

Approved by the Rye School Board at its August 26, 2009 meeting.

**RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT
RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

The summer planning session of the School Board of the Rye School District was held at the Portsmouth Community Campus on July 16, 2009 at 8:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

School Board Members: Ian Grant, Betty Anderson, Peggy Balboni,
Jeanne Moynahan, Mike Schwartz.

Administrators: Dr. George A. Cushing, Superintendent
Jim Katkin, Business Administrator
Chris Pollet, Principal, Rye Junior High
Patricia-Lane Richardson, Principal, Rye Elementary
Mary Lyons, Director of Pupil Services
Linda Walsh, Instruction & Curriculum Coordinator

Staff Kathleen Cole

Residents/Visitors: George Hails

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Grant called the meeting to order at 8:04 a.m.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

On a motion by Ms. Anderson and seconded by Mrs. Balboni, the public minutes of June 23, 2009 were accepted. Vote: Approved: Ms. Anderson, Mr. Grant, Mrs. Balboni, and Mrs. Moynahan. Abstained: Mr. Schwartz as he did not attend the June 23rd meeting.

On a motion by Ms. Anderson and seconded by Mr. Schwartz, the verbiage clarification regarding policy IHAM for the May 20, 2009 public minutes was accepted. Vote: unanimously approved.

The non-public minutes of June 23, 2009 were circulated for approval.

Communication

- Dr. Cushing distributed the 2009-2010 Portsmouth High School calendar.
- Dr. Cushing spoke to a letter written by John B. Andrews, Executive Director, NHMA/NHLGC; Dr. Theodore E. Comstock, Executive Director, NHSBA; and Betsy B. Miller, Executive Director/Government Relations Counsel, NHAC asking for local school board support of their lawsuit against the State of New Hampshire. The lawsuit pertains to the reduction of the state's contribution to retirement funding. The reduced state contributions will have a major impact on local budgets. Dr. Cushing said the Board does not need to take action on the request for participation in the lawsuit (suggested contribution of \$793) but that LGC is asking for support.

Dr. Cushing recommended, and the Board agreed, to hold off on any action until the August meeting.

- Dr. Cushing received a letter dated June 17, 2009 from the NH Department of Revenue indicating that all warrants, budget, minutes, and report of appropriations have been received and accepted.

FINANCIAL

Manifest: Ms. Anderson proposed, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, a motion to approve the manifest of June 19, 2009 through June 26, 2009 in the amount of \$1,503,209.00. Vote: Unanimously approved.

Mr. Grant noted the RJH pay phone showed up on the manifest and asked for an update on its removal. Mr. Pollet said the pay phone should be removed on June 17th and indicated there may be a small removal fee.

Ms. Anderson proposed, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, a motion to approve the manifest of June 27, 2009 through June 30, 2009 in the amount of \$21,494.85. Vote: Unanimously approved.

Ms. Anderson proposed, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, a motion to approve the manifest of July 1, 2009 through July 9, 2009 in the amount of \$155,801.78. Vote: Unanimously approved.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Library renovation – Mr. Pollet said the library is completely gutted. Supports are in place and the first floor should be framed by the end of next week. A few parents have walked through the space; Tim (the general contractor) has been very accommodating. For the time being, the library is working out of the cafeteria. The renovated library should be complete around early November.

Mr. Grant noted that during demolition a hole was found in a wall which needed repair with funds from the contingency fund. Mr. Grant said, generally speaking, he sees three types of classifications of repairs:

1. Critical but unknown prior – needs to be taken care of
2. Pay now or pay later
3. Wouldn't it be nice

Mr. Grant suggested because the project has come in higher than originally expected and the contingency fund is at this point coming out of the Building Maintenance Trust that the contingency is not a “use it or lose it” account and that Critical needs and maybe #2 be considered. He noted that there were some committee members that wanted to upgrade the carpet and add other things after the bids had been accepted. He felt uncomfortable with the notion that there is an open-end check on this project. There was consensus from the Board on this approach.

Mr. Schwartz said we needed to review if the Board vote in June included the full budget with contingency.

Mr. Pollet noted three other potential change orders brought to his attention were: lighting upgrade (\$840), removal of existing bead board and replace with MDF board (\$4,900), and upgrade of HVAC system (\$4,900).

Mrs. Moynahan asked if the bead board was in good condition and questioned why it would be removed if it was in good condition. Mr. Pollet said the bead board can be sanded, stripped, and repainted for use as there is nothing wrong with it.

Mr. Schwartz said he felt it best to follow the recommendation of the library committee as they are most closely connected with the space. He said we should provide the guidance that funds should be used sparingly as these three issues alone represent almost half of the contingency fund.

Mr. Grant said Mr. Katkin is getting more information on the lighting upgrade and he could really go either way on this change.

Ms. Anderson suggested that process-wise it might be most efficient to leave decisions up to Mr. Katkin and Mr. Pollet with input from Board reps.

There was Board consensus that the approved funding of \$306,164 included a \$24,000 contingency fund.

Building Maintenance

Mr. Grant stated the insulation at RJH should be complete by the end of the week. Ms. Richardson said she believes they have actually completed, or nearly completed, insulation at RES.

Mr. Grant said the electrical piece subbed out at RJH qualifies for PSNH funding. Mr. Katkin's concern is that the proposed fixtures are not much more efficient beyond changing wattage of the bulbs used. Mr. Katkin felt too much needed to happen in a very short window of time and he recommended delaying this for a year.

Ms. Anderson proposed, seconded by Mrs. Balboni, a motion to delay the electrical project at RJH for 1 year as recommended. Vote: Unanimously approved.

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS:

Mrs. Lyons introduced George Hails who is interning with her through the fall as he pursues his degree in special education administration.

OTHER:

Ms. Anderson stated that, during the budget process, she suggested removing funding for someone to take the Board monthly minutes and offered that she could do that instead. After much thought, she is unable to volunteer that time and would like the Board to reconsider funding for the taking of Board minutes. Ms. Balboni stated that she would take them, but feels if a Board member is taking minutes, their participating in the meeting is somewhat diminished.

Mr. Schwartz made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, to add money back to the budget line for the same amount as the 2008-09 school year to allow for someone to take minutes at the monthly Board meetings. Vote: Approved: Ms. Anderson, Mrs. Balboni, Mrs. Moynahan, and Mr. Schwartz. Opposed: Mr. Grant.

NEW BUSINESS:

Ms. Anderson mentioned the possibility of property behind RJH coming up for sale and discussion followed about the school district considering purchase of this land if it were to go on the market.

Special Education Report – Mrs. Lyons distributed her report with financials. Mrs. Moynahan asked what the difference was between a student who has been “discharged” and a student who “no longer needs services”. Mrs. Lyons stated a discharged student has moved out of district and a student who longer needs services is just that – the student doesn’t need services any longer.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION:

None

SECRETARY’S REPORT *continued:*

On a motion by Ms. Anderson and seconded by Mrs. Balboni, the non-public minutes of June 23, 2009 were accepted. Vote: Approved: Ms. Anderson, Mr. Grant, Mrs. Balboni, and Mrs. Moynahan.

Abstained: Mr. Schwartz as he did not attend the June 23rd meeting.

The Board took a brief recess from 8:55 to 9:00 a.m.

OPENING OF RETREAT:

Mr. Grant opened up the retreat portion of the meeting at 9:00 a.m. He provided a brief summation on a great year within the Rye School District. He noted the following: the great efforts of teachers, staff, administration and parents as part of the NEASC approval process; Mr. Pollet is finding his stride with 2 years behind him now as RJH principal; Ms. Richardson continues to provide great leadership at RES; Mr. Katkin has taken on many projects for us and led the team to clarify the agreement with PHS which realized significant savings for the school. All in addition to his regular responsibilities; Mrs. Lyons has done much with special education and at PHS clarification agreement; Mrs. Walsh fought a courageous health battle and has begun to work on many accomplishments in 6 months that others may have done in 12 months; and Dr. Cushing showed great focus given the number of issues he dealt with.

He said for the Board there were many healthy discussions and some disagreements but all worked with the end goal of getting the schools to be the best possible.

Dr. Cushing said we have been through a lot over the years but have really come together as a team and, as part of that, challenged each other. Dr. Cushing also noted Mr. Collins is hiring a psychologist for PHS as a result of the AREA agreement we signed with them.

DINI Plan and Math discussion:

Mrs. Walsh is working with administrators on a district in need of improvement (DINI) plan. She said she looks at DINI as an opportunity to look at what we practice and look for ways we can do things better. It provides the opportunity to analyze where we are and look where we need to go.

Mrs. Walsh said we have an opportunity for a planning grant up to \$4,000 as part of DINI and Mr. Katkin is preparing the financial part of that. The grant runs from the date of application to September 15, 2009 and is for planning only. The grant can be used for paying for subs, staffing as part of planning, supplies, outside facilitator, food/beverage for the committee, etc. Mrs. Walsh spoke with Steve Zadravec about using an outside facilitator and he said it was helpful but he wasn’t convinced it was necessarily worth the money. Mr. Zadravec offered to serve as an unpaid consultant for us if we wanted. Mrs. Balboni said Mr. Zadravec would be a valuable resource for Mrs. Walsh during this process as he was instrumental in the development and implementation of the DINI plan in Portsmouth.

Mr. Schwartz asked if special education is the primary focus of the DINI plan since the area that lead to our DINI status was our special education subgroup. Mrs. Walsh said the focus is on the whole school as some non-proficient students were not special education-identified students.

Mrs. Lyons added that there is a special focus on special education such as stimulus funds will be used for the summer math camp program which, though inclusive, targets special education needs.

Mr. Pollet said he included students 'on the cusp' for the math camp. He had a list of 35 kids and has already received 16 positive responses. The program will run from 9:00 – 12:00 noon with 2 hours of specific math work and 1 hour of application. All three RJH math teachers are participating. Mrs. Walsh noted the participation of all three teachers speaks to their commitment to the students.

Mr. Grant asked if student participation is mandatory and how will 'no-shows' be handled? Mrs. Lyons said there are always issues with the matter of attendance but she is hopeful that having the program before the school year and pointing out that the efforts will continue during the school year will help.

Mr. Schwartz feels like this is a great offering for students.

Mrs. Walsh went over the handout explaining the two phases of the DINI plan. Phase 1: Abstract (due August 6, 2009) and Phase 2: Strategies and Implementation (due September 18, 2009).

Mrs. Walsh is hoping to have a grade specific math curriculum checklist for teachers as a way to align curriculum. Mrs. Lyons said this is a terrific way to present the information to the teachers and Mrs. Walsh added that the idea for these checklists came as a direct result of input from the teachers during professional learning community meetings.

Additionally Mrs. Walsh noted that student schedules at RJH will have an extra block for students to get extra help or high-achieving students will be able to work on extra assignments for a challenge. This will allow for a very personalized approach.

Mr. Pollet said the first five weeks of school will be partially dedicated to NECAP preparation. He will then determine how schedules will look after NECAP. Some schedules may need to be re-arranged to address the needs of the students. Mr. Pollet is working with Learning Tree Consultants on options of how to make the most of team meeting time. He said this year was a tough time to tackle this issue with NEASC accreditation going on. He feels using the consulting company will be invaluable.

Ms. Richardson agreed that, with the NEASC process behind, us there will be more time this year to focus on personalized education. Ms. Richardson said it has been great working with Mrs. Walsh as she is professional, knowledgeable, and has very strong work ethics.

Ms. Anderson noted she could feel the energy and enthusiasm the Administrators have for addressing the DINI plan and for further personalizing education. Ms. Anderson further said she appreciated Mrs. Walsh's attitude and actions.

Mrs. Balboni said she is very glad to hear that part of the plan is to provide challenging opportunities for highly successful students as well as those that have some academic struggles.

Mr. Grant noted that the special education piece of curriculum night was a huge hit with parents and suggested a presentation be given at curriculum nights about the DINI plan and the other goals the schools are taking on. He also asked how we will collectively know if the DINI plan is a success.

Mrs. Walsh said there is an evaluation piece at the end and she suspects there is a report back as part of that.

Mr. Grant asked how the district gets out of DINI. Mrs. Walsh said the district must make Average Yearly Progress (AYP) two years in a row. Part of the challenge being the standards within subgroups keeps changing.

Mrs. Moynahan thanked Mrs. Walsh for collecting the information which allows for Board discussion with parents and town's people who ask about not making AYP.

MATH TRAILBLAZERS:

Ms. Chagnon created a report spurred by questions about the math program at previous Board meetings. Ms. Chagnon worked with students in grade 2 and those students' math grades subsequently improved. The Board reviewed and discussed Ms. Chagnon's report which highlighted the positives about Math Trailblazers but also gave suggestions for filling the gaps in the program as is the case with all math programs. Mr. Schwartz said she produced a great report and he particularly appreciated her feedback on Singapore Math which stated that it has significant deficiencies. Mrs. Balboni offered her compliments to Ms. Chagnon for this report. She then asked Mrs. Walsh if she planned on incorporating some of the information from Ms. Chagnon's report into the grade level charts for teachers; perhaps "Recommendations from the Math Specialist" section. Mrs. Walsh noted typical computation, as highlighted by Ms. Chagnon, is an identified area of needing additional attention.

Mr. Grant asked about what is being done at RJH to improve the math program.

Mr. Pollet said part of the problem is the chosen material. Sixth grade math instruction has struggled for a number of years and just two years ago the students had 4 teachers in just one year. That turnover was disruptive for students and learning. The Learning Compact will help teachers prepare and adjust for students. There are two new math teachers who are energized to work with the veteran math teacher. Summer math camp will further help prepare students and set the table for the new year. More timed-tests with peers are part of the plan as well. Hopefully we'll see 7th grade math scores improve.

Mrs. Lyons said just having the math curriculum solidified will be invaluable for the teachers. The "Professional Learning Community" (PLC) meetings provided an opportunity for the teachers from all four districts to talk amongst themselves and discuss the components they were responsible for within their grade.

NEASC Survey and Parent Survey Results:

Ms. Richardson stated that, in her report, she tried to align NEASC recommendations with parent survey results; she noted that she had the advantage of having received the NEASC report for her school. Ms. Richardson said that one of the two staff meetings per month will focus on curriculum or technology training.

Mr. Pollet said there is still a misperception within the building about staff meetings. He feels it is critical to clearly state the purpose of the meeting upfront. RJH currently has 3 staff meetings each month.

Mr. Pollet did not have the NEASC report for his school when creating his summary report. He stated that next year he would like the survey to have categories other than "very satisfied" and "somewhat

satisfied” as he feels there is a huge difference between the two. Mr. Pollet said it is clear RJH needs to demonstrate to the community what they are teaching and how students are progressing.

In response to a comment by Ms. Anderson about ideas for further communicating, Mr. Pollet agreed a two-pronged approach with a team presentation by teachers about their curriculum and overall grade-level skill accomplishments as well as individual class time on curriculum night would be a good idea. He feels this two-fold approach would be successful at the open house. Ms. Anderson agreed and feels it would provide a better showcase. Ms. Balboni stated that teachers do a good job at this individually in their classrooms on curriculum night but also agreed that a group presentation would add to the impact.

Ms. Richardson stated adding the reading and math specialists to the open house presentation at RES worked well.

Mrs. Balboni suggested asking Ms. Costanzo to be part of the RJH open house and have her speak to the timeline and required actions for students applying to both the Portsmouth honors program and private high school. She feels providing this information to parents in the fall would be very helpful for future planning.

Ms. Richardson spoke to the end/action plan from NEASC. She said the school appoints an action plan committee and then divides the plan into groups preparing for the 5-year plan.

Mr. Pollet said the NEASC accreditation process validates much of what we’re already talked about. Many strategies were already under way within our school so when those came up in the self study, we were all set.

Instruction is an area we have to keep assessing and evaluating. Dr. Cushing said that once we have the NEASC reports, we can create action steps to move forward.

Ms. Richardson said she had a tough time incorporating data from the parent survey and she may need to re-evaluate the survey next year.

Mrs. Balboni thinks the summary of the parent surveys presented by the principals is perfect. Mr. Grant thinks it was valuable to actually see all answers on the parent survey because there was more of a sense of what parent were thinking beyond just a checked box. Amazing insights were provided. He supports continuing to take names of students out of the comments as it has no impact on the core comments. Mr. Schwartz feels strongly the Board should not see specific responses; he feels it is valuable information but it should be kept with the principals.

Mr. Pollet thinks the parent surveys should be kept less open-ended and that we should tailor questions to get information on specific topics. The encouraging thing for Mr. Pollet was the overall feeling of RJH being a positive environment. He also followed up with parents on specific questions/responses. He said this was a beneficial process and he learned a lot about how to conduct a survey.

Mr. Grant noted that from the surveys in both schools there is a certain population of students that are not being challenged enough. How do we challenge kids that excel? He also suggested we not lump ‘very satisfied’ with ‘somewhat satisfied’ when summarizing the responses as it was probably not representational. Mr. Grant noted that under the question “Is the school climate positive” 81.2% said “strongly agree” at RES and “59.7% at RJH. This indicates that people clearly were comfortable giving the highest ratings in questions. Mr. Grant also pointed out that on the question “Is your child challenged

this past year academically” only 39% are “very satisfied” at RJH and 60.6% at RES. Also notable was the ratings for “Satisfaction your child did in language this year” only 35.2% said “very satisfied” and in science only 37.5% RJH and 44.5% at RES. These were the only areas under 50%.

Mr. Schwartz said these are good questions but what is our goal? Are we looking for 70% of parents to feel their students are academically challenged? Or more than that? He stated we should use the surveys to help identify those areas that are lower and add to the goals. He pointed out that there were several areas scoring lower in regards to parents’ belief that their student is challenged. He recommended that we identify goals for these areas – e.g. improve satisfaction by 5%. He stated that is might not be the case of being challenged, it may be communication, but regardless, it would be a good goal to strive for and increase the satisfaction.

Mr. Pollet said it is also partly parental perception. Mr. Grant said anecdotally parents go into the classroom to speak to the teacher and raise awareness of the need to challenge a student. How do you create opportunities for parents to bring this need up? Mr. Pollet said we could ask teachers at what depth are they challenging students.

Dr. Cushing said you have to consider if it is just acceleration you are looking for or are looking to determine what is the trigger that makes a student want to do more? We are providing a strong foundation.

Mr. Grant said there is part of the student population that is not being challenged and that needs to be addressed.

Mrs. Lyons asked if it would be fair to use the survey as a baseline and look for improvement in future survey results.

Mr. Schwartz said, with the Learning Compact in mind, that by meeting with parents and students, teachers will help form a group consensus of a goal for each student.

Mrs. Balboni said that having two kids go through RJH and onto other schools, there is a misconception that A’s and B’s in junior high make a student a shoe-in for admission to a private school. That is definitely not the case.

Mr. Pollet said this point was brought up in the parent survey. He said the goal is to maximize the potential of every student at RJH. This leads to some hard discussions that need to happen.

Ms. Richardson said she had to talk with teachers about report cards. Some teachers are afraid of parent reactions to grades.

Mrs. Walsh said if you give a student a ‘B’ you have to be able to support that; so sometimes it is easier for a teacher to give an ‘A’.

Mr. Grant said the beginning of the year, January/February, and the spring are probably the best times to seek input from parents and the Learning Compact is a great vehicle by which to do that.

Mrs. Walsh said we also want a child to realize they can take a risk and take a more challenging course but they need to realize they might not get an ‘A’.

The Board took a brief recess from 10:42 to 10:52 a.m.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION:

Mrs. Moynahan proposed, seconded by Mr. Schwartz, a motion to go into non-public session at 10:52 a.m. to discuss negotiations. Unanimously approved on a role call vote.

PUBLIC SESSION:

The board returned to public session at 11:20 a.m.

2009/2010 GOALS:

Mr. Grant stated that the goal is to finalize 2009-2010 goals prior to the start of the school year.

Curriculum:

Implement NEASC recommendations as it applies to all Rye School District goal categories - After discussion there was Board consensus for the principals to revise their NEASC identified goals and attach as an appendix to the school district goals.

Mr. Schwartz suggested we also look at the metrics he and Mr. Southworth put together. He mentioned the metrics showing a large number of high school students receiving Ds and Es. He also noted a large number of students missing more than 10 days of school. Ms. Richardson said that RES has a goal of improving attendance (average daily membership) which has been an ongoing problem. Ms. Anderson ask if, given this issue relates to AYP, could parents coordinate with the principal for ‘real-world learning’ experience credit when taking a vacation during school time? Ms. Richardson stated the bigger issue is families taking Fridays or Mondays off.

District in Need of Improvement Plan will be added as new goal.

Implement Learning Compact and Investigate adventure based learning will remain as a goals.

Core Curriculum documents – this goal will remain until the documents are aligned with New Hampshire state standards. Mrs. Balboni mentioned that, in terms of communicating with parents, Mrs. Walsh had proposed creating curriculum pamphlets.

Promotion and preparation for college planning documents for students and parents and Implement fully school-sponsored DI program were eliminated as goals.

Communication

Expand role of parents at RJH through the PTA was added as a goal.

Improve the RJH report cards to be ‘standards-based’ to better understand what students have learned and reflect what a child has learned/mastered – remained as a goal as it will be rolled out in 2009-2010 school year.

Consolidate RES and RJH parent/teacher handbooks- removed as completed goal.

Metrics – identify metric categories, collect data, and identify goals based on the data, was proposed as a goal.

Leadership & Organization

Revise annual parent survey/review of RES and RJH was added as goal.

Participate in the selection process of SAU 52 Superintendent – removed as completed goal.

Continue to foster a relationship with UNH to take advantage of their student internship – removed as goal; ongoing.

Budget

Negotiate new teacher contract – added as goal

Negotiate new bus contract, Increase identification of potential bidders for school projects, and Coordination of funding priorities of PTA, REF, and School Board – removed as completed goals

Explore early retirement incentives – remains as goal

Assessment & Accountability

Change goal category to **Accountability**

Mrs. Balboni suggested a self-assessment goal for the Rye School Board. Ms. Anderson suggested that Board members receive their ultimate assessment on election day.

Ms. Anderson would like to have goals set using real data. For example, get high school world language data (public and private) to see the level of 9th grade placement, how many students switch languages in high school and why, if the student does well in the level placed, etc. If the results are good, there is no goal. If not, there should be a goal for improvement.

Mrs. Lyons stated that the world language core documents might be helpful to the teachers as guidance going forward. Ms. Anderson agreed that common assessment certainly might help but the data piece is important as well.

Mr. Grant said investing six years of foreign language for our students would lead you to believe our students would place into higher level upon entrance to high school.

The following goals remained:

Update and create written job descriptions for K-8

Review K-12 data metrics for tracking trends

Review Student Information System

SPED program assessment was removed as a completed goal.

NEW GOALS:

Based on survey results and feedback it was determined to create a goal to increase the number of students who are truly challenged academically within our schools. A goal would be created about satisfaction with the world language program. Additionally a goal would be created about metrics to help determine further goal focus areas. Mr. Grant would draft the language as part of the Curriculum goal section.

Mr. Grant said he would provide a draft of the agreed upon goals for review prior to the August meeting.

NEXT MEETING:

The next regular scheduled meeting of the Rye School Board will be Wednesday, August 26, 2009 at 5:30 p.m. at Rye Elementary School.

ADJOURN:

Mrs. Moynahan proposed, seconded by Mr. Schwartz, a motion to adjourn at 12:48 p.m. Vote: Unanimously approved.

School Board Secretary