

**Richmond Consolidated School - School Committee  
Meeting Minutes**

Friday, August 7, 2020  
4:30 PM

Approved

**Present:** Adeline Ellis, Dewey Wyatt, Ian Wilhelm, Peter Dillon, Jill Pompei, Mary Shook

**Guests:** Cristina Lenfest, Neal Pilson Kim Hosley Roger Kohler, Rachel Kanz, Sharon Renfrew, Jessica Godfroy, Katie Bovard, Michelle Smith, Joy Mullen, Lauren Broussal, Beth Smith, Ronna Zigmond, Julia Padilla, Natalie Gingras, Lisa Callahan, seven others.

1. Call to order: 4:33pm

DW announced the meeting is being recorded per MGL Ch30sec20(f) requirements, and that the meeting was posted and being held according to current Open Meeting Law requirements.

Meeting was held by conference call due to the COVID-19 issue.

An Executive Order from the Governor of Massachusetts relieves public bodies from the requirement in the Open Meeting Law that meetings be conducted in a public place that is open and physically accessible to the public, provided that the public body makes provision to ensure public access to the deliberations through telephone, internet, or satellite enabled audio or video conferencing or any other technology that enables the public to clearly follow the proceedings of the public body in real time.

In addition, all members of a public body may participate in a meeting remotely; the Open Meeting Law's requirement that a quorum of the body and the chair be physically present at the meeting location is suspended.

All other provisions of the Open Meeting Law, such as the requirements regarding posting notice of meetings and creating and maintaining accurate meeting minutes, as well as the limited, enumerated purposes for holding an executive session, remain in effect.

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2. Roll call to move to Executive Session. Motion by IW, AE 2<sup>nd</sup>, roll call all in favor 4:45pm.

Purpose: to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining for teacher contracts (because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect of the bargaining position of the School Committee, and to conduct a strategy session in preparation for negotiations with non-bargaining unit personnel, both pursuant to MGL c.39 § 23B (3)).

Return to open session: returned 5:07pm

3. Review and approval of the Re-Opening Plan to be submitted:

Peter: There are two dates that that are particularly important. On July, 31, we need to submit a tentative plan for what we're leaning toward. And then, originally on Monday, Aug 10 were supposed to submit a more formal plan that was extended to Friday August 14. What the commissioner and Governor asked us to do was look at the three models of being back to school and analyze the advantages and disadvantage of all of them. And then, and then pick one for the start of school for those who haven't been part of this conversation before I'll just summarize it quickly. The first one would be face to face instruction, not unlike what happened before the virus, right, but with some constraints and shifts in behavior, including masks and other things, and distancing. Then the second model would be a hybrid model, and in the advantages of a hybrid model are that people are working together and you get some benefits of the face to face, but having about half the students in also addresses some safety concerns, and there's things that are really attractive about that from a learning perspective and also from a family perspective. The third model is the fully remote model, and from a virus perspective that's entirely safe from another sort of health and wellness perspective that they're potentially issues with isolation and disconnection but there's a lot that's good there. From a learning perspective and it's a little more challenging. And that's why we're spending

10-12 days on professional development and lots of work over the summer to catch people up on our learning management system canvas. And to think more broadly around. How do you do online learning in a way that that captures some of the things that our teachers typically do look great, face to face right so they're the three options. Initially, our thinking was a hybrid model made sense but we listened very carefully to families and colleagues and, and now we're shifting our model or approach to the start of school from our recommendation from a hybrid model to one that's a remote model. We went through this last night in Berkshire Hills and that school committee ultimately endorsed that unanimously. It looks like many other school districts are doing that in Berkshire County, a small number of the very smallest districts. Hancock and Farmington river may be going I think actually going to go with a face to face model because they're 50 kids and they have enough space and they could pull it off. Farmington River I think is going with a hybrid model, but in the context of where we're at in the context of what's going on. I'd like to recommend that we start with a remote model, while we continue to dig in and develop both the hybrid model and the face to face model with the hope and sort of optimistic expectation, that is the conditions around us change. When we come up at the state level with concrete metric like Governor Cuomo announced in New York State late this afternoon. Then we'll have information that can help us make decisions importantly because I sort of said this funny that the data is coming from the state but the data would be disaggregated by county. So, it's my assumption that Berkshire County will have very different rates than Middlesex County. And, and the information that should drive our thinking should be Berkshire County specific, but I'd like to use state numbers because they'll be objective and mutually agreed upon. So that's sort of the highest level overview I'm recommending and jealous to that we start with remote learning. If and when we have an opportunity to shift from a remote model to a hybrid model, that would be informed by the data that I've been talking about.

If and when we have the opportunity we'd like to prioritize really three groups in the context of Richmond, it's really two groups, high needs special education students who would benefit greatly from face to face work and contact . In any other district the second group would be English language learners whose communicative competence would grow leaps and bounds from being face to face. And then the third group that we'd like to keep a careful eye on and figure out ways to be creative with would be our youngest students our pre k and k are early pace students because just because of where they are developmentally, the work with the youngest students is around socialization and interactions and can they do some of that online Yes, but it doesn't it's not as meaningful or significant for them. So, so that's the initial thinking as Dewey mentioned at the top of this. I think it's highly likely that if things get better. We may cycle through all three models. If things get worse, we may be in a remote model for quite some time. If a vaccine is developed and shared and widely used in the late spring, we may actually come back, face to face. Tons of work to do. The negotiations today with the Richmond Education Association has been highly collaborative very positive we're working through a process of articulating shared goals. And, and it's one of those wonderful things where. What's, what's good for kids is also good for grownups in the building are also good for families and good for the school or district as a whole. And I think, at each meeting will have significant common ground, and some, some creative thinking. So, I think doing from an overview perspective that should be good, Jim, I have some things to add the committee and or the public may have some questions. And we can go into really granular detail if people want to do that. But I think much of that will be answered. As we are in negotiations and do additional planning, and one of the real upsides of starting in love remote model is it lets us have discussions about safety but not enact that those discussions immediately so the remote model is attractive to many people because we've got questions about the data, but it also buys us some time from a planning perspective. And then on the other side and

I mentioned the teachers and staff are really doing a nice job around, expanding their skills around remote learning. So a heavy lift for all of us, is to hit September 14, hit the ground running and really get off to an outstanding start, and I think we can do that. But, but we're all going to work very hard to do that. Did I leave anything out?

Jill: I was just going to also articulate that we're looking at the state recommendations for a strong remote learning plan and moving forward full force with our, our learning management system Canvas because I do believe that we can knock it out of the park with remote learning, and at the same time as you said you know optimistically moving forward with planning for a hybrid Should we get to the point where we could open an app.

Dewey: we want to move to public comment but before that, let's have some school committee discussion. And if it's okay, I'd like to start off with some comments, thoughts. Obviously teaching and learning is maximized when students and teachers are together, physically together. I think everybody knows that. However, that's the dilemma. We can't do that, at least the way it was. We all need to be safe, we need to focus on having a safe plan for the health and safety of the students and all the folks that are surrounding them. This is a very, very interesting time, every day we're learning new things. I think the word Caution is out there a lot so our challenge is moving to something to where we're serving the students, but then also balancing the everybody else's needs, needs of parents. Parents need to plan their days, it's impacting their home schedule, their work schedule.

One of the foundational pieces of an organization is you can never succeed unless you have willing partners, you have to collaborating well. I'm pleased, at least at this point, where we are with the REA. However this is much to do and resolve.

Peter you highlighted the high risk student population. We really need to look at the social emotional aspects. It's, it's very scary the amount of learning time being lost. And how do we keep up on that with distance learning? You know there's been a lot said about what was done in the spring, I think a lot of great things were done, but it is far from where we need to be. We have to find ways to be more creative and engaging students. We need to find more ways to knock it out of the park, we have to be creative, we have to really do some amazing things to counter this this unbelievable shortcoming the students are getting. So I guess in summary is we have to be very cautious, there's so much we don't understand. There's science out there, new information still being interpreted. And we just have to be very careful and it makes sense to go remote initially, a lot of work is needed yet to even go to a hybrid. The complete face to face model is obviously not an option and is off the table. The hybrid model even I think is just too much too fast when taking in to consideration all the factors and listening to others in the county. The big question is, is how do we set the plan from there, with the goal of giving the students what they deserve without, without taking undue risk.

Adeline: Dewey very well said. I just think parents who are listening, maybe Peter you just want to chat a little bit about this question that we've talked about. When is it going to be safe, and a little bit about the schedule. And when we would be looking at hard data. Please talk a little bit about that so parents can hear that.

Peter: Yeah, this is a big issue and, for some families, this is significantly more impactful than it is for others. If people's work schedules, make it hard for them to be home with their kids. This is a tremendous burden. From an economic standpoint, from a time standpoint. Any which way you slice it. So what we're

starting on, on September 14 with remote learning. Between now and September 14, there's all sorts of time to both agree to appropriate metrics, but to also track where things are going. In my professional life in my personal life I tend to be very optimistic, in the context of this virus I think we have an obligation to be a little conservative, so I'd love to see this get better or stay the same. I've got a bad feeling it might get worse as we, I mean, the Texas, Florida, Tennessee, all of that mass, but even Rhode Island, which was doing a very good job is struggling now. And, and there was a little uptick in Massachusetts and Governor Baker was speaking earlier today about that so let's. I think people are tired right people are tired of quarantining and the whole thing attached to it, and, and maybe as a state, we got a little loose on that, and it's time to see if changing our behavior again can rein some of that in and we could get better. If I were a parent of small children planning around this, I think we're starting the 14th of September, I would think, in, in early October, we have some check in on where we're going with the numbers and what's happening. The worst case scenario and this is a terrible one I hate to even suggest it is the virus doesn't get better it gets worse and we have a year of fully remote learning. The best case scenario is, it gets a little better, and we ease into a hybrid. And then it gets better. And, and we and we ease into face to face, and there might be something in the middle where we go in and out of them. So, from a planning perspective this is going to be hard. And now I'm like that cliché fortune cookie right the only certainty is this is the year of uncertainty. And we just got to keep an eye on it, and communicate a lot. We had some nice community forums, we'll do more of those. As we get going with teachers and other staff and students there'll be significant daily contact and interactions. And I think as we start doing that kids will feel and families will feel additionally connected. And, and we'll make the best of a very challenging situation.

Ina: I just wanted to really emphasize that achievement of our children's students is really maximized when teachers feel safe when they feel supported. And when they have the materials and in this case a lot of technology to go ahead, which it seems like that has been really worked on. I think we really talk considerably about the safety of our children, which of course we should, but it seems that a lot of times the teachers have to fight for what they want. And I think they really need to be heard. I think they need to negotiate. I think it's doesn't serve our purpose or the purpose for the children for one side or the other to dig in at this time because we are dealing with outrageous variables that we've never dealt with before so I think we have to step back and listen in and that goes to me too because I'm such a teacher supporter.

Peter: I think that's well said and I think we're doing that.

Thank you, Ina, I think, you know, it's always he always looked to how to take our bad situation and turn it into something good. So our focus really need this to be is to have something that's certainly not going to be ideal but to make the best of it we need to figure out how to get this online learning set. And I think a community it's going to take people to support one another, to have creative dialogue is absolutely huge right now. When you think of families that need to work and to take care of their kids. Hopefully there's a network of support that can grow, to kind of bridge those issues so I just, I think it all centers around how do we have a good program that is safe but we're also as a community thinking of power collectively we can keep moving ahead and make something, something great out of this.

Ina: I think last year one of the problems that I heard was the different platforms for communicating and I think Julie worked on that. Can you speak to that?

Jill: The Berkshire County Task Force got together and they were able to purchase a learning management system called canvas that many school districts are adopting this year. It's a tool that educators can use that will provide a consistent way to communicate with to show their courses, and their assignments to communicate with families, so that if I am the parent of multiple children in the same school, I can log on and I can see information presented in a similar way everything will be from this one learning management system I can click on links I can go to assignments. Parents will be given an observer role where they'll be able to see what their students assignments are so that they can keep track of them. We're very fortunate Ronna Zigmund and Roger Kohler have done a ton of work with it. They are our ambassadors I guess you would say for our school, or our project coordinators for our school. Jalen Romano has taken on the role of teacher expert, and they are helping me. We're looking at how we're going to plan professional development for our staff during those first 10 days, and also looking at what kind of support we can offer to parents and to students so that they can hit the ground running when September 14 rolls around. And in addition, Canvas also had the opportunity for teachers to participate in a course called Growing with Canvas to teach teachers about that platform and play around in what's called the sandbox online, designing a course and many of our teachers have spent time this summer doing that. So I do feel we will be much better positioned in the fall, to provide remote learning experiences I do think we did a good job with it in the spring, but as Peter said there's always room for improvement and I think that with this gift of time we will just Excel, the way that Richmond teachers often too often do itself. You know, we do have a group of over achievers and it's in the best interest of our students and community

Dewey: can you speak about the younger versus the older kids? You don't want younger to have too much screen time which is less productive or not functional. How does the plan likely going to be different, online to meet the needs of the older versus the younger and I don't know where a cut off would be the second grade and younger versus the older.

Jill: So you know when we're looking at a remote platform, there's a couple of things that we're looking at. So first of all, Canvas can be used with even the youngest of learners, Ronna is doing a lot of work to look at how iPads, could be the device that they use as opposed to a Chromebook it's much more user friendly for the younger learners. So we're actually putting in to order some iPads. We're also looking at the number of hours so ISTD is this group that comes up with technology standards and they have you know recommended amounts of screen time for different age levels so we're, we're looking at their guidance for that. And then, you know, Canvas allows for a variety of types of lessons so you know the buzzwords or the new words that I've learned this summer are asynchronous and synchronous learning. So, students will be able to have some lessons where the teacher is live teaching, and then there will be opportunities where the teacher might record some lessons there might be some opportunities where students might go to a site to do some practice, you know some games online to practice letter ladders. So it's a blend of different learning experiences, it's not all going to be where they have to sit in front of a screen and you know things that our staff did back in the spring, you know, our phys ed teacher was able to offer you know she did, she led yoga classes for some of the groups and, you know, Mrs. Lenfest was able to offer some sessions you know to talk about social emotional issues so it's, it runs the gamut, but we'll certainly be very, very thoughtful in our planning when we're looking at the difference between what it might look like for a six year old and a 12 year old.

Ina: I think I want to jump in with it with one caveat, and that is this whole issue of closing the gap. I think that puts considerable pressure on teachers, not only to move the children forward, which is their charge but to close the gap. And I'm not sure that's a reasonable achievement I think that the best that we need to do is the best instruction at the time, keep the data and, and then build from there.

Peter: I think that's well said.

Dewey: I think I'll open it up for public comment. So, so if we, a couple ways this can work well is, we can go with the chat box for folks to enter something in, or it's not to larger group I guess if you want to just speak up. Rachel I see you're there and unmuted.

#### 4. Public comments:

Rachel: I'd like to speak on behalf of the REA. At our last school committee meeting union president, Joy Mullen read our re endorsement. To begin next school year following the remote learning model and 100% of our members supported this endorsement and we just heard our administration endorsed the beginning of the year remotely as well. We do, however, know that this leaves our parents and our community members with many many questions. Maybe worried about the emotional and academic development, which was just touched on, people may be wondering how parents in particular how they're going to balance their own work in or out of the house that remote learning, and whether children are home three days a week for a hybrid model or five days a week in a remote model. We recognize that the roles of parents will shift, the burden is undeniable. And we teachers understand this and wish there's an easy solution, there's not. But we want our community to know that we're supportive and responsive as our families work through navigating this new normal. Through interest based bargaining our union is working with administration around how to best meet the thoughtful proposals endorsed by the MTA (Mass Teachers Assoc). In the meantime, there are questions we know that everyone has these questions which people have spoken before have addressed which is what is the school day going to look like for children. And we know as everyone has been saying that there are, we don't have answers yet. But we, but thanks to the district adoption of the learning management system of Canvas, we can at least be confident that there will be a common communication platform across all of our staff, which will through streamlined student teacher and parent teacher connections. As far as the meat of our remote teaching. We want everyone to know that each teacher is working hard to understand and adopt best practices in his or her subject area. In plain speak. We're working hard to start the first day of school, prepared to raise RCS education to an even higher level. When we as teachers union support remote learning, we're supporting the safety of the children of our community. The members our community as well as ourselves and our families. we are all in this together and we thank the administration and our community for your support.

Thank you.

Lauren: Thank you I have a question, is there a site where a lay person can find out more about Canvas?

Peter: There is, and we can share that link with you. What we're planning to do is some specific training with parents and families and caregivers in addition to training with students. So, the main site talks about Canvas, sort of pitching to districts and entities that might purchase it. There's sites behind that site that are more instructional from using it, I'll, I'll try to get you links to those.

Some early adaptors want to figure it out and make sense of it. And then other people will come to understand it in the context of their own children. And some support and training that teachers and other staff provide but we'll, we'll get that up and Ronna is so good at doing this, it'll probably be up by seven o'clock tonight, but in reality, let's give her until Monday to get it up, and then we'll send some links to it, and we'll go from there.

Dewey: Is there anyone else that would like to comment? (none)

Peter: if nobody wants to comment I could share a draft motion that the committee might want to use to help Jill and I move forward with the state that's helpful. The Richmond school committee endorses the recommendation to start the school year with remote learning

School Committee Vote:

Motion for the School Committee to endorse the recommendation of the Administration to start the year with remote learning. IW , AE 2<sup>nd</sup>, all in favor.

Pete and/or Jill will send out an update that we are starting remotely.

5. Other unforeseen items: none
6. Adjournment: motion to adjourn 5:53pm AE, IW 2<sup>nd</sup>, all in favor.

Submitted: DW