

**River Valley Charter School
Board of Trustees Meeting
Meeting # 292
March 21, 2023 7:00 pm**

Meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm.

In attendance:

Pam Armstrong
Erin Bradley
Nancy Durkee (arrived 7:29)
Denise Herrera
Lainie Ives
Ken Jackman
Nina Keery
Tim Letson
Catherine Martin (via telecomm)
Tanya Murdy
Erin Seaton (arrived 7:26, left 9:20)
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore
Chris Whitford (arrived 7:20)
Jonnie Lyn Evans, Director

Absent:

Amber Hewett
Alfred Link
Eric Simone

Public:

Meg Connerton

Note from the Chair:

Reminder to please not text or email other Trustees during meetings.

Vote: To approve minutes from the February Board of Trustees meeting and submitted March committee meeting minutes with listed correction.

Correction: Development Meeting Minutes: Jonnie Lyn Evans' name is spelled incorrectly.

Motion: Anna Wetmore

2nd: Denise Herrera

Yes:

Pam Armstrong
Erin Bradley

Denise Herrera
Lainie Ives
Ken Jackman
Nina Keery
Tim Letson
Catherine Martin
Tanya Murdy
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore

No:
None

Abstain:
None

Absent:
Nancy Durkee (arrived later)
Amber Hewett
Alfred Link
Erin Seaton (arrived later)
Eric Simone
Chris Whitford (arrived later)

Director's Report: Jonnie Lyn Evans presented report

The Director's Report appears in the packet. Time was allowed for questions and comments.

Additional things:

JLEvans highlights the Celebrations of Learning for those who are new to the board. Each Trustee is encouraged to attend a couple of COLs. The presentations are powerful and help us understand the end of a RVCS students' career. Colin Vandenburg will reach out with a Doodle poll. Each Trustee should choose as many as they are available for, he will then assign each Trustee two. They are generally held during the school day with a few outside of school hours as family needs dictate.

Place Based Education - Please read the article by Outdoor Educator Lynne Taylor which appeared in EdPost..

Senator Bruce Tarr visited. It is a positive connection with MA government.

TLetson - Could we please have an update on enrollment numbers?

JLEvans - It is still up in the air because all confirmations of reattendance aren't all confirmed. So far, no one has said they are leaving.

KJ - Is there a healthy cushion on the waiting list?

JLEvans - We had a depletion at grades 6, 7 and 8. We now have a handful in each grade.

We are fully enrolled. The lottery was all online via Zoom. RVCS held two information sessions after the lottery. Attendance was good as many of the accepted students' parents were not at the earlier info sessions.

PArmstrong - How did the American Montessori conference go?

JLEvans - RVCS paid for one representative from each level and Jane Patterson and JLEvans went. Attendees who went less often than JLEvans had more takeaways. The Exhibit hall was particularly useful. JLEvans was particularly energized by a lecture on connecting parents with Montessori.

TLetson - How's the transition going with finance outsourcing?

JLEvans - There have been some hiccups, but there are also opportunities. In one case, all information was not loaded properly and the intern had to do a major data entry project to make sure all of the information was entered. A lot is be learned, but it is also requiring a lot of focused attention. JLEvans is trying to figure out how to handle staff and administration that is using up sick time on Covid.

ELrose commends the school on its low Covid case count.

We could vote on August 29th as the start date of the 2023-2024 School Year. This gives a gradual start for most students. 3 days in week 1, 4 days in week 2 and 5 days in week 3.

ESeaton - It is very helpful for parents to know the return date as early as possible. School doesn't usually start after Labor Day. This makes a lot of sense. Many camps have ended and there aren't many good childcare options at that time.

KJackman - It is helpful for parents with children at multiple schools to have matching schedules.

JLEvans- It's impossible to to correlate with all sending districts. I believe we are in line with how Newburyport will start.

Vote: To approve Tuesday Aug 29, 2023 as the 2023-2024 school year start date.

Motion: Pam Armstrong

2nd: Erin Seaton

Yes:

Pam Armstrong

Erin Bradley

Nancy Durkee

Denise Herrera
Lainie Ives
Nina Keery
Tim Letson
Catherine Martin
Tanya Murdy
Erin Seaton
Albert Ting
Anna Wetmore
Chris Whitford

No:
Ken Jackman

Abstain:
None

Absent:
Amber Hewett
Alfred Link
Eric Simone

We will expect to vote on the entire calendar at the May meeting.

JLEvans - I want to inform you that there is a group of us that is meeting approximately one day a week looking at schedules, including the start date and calendar. There has been wonderful stuff we haven't been able to do due to Covid. One of the things that we are focusing on is teacher planning time. They need more time and we can't quite figure out how to give it to them. We've added specials, but it hasn't been enough. Second to compensation, this is an important way to show respect for the teachers. We are looking at that and trying to find a solution. There isn't a solution yet. They are swirling around with multiple options. An article says that the average teacher works 54 hours a week.

DHerrera - How is the planning time spent? By level or individual.

JLEvans - Both, but by level is particularly important right now. We are especially asking specialists to take on a lot.

Elrose - Who is in the group?

JLEvans - Participation was offered to everyone. The group has a decent cross section, but is missing E1 and middle. We disseminate and collect information each Friday to the representatives and that gives them a chance to share with their level and then return with feedback.

Elrose - Are you getting a sense from teachers if they'd give more time if they are paid more?

JLEvans - No, they are tapped out. Some people are working extra duty and they are being compensated.

NDurkee - Could you consider on-site child care if there is a schedule change?

JLEvans - We'd have conversations with the Boys and Girls Club and Newburyport Youth Services.

NDurkee - reiterates the importance of on-site child care to be considered to avoid disrupting family schedules.

AWetmore - What do E2 teachers do while their students are at PBE?

FLE - Assistants go to PBE, other teachers are given additional assignments helping within the school community.

TLetson - There might not be a one-size fits all solution at all levels.

JLEvans - We need to make sure that this stays equitable to all levels.

KJackman - One metric we need to keep our eye on is if this results in less teaching time right after Covid when students are already at a loss.

ESeaton - Article states that high quality instruction results with more teacher planning time.

Elrose - Reiterates the importance of on-site childcare.

ESeaton - It doesn't sound like this is a problem that is solved by bringing more people in.

JLEvans - That is accurate.

Strategic Plan Update

Strategic plan meeting notes were shared with all Trustees. The second parent meeting had one parent attendee.

JLEvans will take the feedback, make edits, share out with Trustees, then there will be another meeting with Trustees. We will receive a Doodle poll to find a time that captures the most people. There will be a call in option and it will be listed as a public meeting.

Committee on Trustees

We discussed how important it is to have a consistent process for all prospective board members and we're working on a consistent paragraph for advertising. Voting on all new board members in May seems to be the best way to handle this. We are a big group now, but will go down to 13. The committee feels that 15 is a good number to shoot for. There are also 3 members whose first term wraps up this year. It's important to have members that are not exclusively parents, which

brings up the idea of advertising in different ways.

PArmstrong - Was there talk about the committee membership?

TLetson - Suggests that committees with high membership could migrate members to another committee.

The committee asks for the support from the general membership in bringing on a student member with the understanding that we would involve them appropriately. There are still questions about what guardrails to put on them as far as voting.

CWhitford - Does it get complicated with multiple levels of participation?

NKeery - Is in total support of a full voting member that is a student.

ATing - The ask isn't to figure it out now, it is for the support for investigating how it could work.

ESeaton - As a Montessori school, we are meant to grow civically engaged students. It seems aligned with the mission and we are missing that.

PArmstrong - It would be phenomenal to have an active, engaged student representative. She believes that it is outside of our lane as it feels like a curricular issue to make it useful. She'd like it to come up from the staff or teachers. Or with the CoT working with the middle school. We are governance. It won't be successful if it's not supported with curricular engagement.

ESeaton - But there doesn't have to be a roadblock at this point because we haven't worked it all out.

Elrose - As CoT, we feel energetic in figuring this out. The question is can we look into it.

JLE - 1. She was a student representative in her school community. 2. Encourages getting the pulse from faculty. 3. Think about whether this person is representative of the student body. 4. Would love to have an RVCS graduate who is currently in HS.

NDurkee - We need an equitable recruitment process, how will we offset the power differential? The middle school is a small community.

Finance Committee

Working with Suzanne at Central Source has been nice and we're working to improve efficiency. Reducing meetings that are being held could increase that efficiency. Quarterly is probably sufficient for reviewing many of the reports. This even saves time in generating those reports for Suzanne and JLEvans.

Accountability Committee

The committee reviewed the parent survey from last year to make sure that it is up to date with current programming. There are only a few questions that need minor edits. Colin Irose has volunteered to author a follow up email after the survey is sent.

Members have brought up changing the options of choice within the survey. Next year we will begin working on this in December.

Development Committee

Parents Alliance Update - Coming up: Teacher luncheon, Playground meet ups, Clothing swap, A few events for teacher appreciation week, Family dance, Field day (running into issues with field availability). There is not much involvement in PA. People will sign up, but don't want to take the lead.

Development is the most public facing committee. Parent involvement is giving us data points, but committee hands are tied by not having the information about donors. People are confused as to what we are donating for. We need to be more transparent.

The committee is reloading and being thoughtful in taking a different tack with the third prong, volunteerism. These are great opportunities for the community to grow. We need to find a way to restart connections between families and the school. Perhaps things like having Field Day during the school day?

JLEvans - The school at large is in support of bringing the community together. The goal is figuring out how we do that.

ESeaton - It is very important to not know who donated how much. It gives a louder voice to the people who are donating.

KJackman - It's to understand why they are motivated to donate. The way that we do it now, we handicap ourselves. We can adjust our message to communicate better to the community if we know what is motivating donors.

CWhitford - It doesn't have to be what development is saying and what the other side is saying. There has to be another answer, because we do need to start raising some money. The why has to be determined in order to make changes. Why was there attendance at the event, but that attendance didn't translate into giving?

TLetson - Two things can be true. The monetary aspect is big, but someone's giving could be coming to meet JLEvans, someone's giving could be time on the playground. Open our minds and respect each side and how we can incorporate that into the plan.

TMurdy - We just need to be asking the right thing in the right way.

CWhitford - But we haven't even tried a direct ask. We could see how that goes.

NKeery - Has there been talk of hiring someone for development?

JLEvans - There hasn't been.

NKeery - Parent education nights used to be a great way to build community.

Public Comment:

None.

Vote: To adjourn.

Motion: Pam Armstrong

2nd: Chris Whitford

Yes:

Pam Armstrong

Erin Bradley

Nancy Durkee

Denise Herrera

Lainie Ives

Ken Jackman

Nina Keery

Tim Letson

Catherine Martin

Tanya Murdy

Albert Ting

Anna Wetmore

Chris Whitford

No:

None

Abstain:

None

Absent:

Amber Hewett

Alfred Link

Erin Seaton (left meeting at 9:20)

Eric Simone

9:30 pm Board adjourns.