

**RUTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS
MAY 28, 2013**

School Board Members Present:

Daniel Alcorn
Hurley Cavacas, Jr. (6:32 pm)
Wayne Cooke
Richard Courcelle
Peter Fagan
Erin Shimp
Kate Thomas
Lena Cohen

Members Absent

Peter Mello
Rob Kurchena
Patricia Aigner
Jamie Pemrick
Rob Towle

Also Present:

Superintendent Mary Moran
Assistant Superintendent Rob Bliss
Wil Cunningham
Peter Amons
Bill Olsen
Susanne Engels
Glenn Olson
Steve Sampson
Cathy Farman
Nicole Carter

**CALL TO
ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Clerk Courcelle noted the absence of Commissioners Mello, Cavacas, Kurchena, Pemrick, and Towle. Mr. Courcelle said there is a quorum. He said has made changes in the order of items on the agenda.

ROLL CALL

**MOTION:
MINUTES
05/14/13
MEETING**

Motion by Fagan /Shimp to accept the minutes of the May 14, 2013 regular school board meeting as written. Motion passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

**WRITTEN &
ORAL
COMMUN-
ICATIONS**

Written and Oral Communications - None

PERSONNEL

Motion by Fagan / Cooke to approve the Licensed and Non-licensed section of the Personnel Memorandum No. 483 dated May 24, 2013, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.

**MOTION:
PERSONNEL
MEMO #483**

The appointments and resignations were reviewed by Superintendent Moran. They are attached.

Motion passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

**FY14 NON-
ALIGNED
SALARY
INCREASES**

FY 14 Non-Aligned Salary Increases - Ms. Moran said these are employees not covered by any labor agreement or which are part-time positions. They are paying a high percentage of their health insurance and city pension contributions. The recommendation is for a 2.8% salary increase with a minor adjustment for one employee.

Motion by Cavacas / Fagan to approve the 2.8% salary increase for non-aligned employees for FY 14 and adjustment of the high school secretary's salary, no adjustments to health insurance or city pension contributions, all as presented. Motion passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

**MOTION:
APPROVE
SALARY
INCREASES
FOR FY14
NON-
ALIGNED**

Contingency Items - Mr. Amons reviewed the requests. The first is for an additional PA system implementation at RIS / RMS. Ms. Moran said this is in line with our safety planning. Mr. Amons said there is an old walk-in refrigerator at Longfellow which does not work. The national school lunch program has a walk-in freezer available to us which would enable the district to receive excess government surplus food. It will cost \$5,000 for the conversion. Sodexo has said they will make use of all the food.

**BUSINESS
REPORT**

**CONTIN-
GENCY
ITEMS**

Motion by Cooke / Fagan that the Board of School Commissioners approve charging the FY13 contingency account expenditures of \$37,082 for additional PA system implementation at RIS / RMS and the conversion of a walk-in refrigerator to a walk-in freezer at Longfellow.

**MOTION:
APPROVE
FY13
CONTIN-
GENCY
EXPENDI-
TURES**

Commissioner Cooke said these requests were discussed at the building committee and they support it. Mr. Amons said regarding any surplus in contingency in the current fiscal year, he does not separate out excesses by line item. He said we forecast a general surplus or deficit which gets rolled over. This year we will use all of the contingency, which we have not done for a few years. Mr. Cooke said the PA system is part of the ongoing safety plan.

Motion passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

Bus Bid - Mr. Amons said we have 20 buses and each bus lasts about ten years. We buy or lease two buses a year. Mr. Rice put it out to bid. DATTCO is the exclusive New England dealer of International Buses. Mr. Amons said we prefer to stay with the same fleet for ease in repair and maintenance..

BUS BID

Motion by Cavacas / Fagan that Rutland Public Schools purchase, and subsequently lease, two 71 passenger school buses from DATTCO of New Britain CT for a total sum of \$168,998.

**MOTION:
APPROVE
PURCHASE /
LEASE OF
TWO BUSES**

Mr. Cooke said this was discussed at the building committee and they support the recommendation and keeping the fleet uniform. Mr. Amons said the plan is to buy and pay for the two buses and then finance the purchase over three years through a leasing agent. Municipal Leasing Consultants will find us a bank. He said it will cost \$60,000 per year for three years.

Motion passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

Recognize Outgoing Student Representative - Mr. Courcelle acknowledged and thanked Lena Cohen for her service to the School Board. Lena thanked the Board and said she has had a great experience and has learned a lot. Ms. Moran said Lena recently helped develop a workshop for the Vermont Superintendent's Annual Conference.

**RECOGNIZE
OUTGOING
AND
INCOMING
STUDENT
REPRESENT-
TIVES TO
THE
SCHOOL
BOARD**

Welcome New Student Representative - Cooper Babbitt, the new Student Representative was introduced and welcomed. Mr. Olsen said Cooper is a great RHS student and will be an excellent addition to the Board. Lena said she has worked with Cooper all year on the Student Senate and other committees and thinks he will do a great job. Cooper said he is excited to represent the student body and be a part of the Board.

Announcements

- Lena said today was the last day of classes at the high school. After a couple of days of exams, YES plan begins on Monday. AP Spanish students have been traveling to RIS to teach about Spanish culture. The Encore awards will be held later this week.
- Ms. Moran presented the Raiders of the Arts, the literary and visual arts publication.
- Friday was the yearbook dedication ceremony, in which the yearbook was presented and distributed at an assembly. The book was dedicated to Carly Ferro. Ms. Moran thanked the yearbook advisors and all the students who worked on it.
- Congratulations to Erica Wallstrom of RHS, named to the Outstanding Earth Science Teacher Award for 2013 by the New England Section of the National Association of Geoscience Teachers.
- At Northwest, there was a Running Club celebration today at the track for all Kids Run the Nation participants. There will be a DJ dance party this Friday, as final “Star Jar” celebration for our PBIS efforts this year! Field Day is next Wednesday.
- This week RIS is raising money through the Penny Drive for Cystic Fibrosis. Each grade level will compete in a friendly competition by bringing pennies into school. Thank you to the RIS Student Council for coordinating this event.
- The RMS Enriched Studies Program (ESP) begins on June 6. During this five day program students will participate in challenging, age appropriate half-day and full-day courses.
- The RMS Memorial Day assembly took place on May 24. Many thanks to the following guests who helped make this annual ceremony a success: Mayor Chris Louras; School Board Chair Peter Mello; Mr. Donald Wickman; Mr. Craig Cassidy of the Rutland Veterans Council; Operation Military Kids (OMK) representative, Ms. Jahnine Spaulding; former RMS student, Mariah Griffin; and Assistant Superintendent Rob Bliss. Ms. Moran read an excerpt from a letter from Ms. Spaulding, thanking OMK for being a part of the Memorial Day assembly and praising the students and people involved in the activity. Also, congratulations to RMS eighth grader Alex Forte for her winning Memorial Day essay. She read her essay at this assembly and at the Rutland City Memorial Day ceremony on Monday.
- Thursday, June 13 is Graduation at 6 pm. All board members are invited. The 50th year reception is 4 pm, meeting in the high school lobby.
- Other end of the year activities were announced.

Legislative Report - Ms. Moran distributed a final legislative report. She reviewed several of the bills affecting education. Mr. Fagan reviewed H. 528 having to do with student-to-staff and student-to-teacher ratios. He said there will be a study and further discussions about how to require small schools to achieve more realistic ratios. There was discussion on the different ways of calculating and reporting ratios -- some which include all adults including nurses, counselors, librarians, etc., and some which just count classroom teachers.

Building Committee - Mr. Cooke said at the meeting, Mr. Rice presented the summer work program. The department is looking at new, and often “green” products, they have a comprehensive list of items to be worked on, and they are working on safety issues.

**SUPERIN-
PENDENT'S
REPORT**

**ANNOUNCE-
MENTS**

**LEGISLA-
TIVE
REPORT**

**COMM.
REPORTS**

**BUILDING
COMM.**

Mr. Cooke said he is impressed with the master plan. There are a number of transportation needs throughout the summer as well.

BUILDING
COMM., cont.

Mr. Cooke said Ms. Moran and Mr. Rice shared with the committee a new Safety Book. Ms. Moran said the document represents a lot of work and coordination with agencies, departments, and the schools. The police and fire departments and all administrators have an electronic copy so information is widely available to authorities. She said we continue to work on safety plans. Ms. Moran thanked the Chief, Officer Greene, and the Administrative team.

WATKINS
SCHOOL
SALE

Watkins - Ms. Moran said the plan is for the real estate closing to take place before Aug. 31.

Dana School Sale - Mr. Cooke said the building committee has a recommendation on Dana School. He said the committee and administration feel and believe this represents the best for the neighborhood.

DANA
SCHOOL
SALE

Motion by Cooke / Fagan to approve the Resolution regarding the sale of Dana School Property, as follows, dated May 28, 2013:

MOTION:
APPROVE
DANA
SCHOOL
RESOL-
UTION

“Resolution

Be it resolved as follows:

Whereas, the City of Rutland has the power to purchase, hold, and sell real estate pursuant to §3.1 of the Rutland City Charter (hereinafter Charter);

Whereas, the Board of School Commissioners of the City of Rutland (hereinafter the Board) has control over its property and has used the Dana School Property for school purposes pursuant to its authority and duties under §30.4 of the Charter (hereinafter the Property);

Whereas, the sale of the Dana School Property was approved by the voters of the City of Rutland;

Whereas, the Board desires to sell the Property pursuant to a contract that has been negotiated by the Superintendent of Schools and use the proceeds from the sale consistent with the law and in the best interests of the School District as determined by the Board;

Whereas, §6.2 of the Charter states: "Only the board of aldermen may authorize the sale or lease of real or personal property belonging to the city, except as otherwise authorized by charter or ordinance. All conveyances, grants, or leases of real estate shall be signed by the mayor and be sealed with the city seal."

Whereas, the Board has the authority under the charter and state law to control its property and to authorize the sale of real estate under its general duties;

Whereas, title lawyers believe that the charter is ambiguous; and

Whereas, the Board must convey marketable title to the purchaser of the Property and wants to

avoid any issues for the title lawyers.

Now therefore, the Board authorizes and approves the following:

1. The Superintendent shall obtain the authorization from the board of alderman for the sale of the Property consistent with the terms of the contract that is attached hereto for the sale of the Property and obtain approval that all net proceeds from the sale shall be given to the School District.
2. The Superintendent shall obtain the written consent for the sale and disbursement of proceeds and his agreement that the mayor will sign the deed in order to convey the Property to the purchaser of Property at the closing when all conditions have been met and satisfied.
3. Once the approval of the sale and the disbursement of all proceeds to the School District have been obtained from the board of alderman and consent has been obtained from the Mayor as requested, the Superintendent is authorized to sign the Purchase and Sales agreement for the sale of the Property that is attached hereto as Exhibit A.

Dated this 28 day of May, 2013.

Duly Adopted by the Board of School Commissioners.”

Mr. Fagan thanked the committee for all their work for the effort to sell Dana and Watkins Schools. Commissioner Thomas said on behalf of the Dana School neighborhood, she thanked the committee for their work and the level of involvement with the neighbors. Ms. Moran will follow up with legal counsel and the Board of Aldermen.

VOTE ON
MOTION

Motion passed by all those in attendance.

EDUCA-
TIONAL
REPORT

RHS Class Rank / Honor System Discussion - Mr. Courcelle said this issue came before the Board last year. Mr. Olsen said there is nothing new in the information from the committee. He thinks there is a well-informed proposal. He acknowledged the work of the Grading Committee, which consisted of administrators, teachers, and two students, who are present tonight. Mr. Olsen said grading is used to report student progress. We want to make sure the systems are helping student learning. We have studied class rank quite extensively. Mr. Olsen said after a lot of research, the feeling is that class rank is not serving our students well and the proposal is to move to a Latin Honors System. He said they feel the class rank system suffers from reliability and validity and the Latin Honors System will be an incentive for a student to reach for a certain honor and achievement. Mr. Olson said they feel the importance of the student profile more than a straight rank. There are so many variables. He said the school presents a standard and it does not matter how many other students in the class have reached that. It is a standard -- not a competition. Those who qualify would graduate with the honors. For scholarships or awards, if reporting of rank was required, it may be reported with student permission. He said they want to make sure every student receives any scholarships they might be eligible for. It will be provided if needed.

RHS CLASS
RANK /
HONOR
SYSTEM
DISCUSSION

Lena said speaking on behalf of the students involved in this proposal as part of student-led discussions, the students were able to see how this change would benefit them. She said they believe this will help students get into more colleges. This seems like a more fair and reliable way for students to measure academic abilities. Cooper Babbitt said he thinks this will be a positive change for the college admissions process and also for education in general. He said for example, perhaps a student would be interested in taking a fine arts class, but they might not because they are concerned about their class rank. A student on the committee, Hunter Cole, said he advocates for this proposal. He said it focuses on learning and not on competition. As many students as possible can achieve the standard. The current ranking system does not allow that.

There were questions and discussion from Board members:

- There was a clarification question about weighted classes. Mr. Olson said AP and Honors classes are weighted higher. Students might see what other students they are in competition with are taking. Ms. Moran said all classes are weighted. Sometimes students do not take classes they should be, because they are concerned about rank.
- Mr. Fagan said he feels he “had the furthest to come” with this decision. He said he will support it. Last year, he did his own study and spoke with the administrators. He said competition is not a bad thing. His concerns last year were with a) the decile system, which has been dropped, and b) “good enough”. Mr. Fagan explained that he felt the proposal last year would have created a “good enough” attitude amongst students and he wants every student to excel, to push the bounds of their knowledge, to be able to learn everything they can, and then go forward and apply it. Mr. Fagan said with the Latin Honors System, he feels everyone has the ability to “be better.” The example GPA profile from a previous class shows the number of students who would have achieved the different honors status, based on their GPA. With that information, a school would be able to tell where a student finished the year. Mr. Fagan said we use block scheduling, just like colleges, and the Latin Honors system is what students will use in college. He said he has wrestled with this decision. Students will recognize that they can get to the best.
- Mr. Cavacas said he supports this. He said he knows there are students who do not take certain courses, even if it might be good for their major, because of their class rank and desire for a higher rank.
- Mr. Fagan said this will start with the class on 2016, which is important. The current freshmen have not yet been ranked. This will start with them.

There were questions and comments from the public and responses from administration and further questions from the Board. Bill Hanley, the parent of a junior at RHS, shared his concerns with eliminating class ranking. Commissioner Alcorn said he works at a university in Vermont which is not on the list. He talked with the admissions officers and they said they look at the course list, they are not looking at class rank anymore. He said the admissions officers told him this program should help people and they do not see it as negative. Mr. Olsen clarified that under this proposal, class rank would only be provided for scholarships, awards or some special circumstance. He said they do not think the system is reliable or valuable and he does not think students are always making good academic choices reasons because they are looking to get ahead of each other. Mr. Cooke asked if the committee considered having the placement information available

if needed for i.e., college admissions, for those schools that continue to request that type of information, it might make a difference to a student. He said if the information is provided for money circumstances, then it means a parent might have the number. If you give it out for money, then that parent would have the number. He said he can see both sides. Dave Williams, father of a daughter in the class of 2015, said he thinks the school should present students in the best way possible. He is concerned that next year they will want to eliminate weighting, that it is an ultimate goal. Ms. Moran said that is not the case. She said all the course work is weighted. She said the GPA example provided shows an actual placement of students. Jenna Keith, a senior at RHS, spoke in favor of class rank and said it has made her push harder to be valedictorian. She also thinks graduation speakers should be the valedictorian and salutatorian.

Mr. Courcelle said he appreciates the passion of this topic. There has been a lot of research. He applauded the administration, parents and students who have spoken. When considering the issues, the Board is considering what would be the best outcome for students, knowing there is "not the only way." He said the Board has been deliberating.

Motion by Cavacas / Fagan that starting with the class of 2016 at Rutland High School, that all students who have reached at least a 95% weighted GPA would be recognized for their achievement by receiving cum laude designation on the Latin Honors System, replacing the current system of class rank, as per the proposal of the RHS Grading Committee and administration.

MOTION:
LATIN
HONORS
SYSTEM

Mr. Fagan clarified that a student needing class rank information for financial reasons would be provided that information and Mr. Olsen said he hopes that is clear enough. Mr. Fagan said he hopes this can be tweaked if certain schools are looking for more information so students are not precluded because of what we do or do not report. He feels the rigor of the course work the student takes is the most important thing being considered. Mr. Cooke said he echoes Mr. Fagan. He asked if certain students need class rank information for certain colleges, that the information be provided to them. He would hate to have students lose out on some schools because of what we report. He is also concerned that there are ways parents can figure out the rank to circumvent the system.

Vote on motion passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

VOTE ON
MOTION

Old Business

Universal Pre-K - Ms. Moran universal pre-K did not pass the legislature this session but it is expected to pass next year. The Agency of Education has funds set aside to support the transition period and some funds are being offered to us by the Agency. Mr. Bliss has been working on this and she has spoken with Mr. Mello. The recommendation is to accept the funds in order to plan for what we can expect to during implementation. Mr. Fagan said this passed the House and is on to the Senate. There is money available and he agrees with Ms. Moran that this will pass next year and be signed by the Governor. It is one of his agenda items. It is an appropriate path in planning.

OLD
BUSINESS

UNIVERSAL
PRE-K

Motion by Thomas / Cooke to accept the Agency of Education's Universal Pre-K funds and continue the planning process. Passed by all those in attendance.

**MOTION:
ACCEPT
AGENCY OF
EDUCA-
TION
UNIVERSAL
PRE-K
PLANNING
FUNDS**

New Business

Mr. Fagan said he attended the Evening of the Arts and Spring Band Concert. He said the talent in the schools is amazing and he was very impressed.

**NEW
BUSINESS**

Summer retreat date planning - bring calendars next meeting.

Motion by Cavacas / Fagan at 8:20 pm, after a recess, for the board to convene to executive session for the purpose of discussing legal matters, the premature release of information regarding those subjects which would place the Board at a substantial disadvantage. Unanimously passed by those in attendance.

**SCHOOL
ARTS**

**SUMMER
RETREAT**

The Board came out of executive session at 8:27 pm.

**MOTION:
EXECUTIVE
SESSION**

Motion by Alcorn / Shimp to adjourn at 8:27 pm. Passed.

**PUBLIC
SESSION**

Respectfully submitted

ADJOURN

Janet Mondlak
Recording Secretary