

Approved by the Rye School Board at its December 16, 2009 meeting.

**RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT
RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

The monthly meeting of the School Board of the Rye School District was held at Rye Junior High School on November 18, 2009 at 6:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

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

Administrators: Dr. George A. Cushing, Superintendent
Chris Pollet, Principal, Rye Junior High
Patricia-Lane Richardson, Principal, Rye Elementary

Staff: Kathleen Cole, Jeanne Brown, Sheila Adams, Phoebe Guarnaccia,
Ron Fortier

Visitors: Andrea Swanson, Rose Fecteau, parents
Two RJH students

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Grant called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

On a motion by Mrs. Moynahan and seconded by Mr. Schwartz, the public minutes of October 21, 2009 were unanimously approved as amended.

The non-public minutes of October 21, 2009 were circulated among Board members for review.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Dr. Cushing shared a letter from the Portsmouth Herald regarding the recent "moving and dignified" Veteran's Day ceremony. The letter noted the poignant opening remarks by Mr. Pollet and credited the students beautiful songs, presentations, and slide show.

Mr. Grant said he received an email from a Rye taxpayer who asked that it be shared with the Board. He said that the email was also addressed to the newspapers and Rye selectman Joe Mills. The email expressed significant issue with the pending request for a sabbatical by a RJH teacher stating that it was not a good use of taxpayer money in this economy to pay someone not to teach.

REPORTS:

Superintendent's Report

As follow up to the October 9th Professional Development day where Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were the topic, Dr. Dennis King presented a workshop for SAU 50 administrators on November 3rd and then on November 4th he presented the same workshop to teacher team leaders from SAU 50. Dr. King did a wonderful job in presenting information in a clear, sequential way to help us all understand the power and promise of PLCs on student learning.

At the November 3rd session, the administration worked through the presentation to the teachers with Dr. King. There was a good exchange of information as to what a professional learning community could do to meet the needs of SAU #50. On Tuesday, with the focus on SAU 50 goals, Dr. King took the teacher team leaders through his exercises.

The Learning Compact epitomizes what Dr. King talks about when he says our focus must always be the individual student and how to move each child to proficient and then on to advanced.

The November 4th day with teachers went well. There were lots of discussions and real concrete examples and group time to help participants understand how to facilitate PLC meetings. The goal is that focused meetings about students will happen at the school by grade-level.

Emergency Management Meeting

Dr. Cushing attended an emergency management meeting on November 18th and provided the following highlights:

- There is another wave of H1N1 virus expected by spring
- Some area hospitals are putting restrictions on visitors
- Dr. Snow has been hired as an H1N1 advisor to the Seacoast area emergency management team
- 4,500 individuals (65%) of tier 1 people have been vaccinated.
- Rye is considering a clinic in January

Southeasters Meeting

At a recent meeting of superintendents from southeastern, NH, the superintendents heard from a representative of the Local Government Center. He described the increasing medical costs as the 'perfect storm' with insurance costs rising and people seeking more health care services.

Director of Pupil Services Report

Dr. Cushing distributed Mrs. Lyons, Director of Pupil Services report and said the negative balance shown was due to a high school student placed out-of-district.

Principal's Report

Rye Elementary School – Lane Richardson

Highlights of Ms. Richardson's report include:

- All teachers are completing the Learning Compact form for two designated students in each class and this will be an important part of the upcoming parent-teacher conferences.
- Seabrook siren test went well
- There have been 7 new students enrolled in RES: K-1; grade one – 2; grade two 1, grade three – 2; and grade five – 1.
- Beautiful new flagpole is in place
- Mrs. Gianforte, with support of an REF grant, coordinated a "Day at the Coast" on November 6th with 28 UNH docents visiting 3rd and 4th grade classrooms with exhibits set up to study seaweed, rocky shores, salt marshes, plate tectonics, lobsters, marine mammals, and sandy beaches.
- Mrs. Maloney, the new guidance counselor, has really 'hit the road running'
- REF grants – there has been \$11,470.95 in grant requests submitted to REF

Rye Junior High School – Chris Pollet

Mr. Pollet wanted to further acknowledge the outstanding student presentations and performances and Mrs. Michelle Wirth for her part in coordinating the third annual Veteran's Day ceremony. He also shared a letter from Chief Sullivan regarding the ceremony.

Mr. Pollet noted the RJH Harvest Moon Festival was held last week at the school. He thanked Ron Fortier and Mary Coombs for initiating the discussion for the Harvest Moon Festival last year and credited the many teachers for their contribution to this successful school and community-wide celebration.

The eighth graders spent a morning with the Pease Greeters welcoming about 300 soldiers back from a tour in northern Iraq as they were on their way back to Fort Hood. The 8th grade band played patriotic marches while the soldiers crossed down the Heroes Walk. The students then distributed bags of Halloween candy collected by the student council. The students had an opportunity to speak with the soldiers and learn a bit about who they were and how they were serving us.

Goals update – Mr. Pollet reported that the Rye world language department has met with the PHS world language department to discuss Rye students' success at PHS. He reported that many freshmen from Rye are ahead of other freshmen at PHS. Any gaps in the material used at RJH are supplemented at the end of the eighth grade year with additional resources offered over the summer. Two additional meetings are planned for this school year.

Mr. Pollet attended a District in Need of Improvement (DINI) meeting in Concord. He said there are 52 DINI school districts statewide; 20 of them are single school districts. He said the meeting provided an opportunity to network and share practices.

As follow up to the world language goal, Mr. Schwartz asked if part of the issue/goal was that parents didn't feel students were challenged.

Mr. Pollet said it is more of an issue of improving perception of the program. He feels the true measure of success is how the students do when they move on.

Mr. Grant asked if we are talking to Phillips Exeter Academy, St. Thomas and Berwick Academy as well as PHS. Mr. Pollet answered "no, but we probably should".

Mr. Schwartz asked Mr. Pollet if he spoke with parents with open responses to the world language related questions in the parent survey. Mr. Pollet said he did follow up with those parents which is why he took this track as follow up.

Mr. Grant stated that the world language program starts much earlier for students in Rye yet the jumping off point seems to be the same as other districts; which begs the question if Rye is investing the money in the program earlier should the Rye students be slightly ahead of those from other districts?

Mrs. Balboni pointed out that foreign language is often taught differently at different schools.

Mrs. Brown said she asked PHS world language staff if there is anything more RJH staff can do to prepare the students and they said "no". Mrs. Brown provides all students with a packet of information before they move on to high school. She expressed dismay that there was a goal established around world language noting no one has consulted with her or come to her with questions in response to the parent survey.

Ms. Richardson stated that she has had conversations with at least two parents in regards to making the language program better. The RES the team has started to increase the rigor and provide homework assignments. She said there would be a request for enhanced materials in the budget. In addition, the team was starting to speak with other districts to understand what they do.

Mrs. Balboni suggested that Mr. Pollet could communicate with parents who ask for information. Mr. Pollet said it is important to note that when parents come to him with a concern/issue he first checks to see if they have spoken with the teacher/coach involved first.

Mrs. Balboni noted that the middle school philosophy provides less parent involvement in the daily classroom activities so there are fewer opportunities for parents to informally speak with middle school teachers about issues.

Ms. Anderson feels the data regarding world language program should include private schools as more than 30% of Rye's students go to private high schools. She said that relying on the opinion of PHS teachers is not enough and that the data gathered, while good, needs to be more thorough for parents to form their own opinions based on facts. She believes the reason foreign language continues to be discussed as an area of concern for parents is that clear, comprehensive data on how Rye's students do in high school has not been gathered or communicated. Mrs. Moynahan stated that she has had children at Portsmouth High School in the 80's, 90's and 2000's and all did extremely well in French having received their foundation at RJH.

Mr. Schwartz clarified that it was the RES survey that raised the issue that parents perceive world language needs to be more challenging for students.

Mr. Pollet noted that he has been contacted by an Eagle Scout candidate regarding a possible project at RJH. Mr. Pollet will provide more information as it becomes available and then ask the Scout to make a presentation to the Board for consideration.

FINANCIAL

Manifest:

Mrs. Moynahan proposed, seconded by Mrs. Balboni, a motion to approve the manifest of October 20, 2009 through November 3, 2009 in the amount of \$594,761.34. Motion carried on a unanimous roll call vote.

Mrs. Moynahan proposed, seconded by Mrs. Balboni, a motion to approve the manifest of November 4, 2009 through November 13, 2009 in the amount of \$314,587.49. Motion carried on a unanimous roll call vote.

Mrs. Balboni asked about payments made on behalf of the RJH library renovation. She confirmed with Mr. Grant that these payments had been discussed with the budget committee and that the checks had been held until completion of the project.

Mr. Grant asked about checks for Merrowvista drawn from the student services activity account. Mr. Pollet will confirm that those monies are from parent donations to help with offset expenses for families in need.

Other

Mr. Grant thanked Ms. Anderson for outlining the budget process in the brochure that was posted on the school websites and distributed to parents.

It was suggested that the summary of the school budget be posted online as well. Mrs. Balboni noted the budget committee would appreciate having the summary prior to the December 9th meeting. Mrs. Moynahan suggested that we give the summary that Jim does for the public hearing. Ms. Anderson suggested posting the 31-pages from Section 8 of the preliminary budget book (section 4 of the proposed budget book).

Dr. Cushing again distributed a request for a sabbatical from an RJH teacher and the justification for the request. This will be discussed further at the November 19th budget meeting.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Calendar of Policy Action

None

Non-resident request for kindergarten

Ms. Anderson made a motion, seconded by Mr. Schwartz, to allow Vicki Scally's child to attend kindergarten at RES for the 2010-2011 school year for the tuition amount of \$5,000. Vote: Unanimously approved.

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS:

Mrs. Cole made a general comment on the positive parent/teacher conferences she has had recently.

RJH student #1 – The 7th grade student asked if there were more class field trips in the budget for her class. Mr. Pollet responded that a trip to Strawberry Banke is planned and that the teachers have some additional trips under discussion as surprises for the students.

RJH student #2 – The student asked if it was possible for the 7th grade class to do some fundraising for a multi-day trip to Merrowvista as 8th graders. Mr. Pollet suggested a meeting with students, teachers, and the superintendent to come up with a possible proposal/plan.

STANDING COMMITTEES:

Policies

None

Physical Plant

RJH Library – Ms. Anderson asked if there was still a plan to put plexi glass over the windows in the new second floor room of the library to guard against noise traveling between the two levels. Mr. Pollet confirmed that plan.

Special Issues

Ms. Anderson reported there was not much news from the November 5th meeting and noted that she had distributed the budget process document at the meeting.

REF

Grants are being reviewed.

PHS

Portsmouth High School – Mr. Grant provided highlights from the Secondary Advisory meeting which included:

- Discussion of the 7 point grading system vs. 10 point grading system
- 30 students participated in summer school/clipper camp
- There are 1,048 students at PHS; 350 participate in sports, 104 in chorus, and 86 in band.
- The Madrigal singers are participating in an exchange program with Japan
- 58% of parents now have passwords allowing access to the parent portal
- There is a 100% participation goal for Celebration Graduation
- 13 students are going on a trip to western Spain as part of a partnership PHS has with Spain

- The guidance department has new software which will allow them to profile students, track test scores, and assist in matching students with colleges.

Portsmouth Calendar – there was discussion regarding the parent/staff survey Portsmouth sent out for input on the school vacation schedule as they prepare their 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 calendars. After speaking with Mr. Zdravec, Dr. Cushing is confident the vacation schedule will stay as it has in the past. The Portsmouth calendar will be sent to all parents once it has been finalized.

PTA

Membership stands at 170 with \$13,000 in funds.

Rye Recreation

The after school program is going better than ever. Mr. Sawtell is doing a great job and is a very strong communicator.

Communication

Mrs. Balboni and Mrs. Moynahan met with staff at RES and two issues arose:

1. Staff stressed the importance of student attendance at school and identified an ongoing problem with students absent from school for extended and unscheduled vacations at RES.

Discussion followed regarding possible solutions. Ms. Anderson proposed it best to address issues with individual families as needed rather than sending out a blanket notice to all parents. Mr. Grant suggested having the school secretary track to provide detail for the principals.

The Board offered its full support to the principals to follow up with families as appropriate to address attendance issues.

2. The teachers are feeling somewhat overwhelmed with the Learning Compact, 6 traits of writing, PLC's and NEASC recommendations.

The teachers would appreciate the addition of two half-days (early release or late start) for professional development. Mrs. Balboni said she would follow up with the Professional Learning Advisory Committee. Mr. Grant said he understands the number of initiatives but feels they are unique. Mrs. Balboni added that the PLCs are really just ways to run effective meetings and need not be work-intensive; hopefully the teachers become more comfortable with PLC's after receiving more training and experience.

Ms. Anderson said her greatest concern with half-days is the disruption it creates for working parents. She is supportive of the teachers' need for more time to manage the demands placed upon them. She encouraged the administrators to think of other solutions rather than ½ days, and feels it is something the Board should talk further about.

Dr. Cushing suggested further discussion at the January meeting when the school calendars are discussed.

Curriculum

Portsmouth is updating their master plan.

Budget Committee

Mrs. Balboni echoed Mr. Grant's earlier thanks to Ms. Anderson for preparing the budget process documents. She said the budget committee appreciated the opportunity to provide input.

Mrs. Balboni met with the budget committee. Many budgets are down within the town; the Police budget is up 3%, the Fire budget is up 2%. Neither of those budgets included warrant items.

NEW BUSINESS:

Warrant article discussion – Ms. Anderson put forth the idea (for future consideration) of a warrant article to change from an SB2 format to that of town meeting for the School District. History shows it may not likely pass, but it could generate some productive discussion and help with voter turnout.

Mr. Grant feels neither the SB2 nor town meeting format is perfect. He feels the SB2 format allows for greater participation of the town residents.

SECRETARY'S REPORT *continued*:

On a motion by Mr. Schwartz, and seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, the non-public minutes of October 21, 2009 were unanimously approved.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION:

On a motion by Mrs. Moynahan, seconded by Mr. Schwartz, the School Board entered non-public session at 7:44 p.m. on a unanimous roll call vote and in accordance with RSA 91-A:4 to discuss negotiations.

PUBLIC SESSION:

The Board returned to public session on a roll call vote at 8:15 p.m.

ADJOURN:

Mr. Schwartz proposed a motion, seconded by Mrs. Moynahan, to adjourn at 8:15 p.m.

School Board Secretary