

**RUTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS
MAY 8, 2012**

School Board Members Present:

Peter Mello
Hurley Cavacas, Jr.
Richard Courcelle
Douglas Gage
Peter Fagan
Collin Fingon
Erin Shimp
Kate Thomas
Rob Towle
Caroline Corsones

Member Absent

Wayne Cooke
Jamie Pemrick

Also Present:

Superintendent Mary Moran
Assistant Superintendent Rob Bliss
Lyle Jepson
Peter Amons
Bill Olsen
Kristin Francoeur
Jay Slenker
Ellie McGarry
Steve Sampson
Pam Reed
Susanne Engels

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Chair Mello noted the absence of Commissioners Pemrick and Cooke.

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

Motion by Fagan / Towle to accept the minutes of the April 24, 2012 regular school board meeting as written. Motion passed unanimously by all those in attendance.

**MOTION:
MINUTES
04/24/12
MEETING**

Written Communication - Ms. Moran read a letter thanking the School Board for their donation to Project Graduation.

**WRITTEN &
ORAL
COMMUN-
ICATIONS**

Oral Communication - None

**EDUCATION
REPORT**

Jen Kravitz - Rowland Fellowship - Mr. Mello congratulated Rutland High's second consecutive Rowland Fellow. Ms. Moran said this is a very prestigious award. Mr. Olsen said the purpose of the Rowland Foundation is to help support school transformation. Jen Kravitz is going to be working on the Global Studies Concentration. Ms. Kravitz said she will take what Adam Rosenberg started during his Rowland Fellow and expanding it for grades 9-12. She plans to work with other schools, with teachers in Rutland, and with teachers around the world. She said she is excited to look at how other schools are engaging students in global problems and empowering students. She will share what she learns with colleagues and do implementation. Ms. Kravitz is just back from Ishidorya, the RISE exchange. She will be looking at ways to make the exchange more meaningful between Rutland and Hanamaki students. She said the program of studies will include a general curriculum that a student could follow which would allow them to get a Global Studies Certificate. It will be open to the incoming freshmen class. She said one example is to look at real world issues, like what the freshmen did this year with water conservation and see how they could be addressed in multiple classes. How can students in Rutland take steps to solve much bigger issues?

**JEN
KRAVITZ
ROWLAND
FELLOW-
SHIP**

RHS Class Rank / Honor System Presentation - Mr. Mello said class rank has been a long-standing tradition in Rutland City schools. Tonight will be the first time the Board will have information presented from the administration. He proposed that the Board hear the information, listen to testimony, and have people ask questions. At the Board's next meeting, if they are ready, the Board will make a recommendation. Mr. Olsen introduced Jen Wigmore, Head of Guidance at RHS. He said there has been a grading committee with a purpose to look at grading systems and practices and try to make sure they promote student learning. There is a sub-committee of the group looking at class rank and how student performance information is presented to colleges. He introduced the committee members including two students.

The committee looked at class rank and its effect on how students work in the school. Currently, we rank students from #1 through the XXX. The ranks are used when students apply to colleges. It is based on the average of all their class grades. Some classes have a heavier weight such as honors or AP classes. A person could have more than 100% average because of weighting. Mr. Olsen presented a slide show on some of the committee's findings and the identification of some drawbacks to the current system. Rank is different based on course selection and there could be differences in teachers. Depending on the year, students with a certain GPA could move up or down the rank ladder depending on what graduating class they are in. Rank could be different based upon "the year the student is born." Ms. Wigmore discussed some of the decisions students make on course selection because of non-weighted classes. Mr. Olsen said over time, there is room for slight variations in test scores which could impact grades. A student could not feel well one day and one test might effect their grade, and therefore their rank. Ms. Wigmore presented information on national data and from other Vermont high schools which have eliminated rank or report in a different system. She said many of the colleges which our students apply to do not consider rank if it is not reported. She read quotes from the College Board and the NACAC showing they do not need to consider ranking.

Mr. Olsen showed the results of a recent RHS class of the top 15 students, all with GPAs above 100%. Students are being separated from each other by .006 or .004 percentage of a point. Ms. Wigmore said Glen Olson has done an enormous amount of work on this subject. Ms. Wigmore said we are looking at moving toward an Honor System of Recognition, similar to what colleges do; Summa Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude, and Cum Laude.

Mr. Olsen said the recommendation is to move to a decile system for the class of 2015, which would mean they would be reported as being in the top ten percent, second ten percent, etc. The proposal is to keep the current system for juniors and sophomores but also report their results in the Honor System of Recognition. He said the grading committee will continue to do research on rank and weighted grades. It was clarified that the weighted grade system would not change. The decile system is a ranking system but it is a less acute ranking system.

There were questions and discussion from Board members and then from parents / students:

- What about the Green and Gold at University of Vermont? Mr. Olsen said we would still be able to figure out specific ranking for that and other scholarships.

- Would students be able to see their actual rank? Mr. Olsen said the proposal is to move away from that. We would just tell them a decile. If there was money tied to the rank, it could be provided to colleges. Ms. Wigmore said Common (and all other) Applications are filled out by students but there is a section for counselors to fill out.
- Caroline Corsones said she was on the grading committee last year. She feels the Honors System is more fair than the current system.
- Two sophomore students on the committee said they like the proposed system. One said it shines a better light on students and sets a static objective for students to reach for, instead of competition. He said other students he has talked with think it is good but are concerned about the weighting. Another student agreed saying that instead of competing against other students, students would strive for a certain GPA.
- Maria Cruise, RHS parent, asked how the decile is determined. Ms. Wigmore said students are ranked by GPA and Guidance would figure out the top 10% and then the next 10%, and so forth. If there are 230 students, the top 23 students would be in the top 10%. Weighting of classes would effect that.
- Leah Abatiell, RHS parent and a teacher in the district, asked about GPA profile and graphing. How is it different than a rank? Ms. Wigmore said it is a graph for the whole school. An individual student is not highlighted. It would help a college admissions officer. There are ways for them to figure out where a student is using a GPA profile and the student's GPA. Mr. Olsen said it shows where the student is ranked. For example, Burlington's GPA Profile is based on a 4.0 scale. It shows the number of students between 3.5 - 4.0; 3.0 - 3.5, etc.
- Dylan Conboy, a student at RHS said he is in favor of the current policy. He feels the interscholastic competition is beneficial. He said he has spoken with peers -- many students understand where they are with class rank. Students know they can move up or fall off. It gives students more academic responsibility. He said one concern is that the school has the option to submit all aspects of the student profile, such as GPA, Honor System, class rank. The college has the option to put the highest priority on any of those measures. If class rank is eliminated, there is still subjectivity on the year you were born or the class you are in. There is the potential that the top of the class does not meet Cum Laude or Magna Cum laude in any given year.
- Dave Williams, RHS parent, asked about weighted grades. He asked if discussion about eliminating weighted grades in the future would come back to the Board for a vote or if it would be done by the grading committee. Mr. Mello said it would be a significant enough change in policy that it would come to the Board. Mr. Williams said it is two weeks before finals and by the time this is voted upon, the current freshmen will be finished with finals. He said he thinks the change should be made for incoming freshmen, not as a change to students already in the high school.
- Allison Williams, RHS parent, asked for clarification on weighting. She said she wanted to make sure that parents would know when that discussion would take place. She suggested adding parents to the committee.
- Mr. Olsen said with a decile rank, they would retain weighted grades. As of right now, weighted grades will continue. Ms. Wigmore said the decile system is what would be reported to colleges. The Honors System is where they get recognition at graduation.

- Jenna Keith, RHS junior, said she is in favor of class rank. It has helped her. As a freshman, she did not like to participate in class but she had to in order to get the grades she wants. She said the top six students in her class are all friends and help each other. Her class size is 256. That means 25 students are in the top decile. The 26th gets pushed down to another decile and there could be a very small difference between them and #25. She said it is something that colleges consider.
- Sally Stacom, RHS parent, asked for clarification that nothing would change for the classes 2013 and 2014 and Mr. Olsen said that is true. There will be a valedictorian and salutatorian and class rank will be reported to colleges.
- Commissioner Towle asked if it could be option which statistic is reported. He suggested it be whatever is the most beneficial for prospective students. Mr. Olsen said schools are moving away from it because they are trying to show their students in the best light. Mr. Towle suggested reporting rank for some students but not on others. Ms. Wigmore said "We could we do it" but that is different than "Do we want to do it". If Student A comes to guidance and asks for rank to be reported and Student B asks for their decile to be reported, it could be confusing for the school. Mr. Towle said the #3 student would want their individual rank reported but student #23 might want their decile. Ms. Wigmore said if a student is using Common Application, they would have to choose one or the other. Mr. Towle asked if all the information could be listed on the GPA profile and Ms. Wigmore said it could.
- Commissioner Fagan asked if the Honors System would replace the Honor Roll which is reported in the paper and Mr. Olsen said no.
- Commissioner Cavacas asked if this would be returning as an action item at the next meeting and Mr. Mello said yes.
- Commissioner Courcelle said he assumes most parents are concerned because of students getting into colleges and getting scholarships. He asked why the Board is being asked to make the decision in two weeks. What do colleges want? He said he wants to see data. This is very new to him and he does not think he can come to conclusion in two weeks. He feels like he wants to make the decision with the best information.
- Mr. Mello said the grading committee has been in place for years and the administration has been studying this for two years. Board members do not have to rush into a decision in two weeks. It could be delayed although we would not want to make a change in the middle of a year for students.
- Commissioner Fingon said he understands some of the best school districts do not have class ranks: Princeton, Westchester, Fairfield County. Those students are getting into top schools. Students applications do not get thrown out because they do not have a "3" or "5" or "7" next to their name. Each student will have their own GPA. It is important to have a decile system. The top schools have their own system of evaluating. Top districts in Vermont have already done this. He recommended talking to colleges admissions officers. The courses taken are much more important that a number rank.
- Mr. Mello said he thinks the Board owes it to the parents, students, and administrators to let them know if there is a decision pending in two weeks. Mr. Cavacas said he would like to see it on the agenda for the next meeting with the understanding that the decision might be delayed. He said he has called college admissions officers and he has heard that they are fine without the information.

- But he thinks there should be a continued opportunity to ask questions.
- Commissioner Fagan said he made phone calls and has heard that rank is important. He would like to see the nine bullet points being provided to colleges. He said he would like to ask about the importance of the items to the top 50 colleges our students have applied to in the last four years.
- Mr. Towle said he would like the school to let the students and families decide what they want to report. The box can be checked for rank or not. It is our responsibility to help students sell themselves in whatever manner they want. If we have the technology, why would we want to limit the scope? If student does not want class rank, we do not put it on.
- Commissioner Gage said we could provide the information to colleges. But should we supply it to the student? The student is in a competition based on rank and possibly making bad decisions based on rank. He feels we need more information.
- Mr. Mello said it will be on the agenda for the next meeting. He thinks more information is needed to make an informed decision.
- Mr. Williams said he heard the committee has been working on this for three years but parents just found out one month ago. He said if a change is made, it should be for the right reasons. He said he can find just as many schools that say it is very important as can be found that say it is not important. He said parents have contacted schools and got different answers. We need to give the students every opportunity to show how good they are.
- Caroline Corsones asked the point of the decile system. Mr. Olsen said it lessens the placement. It still is a rank. The competition may not go away. A student who knows they are on the borderline, might still make decisions based on that.
- Mr. Towle asked for a copy of the Common Application form. Mr. Cavacas said he thinks the Common Application asks for decile ranking. Ms. Wigmore said that is in the teacher recommendation section.
- Sherry Kamyk, RHS parent said time should be taken to see what is in best interest of the students for getting into the best colleges they can. The whole world is competitive. We need to strive for that for our students.

Mr. Mello thanked the citizens and students for showing up and their interest.

PERSONNEL

Motion by Cavacas / Thomas to approve the Licensed and Non-licensed section of the Personnel Memorandum No. 463 dated May 4, 2012, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.

MOTION:
PERSONNEL
MEMO #463

The appointments, family / medical leaves, and resignations were reviewed by Superintendent Moran. They are attached.

Motion passed by all those in attendance.

Motion by Towle / Fagan to approve the Licensed section of the Personnel Memorandum Addendum No. 463 dated May 4, 2012, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.

MOTION:
PERSONNEL
MEMO
ADDENDUM
#463

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

Motion passed by all those in attendance.

**HIRING
UPDATE**

Hiring Update - Ms. Moran reviewed the few open positions and the searches which are underway. We are completing the search for the Allen Street Campus administrative leader and hope for a recommendation at the next meeting.

Business Report - None

**BUSINESS
REPORT**

Announcements

**SUPERIN-
TENDENT'S
REPORT**

- Caroline Corsones reported on RHS activities. Student elections were last week. The next School Board Representative vote is this week. The Powder Puff game featuring senior girls versus junior girls in football is coming up. The RHS Key Club is sponsoring a mother's day raffle with profits going to the Eliminate Project. NECAP testing is this week.
- Ms. Moran said this is Teacher / Staff Appreciation Week. We appreciate all our staff members. The Board has sent the appropriate thanks and kudos.
- RIS is hosting an info meeting for incoming third grade parents tomorrow night.
- Kindergarten screening is going on last week and this week.
- The RMS annual coffee house is next week featuring students' creative writing and poetry. The RMS spring concert is next week.
- RHS Evening of the Arts is May 16 featuring food, art, and music.
- Congratulations to Brent Barnett as our [Green Mountain Music District] Music Educator of the Year! His name will be submitted to the VMEA to be put on the ballot for Educator of the Year for the state.
- This week, twenty students will be inducted into the National Technical Honor Society.

**ANNOUNCE-
MENTS**

Legislative Report - Mr. Fagan reported on the final outcome of four bills.

**LEGISLA-
TIVE
REPORT**

- Equal pay issue did not pass. There were some compromises.
- Equal education opportunities is still being evaluated.
- Education property tax is going from \$.87 to \$.89. Mr. Amons said on a \$100,000 home, that would be \$20 a year more.
- School Choice was opened statewide. There was discussion on how this might or might not impact Rutland. Ms. Moran said it becomes effective on July 1, but will not be in effect until September 2013. It is very complicated and there are significant flaws. She said it will likely be reworked for effective implementation.

Building Committee - Commissioner Shimp said the first Dana community meeting was held. There were many residents who came and there was a lot of interest and positive feedback. Commissioner Thomas, who is a neighbor, said she thought it was great turnout and there were great questions. Reminder: Next Dana Neighborhood Meeting - May 15 at 6:00 pm at Longfellow.

**COMM.
REPORTS**

**BUILDING
COMM.**

Summer Schedule - Mr. Mello suggested one June Board meeting (June 12) and not another one until the end of August. Dates for Board retreat were discussed.

**NEW
BUSINESS**

**SUMMER
SCHEDULE**

Mr. Towle congratulated Mr. Slenker on the excellent talent show.

**OLD
BUSINESS**

Old Business - None

Motion by Fagan / Towle at 8:12 pm, after a recess, for the board to convene to executive session for the purpose of discussing contractual matters, the premature release of information regarding those subjects which would place the Board at a substantial disadvantage. Unanimously passed by those in attendance.

**MOTION:
EXECUTIVE
SESSION**

The Board came out of executive session at 8:42 pm.

**PUBLIC
SESSION**

Motion by Courcelle / Fingon to adjourn at 8:43 pm. Passed.

ADJOURN

Respectfully submitted

Janet Mondlak
Recording Secretary