perform well on MCAS tests. RVCS students fared well in comparison to our sending districts, posting the highest regional scores on seven of the fourteen tests. River Valley’s accountability rating from DESE was also the highest among all of our sending districts. I will present more detailed results at the October meeting.

**Audit**

Our auditors from Alexander Aronson Finning presented the 2018 audit report to the RVCS Finance Committee and RVCS Foundation Directors on October 18<sup>th</sup>. I would like to thank Jill Eichhorst and Deb McCrevan for their tireless efforts to accurately track and present the school’s finances in such a professional manner. Once again, the school’s financial records were given a clean bill of health from the auditors. We did encounter some communication and recording concerns with the Foundation, and are in the process of instituting new systems to address these concerns going forward.

**MCPSA Regional Cohort Meeting**

RVCS will be hosting the Suburban Rural Charter Alliance Northeast Cohort Fall Meeting at the school on October 24<sup>th</sup>. Leaders from Innovation Academy Charter School, Marblehead Community Charter Public School and Hill View Montessori Charter Public School, along with a representative from the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association will gather to build professional relationships among cohort representatives, share information about current school strengths and challenges and identify one or more areas of focus for cohort collaboration during the 2018-19 school year. The event will also include a tour of the school, and an opportunity to disseminate out public Montessori model.

**Coaching Update**

All three of our coaching initiatives are off to positive starts. Elizabeth Slade, our Montessori Coach, has observed all K-6 classrooms and provided feedback to teachers. She also introduced a Montessori lesson

study protocol to all three levels, and has coached the teams through two sessions. Ben Scherz, our Literacy Coach, has met multiple times with each K-3 classroom team, observed & modeled instruction, and provided feedback. Ben is also reviewing our literacy materials, and is finding opportunities to integrate Montessori lessons into a more robust program. Colin Gibney is coaching seven teachers at the E2 and Middle School levels, observing and meeting with each teacher weekly. Early feedback from teachers regarding this support has been positive.

### **RVCS Wellness Policy**

School Nurse Kimberly Putney and the RVCS Health and Wellness Advisory Committee have drafted proposed updates to the school's Wellness policy. This policy has not been updated since 2012. A copy of the policy is included in this month's Board packet for review, with updates highlighted in yellow. I will be requesting a vote after discussion at the October meeting.

### **Montessori Audit**

We have scheduled this year's Montessori Audit for the week of December 3<sup>rd</sup>. As you may recall, our Accountability Plan calls for us to alternate between internal and external annual Montessori audits. Last year Rob Keys of the Seacoast Center for Montessori Education conducted the audit, so this year we will use the internal model to assess our program against the American Montessori Society's *Essential Elements of Successful Montessori Schools in the Public School Sector*. We expect to have the audit report ready for presentation to the Board at the January meeting.

### **Green Ribbon Application**

We are in the process of applying to the US Department of Education for RVCS to be designated as a national exemplar Green Ribbon School. The application requires evidence in three areas:

Pillar I: Reduce environmental impact and costs.

Pillar II: Improve the health and wellness of students and staff.

Pillar III: Provide effective environmental and sustainability education, incorporating STEM, civic skills and green career pathways.

We feel that the school's efforts over the past several years, as well as our place based educational model, justifies our application. We expect to receive a response by February 2019.

### **Hill View Dissemination**

On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, two of our teachers presented our Habits of Learning curriculum to the faculty of Hill View Montessori Public Charter School in Haverhill. Our teachers were invited by former RVCS faculty to disseminate this information.

### **Perry Way Sidewalks**

I have had preliminary conversations with Wayne Amaral of the Newburyport Department of Public Services to discuss the possibility of widening Perry Way in order to provide sidewalks on both sides of the street to the west of the school's driveway (the area where families park for arrival and dismissal). These would be paved sidewalks, with lines to designate pedestrian and parking areas, as installing raised sidewalks would involve greater regulatory review and costs. We are at the very beginning of this process, so no action is likely until the spring.

**BOT first reading of revised Wellness Policy: May 8, 2012 BOT second reading and vote: June 12, 2012**

## **River Valley Charter School Wellness Policy**

River Valley Charter School (RVCS) is committed to teaching and learning in an environment that focuses on the needs of the whole child. Optimal personal wellness varies for individual students and is critical for their ability to be in school and “ready to learn”. Wellness is defined as the quality or state of being healthy in body and mind, especially as the result of deliberate effort.

RVCS acknowledges the steady rise in rates of adults and children that are determined to be overweight and/or obese as reported by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). RVCS recognizes the link between access to healthy foods and opportunities for being physically active and its effect on personal wellness, obesity, and readiness to learn. Eating nutritious foods and being physically active has been demonstrated to improve behavior and alertness, as well as standardized testing scores. To that end, RVCS has established a Health and Wellness Advisory Committee (HWAC) and the following policies to support staff, student, parent, and community wellness.

### **I. Nutrition Education and Wellness Program**

- RVCS teachers, staff, parents, and students will be educated on the Wellness Policy at the beginning of each school year and periodically throughout the year through workshops, trainings, and school newsletters or other communications, such as e-mail or website updates and postings.
- Students will be given opportunities for nutrition education through the general Montessori Curriculum, supplemental lessons, and Health Classes. Students will work with the USDA Food Guide Pyramid, [www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov), to design a diet that supports health and reduces risk of illness/diseases in a balanced way.
- Staff will be encouraged to seek out professional development activities that will assist them in promoting wellness and movement in the classroom and throughout the school day.

### **II. Physical Activity and Fitness Education**

- Students will participate in a Fitness Program that is led by a qualified teacher per the Massachusetts Department of Education requirements.
- Fitness Classes will be held at each level at least one time per week.

- Proper and safe fitness equipment and adequate indoor and outdoor space will be provided during fitness classes and recess.
- Students will participate in daily recess for thirty minutes or more per day.
- Recess will not be denied to children.
- To the extent possible, physical activity breaks and movement will be incorporated into

The RVCS Health and Wellness Advisory Committee is open to RVCS staff, parents, administrators, Board of Trustee member(s), and other local community members. The Health and Wellness

Advisory Committee will meet periodically throughout the school year with the goal of reviewing and drafting policies or otherwise advising the RVCS staff, parents, administrators, and Board of Trustees on issues that affect health and wellness at RVCS.

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**BOT first reading of revised Wellness Policy: May 8, 2012 BOT second reading and vote: June 12, 2012**

everyday teaching and learning.

### III. Classroom Nutrition Standards

A. RVCS staff will be encouraged to be positive role models for students with regards to

healthy behaviors and eating habits. B

snacks, meals, or classroom celebrations.

**C.**

- Thirty minutes will be allowed for students to eat lunch.
- Students will be encouraged to wash their hands prior to and after meals and snacks for sanitary reasons as well as allergen awareness and prevention.

- RVCS does not allow food to be withheld.
- Education and guidance will be periodically provided to parents in the form of school communication, newsletters, emails, etc.
- “Competitive foods and beverages” can be sold up to 30 minutes before or 30 minutes

after

the school day per Department of Public Health Code 105 CMR 225.000 .

#### **IV. Food Safety Practices**

The Food Safety Program is intended to ensure that a sufficient standard of food safety is maintained at all times within the River Valley Charter School. Appropriate food safety practices must comply with the current U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease and Control guidelines.

- Individuals supervising or undertaking food handling have skills and knowledge in food safety and hygiene matters that corresponds with their food handling activities and responsibilities.
- Kinderhaus students practice hand washing and cleaning the environment as part of their life skills lesson. Hands are washed upon entering the classroom, before snack and lunch, after toileting, and other appropriate times. Tables are washed before and after eating by students with supervision and assistance as needed.
- **Students routinely eat snacks and lunches within their own classroom.** Students are instructed in hand washing at the beginning of the school year and hand washing is reinforced daily.
- Hand washing signs and posters are placed within eye level on bathroom walls.
- When necessary, food is provided for students to supplement meals and improve nutrition.
- Students, faculty, staff, and parents are provided information on handling and preparing food safely to avoid foodborne illness.
- **The School Nurse will monitor for foodborne illnesses and report any foodborne illness outbreaks to the Newburyport Health Department.**

- Staff and students are prohibited from returning to school or work until 24-48 hours after a 2

RVCS will engage families in providing information on healthy food options and may offer

suggestions for healthy foods and snacks that students may bring to school for scheduled

Except for school celebrations, and where proper planning has been established to ensure safety, food sharing is not allowed to avoid accidental exposure to food allergens.

Staff and volunteers who will be involved with food preparation will be asked to review the RVCS Food Allergy Policy and watch the following video, created by the United States Department of Agriculture and available on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFq4sWTzTA8>

F. Persons supervising or undertaking food handling in the kitchen must maintain appropriate

cleaning and sanitizing procedures for utensils, equipment and food contact surfaces.

G. Gloves are supplied in the kitchen and used when handling food.

**BOT first reading of revised Wellness Policy: May 8, 2012 BOT second reading and vote: June 12, 2012**

gastrointestinal illness with nausea, vomiting or diarrhea.

#### V. Special Occasions A.

Each class is requested to limit classroom celebrations that involve community food to two per year. For each celebration, the school nurse will receive a minimum of two weeks notification prior to the event and the RVCS Food Allergy Policy and Management Plan must be followed.

B. RVCS honors each child and the significance of the Maria Montessori Birthday Walk celebration. For the health and safety of each student, food will not be permitted at Birthday Walk celebrations.

C. Community lunches must be scheduled at least two weeks in advance, with both the front office and the school nurse. The RVCS Food Allergy Policy and Management Plan will be enforced during community lunch events.

#### **VI. Other School-Based Activities Designed to Promote Student Wellness**

B. When possible, RVCS will offer various before and/or after school programs that encourage being active.

- To the extent possible, RVCS will incorporate physical activity into the curriculum and encourage staff to use movement in learning when appropriate.
- Students will have access to free water via drinking fountains throughout the building and will be allowed reasonable access to them especially at meal and snack times. **Filters associated with water fountains will be replaced regularly.**

#### **VII. School Lunch Program**

A. Students will receive developmentally appropriate health education from a qualified

professional through the River Valley Charter School health curriculum.

- A. in
- B.
- C.

River Valley does not have an onsite cafeteria but a school lunch is available to every child the school every day that the school is in session through a contract with **an outside lunch provider.** Lunches are prepared and delivered daily.

A small variety of substitute lunch items is maintained for those situations in which a student is in need. For example, a substitute item is made available if a lunch spills or is forgotten. Parents and students should not depend on these substitute items.

River Valley will provide a free or reduced price lunch to any qualifying child based on the school's Financial Hardship Policy guidelines. Financial hardship eligibility is determined in conjunction with the school's Assistant Director, Jonnie Lyn Evans.

Appendix C.

**River Valley Charter School  
Audit Meeting / BoT Finance Committee – October 18, 2018**

Attendees:

Deb McCrevan  
Andy Willemsen  
Dana Lowell  
Nat Coughlin  
Mark Belanger  
Pam Armstrong  
Mason Mitchell-Daniels  
John Gregorio  
Scott McDonald  
Liz Fabel  
Dave Kelleher: Auditor

Not in Attendance:

Stu Steinberg

## Meeting Notes:

1. All draft audit paperwork is included in this month's board packet.
2. Highlights:
  - Overall, auditor indicates this is a “consistent and clear audit” that sends a clean statement to DESE.
  - School comparison document (p. 1-2 of RVCS Audit Draft 10.16.18.pdf) shows RVCS in comparable or better positions than comparison schools. Note that in #6 (Number of Months of Operating Expenses in Unrestricted Net Position) we have 5.61 months of operating expenses in reserve. The standard is 3-6 months. We had aimed for 3, hoped for 4...got more. Good news. Note also that Current Assets and Total Liabilities in #1 & #2 taken at June 30, 2018 do not reflect 750K less due to refinancing that came later.
  - Another important comparison note: schools who are currently looking at financing are experiencing rates of 4.5% to 5.1%. Our refinancing locked in 3.7% for 15 years. Smart move. Thank you again to everyone who worked diligently to make the refi happen.
  - Note on p. 3 of RVCS Audit Draft 10.16.10.pdf: Schedule of 20% Excess Carryover: The takeaway from this page is that RVCS does not owe money back to our sending districts. Compare Total Surplus (\$84,416) to Allowable Carryover (\$1,858,492). DESE looks at these numbers to see if schools have too much working capital.
  - Note on p. 4 of RVCS Audit Draft 10.16.10.pdf: Benchmarking Ratios: All color blocks should appear GREEN, indicating all ratios are within low risk ranges.
  - Note on p. 5 of RVCS Audit Draft 10.16.10.pdf: Letter to BoT and Management: This document addresses a “significant deficiency” in internal control. This is audit language that is less severe than a “material weakness.” In summary, the \$100K anonymous pledge commitment was not reflected in the Foundation accounting records. As Board minutes reflect discussion of the pledge, it is clear that intentions were all in good faith. Deb and the Foundation have discussed the internal control process to remedy the deficiency. Deb created a flowchart with procedures that both the School and the Foundation will now follow so that Donor Commitments will be addressed and recorded properly.
  - Note on p. 8-9 of RVCS Audit Draft 10.16.10.pdf: Letter to BoT and Management: The auditors also identified an uncorrected misstatement in the Foundation's Financial Statement and a deficiency in the Internal Control of the Cash Disbursement Cycle of the Foundation. Details are in the draft audit report. The misstatement will be corrected (booking the anonymous pledge discount) and the internal control has been addressed by Deb and the Foundation.

- Final Note: The main message from the audit is that all is in good order. The 3 deficiencies identified have been addressed and do not point to deeper issues. Many thanks to Deb McCrevan for her diligent work and quick response to the audit results.

## Appendix D.

### Accountability Committee Meeting Minutes:

Date of meeting: October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Present: Erin S, Nancy D, Alfred L, Karina M., Nina K, Andy W.

#### Discussion:

##### **Development of a new accountability plan**

A assuming the charter is renewed (as all expect), Andy suggested that the development of the next accountability plan follow a new process: Andy and Jonnie Lyn will share an initial draft with the faculty for their review and feedback. They will then share the resulting document with the Accountability Committee for our review/revision/adoption. There is no expectation for a dramatic change in approach, but having early faculty buy-in would be beneficial to all constituents.

##### **Alumni Survey:**

Andy presented the results of the 2018 Alumni Survey. The report included responses from 9<sup>th</sup> grade alumni (2 respondents), 10<sup>th</sup> grade alumni (7 respondents) and alumni parents (18 respondents). The report was extremely positive, with a preponderance of the responses in the 7+ (10 being highest). The group shared disappointment in the low response rate and noted that the lack of context as to what schools and/or the level of classes taken made it impossible to draw any real conclusions. In addition, members noted that the written responses in the parents' survey conveyed the most actionable feedback, but that the small number of respondents would tend to emphasize the extremes.

One suggestion was to add questions to determine whether the respondents were attending public or private schools, and what level of classes the respondents were taking (i.e. honors, college prep, skills, etc).

The committee also suggested adding a small incentive to motivate a greater response – RVCS merchandise, an RVCS alumni sticker or similar.

Andy also shared an idea that arose from his discussions with administrators in the surrounding districts: anonymous sharing of transcripts from destination public schools. Andy suggested that this might not be a difficult ask, as long as we had received permission from the students in advance. The committee suggested adding that to the end-of-year paperwork surrounding the COLs. The committee further agreed that while getting transcripts from all destination schools would be ideal, getting quantitative data from any destination school would be a significant improvement.

Andy agreed to contact other administrators in surrounding districts and check the viability of this idea.

### **MCAS**

Andy shared topline results of the most recent MCAS tests showing that RVCS students scored on-par-with or better than students in surrounding districts and/or statewide. The one exception are the 4<sup>th</sup> year Math results, where RVCS students seemed to underperform vis-à-vis surrounding district and state-wide results.

The committee expressed some concern with these results and discussed possible reasons including RVCS's emphasis on teaching math concepts rather than process, curriculum gaps vs state frameworks and/or testing anomalies due to RVCS's relatively small class size.

Andy agreed to investigate further and report back his findings to the committee.

### **Committee Leadership**

Karina Moltz and Alfred Link agreed to co-chair the committee for the remainder of the 2018/19 school year.