

Chariho School Committee Meeting
Regular Session Minutes – October 26, 2021

Committee Members Attendance: Chair Linda Lyall, Ryan Callahan, Donna Chambers, William Day, Gary Liguori, Craig Louzon and Linda McAllister. Absent: George Abbott, Vice Chair Catherine Giusti and Lisa Macaruso. Resigned: Sheila Grover and David Stall.

Administrators and Others Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Attorney for the School Committee Jon Anderson (virtual), High School Assistant Principal Jean Bradanini, Systems Administrator Eric O'Brien, Senator Dennis Algiere, Representatives Blake Filippi and Brian Kennedy, Hopkinton Town Council President Steve Moffitt, Richmond Town Council Member Jim Palmisciano, Ocean State Transit Manager Lillian Benoit and District Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

I. Meeting Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Silent Meditation

Chair Linda Lyall called the meeting of the Chariho School Committee, held in the Chariho High School Library, to order at 6:30 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was followed by a moment of silent meditation.

II. Motion/Vote to go into Executive Session

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was

VOTED: That the School Committee go into executive session under the authority of R.I. General Laws Section 42-46-5(a)(2) for the purpose of discussion and/or action pertaining to collective bargaining (NEA ESP Negotiation Update to include discussion/action on a potential Memorandum of Agreement Between the Chariho Regional School District and NEA ESP Pertaining to Custodial Overtime); and under the authority of R.I. General Laws Section 42-46-5(a)(8) for the purpose of reviewing and/or approving matters which relate to the privacy of students and their records (1. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of October 12, 2021 – Approval of Home Instruction Requests and 2. Approval of Home Instruction Requests); any persons to be discussed have been so notified. In favor: Unanimous.

III. Reconvene Open Session/Pledge of Allegiance/Silent Meditation

The Committee returned to open session at 6:52 PM and Chair Lyall reconvened the meeting at 7:00 PM. She asked all to please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silent meditation.

IV. Closing/Sealing of Executive Session Minutes

1. Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes pertaining to collective bargaining (NEA ESP Negotiation Update) remain sealed until such time as an agreement has been reached.

Ryan Callahan made a motion, seconded by Donna Chambers and it was

VOTED: That minutes pertaining to collective bargaining (NEA ESP Negotiation Update) remain sealed until such time as an agreement has been reached. In favor: Callahan, Chambers, Day, Liguori, Lyall and McAllister. Recused: Louzon. The motion carried by a vote of 6 in favor with 1 recusal.

2. Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes which relate to the privacy of students and their records (Approval of Home Instruction Requests) remain sealed.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was

VOTED: That the minutes which relate to the privacy of students and their records (Approval of Home Instruction Requests) remain sealed. In favor: Unanimous.

V. Disclosure of Executive Session Votes

Ryan Callahan reported there were five votes in executive session. The first vote, to adjust the agenda, was unanimous with 7 in favor with Callahan, Chambers, Day, Liguori, Louzon, Lyall and McAllister voting.

The second vote, approval of executive session minutes of October 12, 2021 – Approval of Home Instruction Minutes, passed with 7 in favor with Callahan, Chambers, Day, Liguori, Louzon, Lyall and McAllister voting.

The third vote on home school requests passed with 7 in favor with Callahan, Chambers, Day, Liguori, Louzon, Lyall and McAllister voting.

The fourth vote, related to contract negotiations, passed with 5 in favor, 1 opposed and 1 recusal with Callahan, Chambers, Liguori, Lyall and McAllister voting in favor, Day opposing and Louzon recusing.

The fifth vote, to return to open session, passed with 6 in favor with Callahan, Chambers, Day, Liguori, Lyall and McAllister voting.

VI. Recognition

1. Richmond resident Jackie Kenyon, who passed on October 8, for her service and support to the Chariho community. Bill Day took a moment to speak on behalf of his neighbor and long-time friend. Jackie was a very hard-working individual and a former member of the School Committee. He told a little story about Jackie's presence at a baseball game her husband, Skip, was coaching. Jackie lived and breathed Chariho all her life and she will certainly be missed by a lot of people in Richmond.

2. High School Art Teacher Stacy Wilbur was congratulated on her selection as the Rhode Island Secondary Art Educator of the Year. She was nominated by her colleague, Rebecca Peabody.

VII. Public Forum

Chair Lyall invited anyone who would like to speak on items not on tonight's agenda to please come to the podium. She thanked all for coming out on an awful night. David Stall from Hopkinton stated that there are more parents in attendance than School Committee Members; he wants to see more School Committee Members here. He noted that our Administration overlaps with other School Committees in the State. There are two open seats on this School Committee and it is political if an administrator sends an email on a school account endorsing a candidate in Hopkinton who could ultimately be overseeing that person. He is asking administration to look into this as that is what Joe Gencarelli did. The second item he is concerned with is curriculum requests. Look at the policy and what you are taking away. Only parents in the District can put in a curriculum objection. You are taking away the rights of the taxpayers and he is objecting to the Library Media Center Policy as well. Polly Hopkins from Hopkinton was looking for a member of the School Committee to sponsor, on the next agenda, the Resolution received today from the Gloucester Public Schools. She does not want to see tax dollars go to a membership that silences people. This is a result of Tim Duffy's efforts and she wants the School Committee to discuss this Resolution.

VIII. Policy

A. Fixed Asset Accounting Policy (Revision) – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the revisions to this policy which has been reviewed and approved by legal counsel. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Ryan, to approve the revisions to the Fixed Asset Accounting Policy. Ryan questioned why the change on page 2 of 5 from \$1,000 to \$5,000? Ned replied that he received notice from the accounting firm. They recommended a \$5,000 threshold as our current policy did not align with GASB. This is the recommended governmental accounting standards. We knew it was coming and won't lose track of detail.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was
VOTED: To approve the revisions to the Fixed Asset Accounting Policy. In favor: Unanimous.

B. Library Media Center Policy (Revision) – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the revisions to this policy which were reviewed and approved by legal counsel. Craig made a motion, seconded by Ryan, to approve the revisions to the Library Media Center Policy. As there were no School Committee members wishing to comment, David Stall began by stating this is a change that bothers him. Chariho staff and taxpayers are not allowed to object unless they are a parent of a current student. You are taking

the voice away from a large amount of people. He keeps hearing that the Committee wants to hear from people. He has had conversations about books in our library. It is a plain fact that you are taking away the voice of every taxpayer; he wants to hear justification for that. If you vote for this, he will stay after it. Donna stated that she thinks the policy is fine the way it is. Anyone could raise an objection and go through someone on the list if they can convince them to bring it before the School Committee. We are not limiting anyone's voice. She objects to what he is suggesting; anyone can contact her and she will review it as this has been done before. Bill agreed with Mr. Stall. It says the "parent" which means anyone sending a student here has a right to object to something but this takes away the right of the Chariho taxpayer. Residents of the District pay the freight here. Those from outside the District do not pay the taxes. It is a very good point. Craig questioned why the word "resident" was deleted to which Gina explained this policy was reviewed by legal counsel. The concern is this could backlog the District. Jon added it is an issue of blind drawing. Parents should have a say in what their child is reading. What right does someone who is not a parent tell our students what they can or cannot read. Donna noted that the Superintendent has the final say; it comes before the Superintendent. The Assistant Superintendent will bring a team together to review the concern. Polly Hopkins questioned how many members of the Committee have a student in this school? She has 31 books on her list that she does not agree with. Gary commented that what Ms. Hopkins finds questionable, he may not. Why should he respond to her list? Are these books you want banned to which she replied, not banned but she finds them questionable. Gary stated he thinks what Mr. Anderson said, by empowering non-parent residents, you are disempowering the parents of current students. Polly replied you are taking away the rights of taxpayers to which Gary responded that taxpayers have a voice; they are not taking away a right. What if it was your view that a group of non-parents were taking away? Would you agree to that to which Polly did not answer but stated that it still does not mitigate the rights of a taxpayer. Gary again asked his question – What if it was your view that a group of non-parents were taking away – would you agree to this – to which Polly replied "No." Ryan stated the policy establishes the people who are impacted by the decision; they should be the ones to make the decision. David Stall and Polly Hopkins want to impose their view that we are taking a voice away from taxpayers but everyone has an avenue they can take. If this does not impact them, we will pose the risk of overburdening the District. Fundamentally this is a better approach to take. They can oppose materials in a proper format. He is in favor of the revisions. David noted Ryan made good points but if only those who are impacted can make the decision, then those should be the only ones you collect taxes from. This is a public school; it is paid for by the public. He agrees a person should not decide what another person's student can read but he does not feel this policy is serving the taxpayer. Gary commented that this was a very binary narrow view. He doesn't believe that anyone is saying they do not have a voice and you are grouping the three of us into saying things that are not accurate. Donna agreed with Gary. This is the typical strategy Mr. Stall seems to be using; changing what is being said. She never said she would ignore the taxpayer and she is really upset with the way things get twisted. She is insulted that he would accuse all three of them of that. Jason DaPonte from Hope Valley felt the change in language may not take away a person's voice but it does weaken it. You are taking the process away from others. He has a child who was uncomfortable with a book her class was reading so she was removed from the class. This was unsettling for a middle school student. Creating a backlog is not a good argument. Citizens have a voice and this policy is suppressing it. Jon commented that he, too, is being misquoted. Taxpayers outside of Charlestown, Richmond and Hopkinton (those from Central Falls, Providence, Pawtucket and all over the State) expended \$13 million of state funds to Chariho so the argument that was presented regarding a taxpayer's voice would mean that any person in the State of Rhode Island could bring an appeal about a book in the Chariho library. Chair Lyall noted that she will move on a vote at this time.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Ryan, and it was VOTED: To approve the revisions to the Library Media Center Policy. In favor: Callahan, Chambers, Liguori, Louzon, Lyall and McAllister. Opposed: Day. The motion carried by a vote of 6 in favor with 1 opposed.

IX. Business

A. Transportation Categorical Aid and Statewide Bus Service Issues – Superintendent Picard reported that we have invited local Senators, Representatives and the three Town Councils to discuss the issues the District has had with Transportation Categorical Aid and Statewide Bus Service. Ned noted that there are

copies of the hand-out in the back of the room. This request was made by Craig Louzon. For this year, we are operating fairly well internally while also handling out-of-district needs. We are working with South Kingstown to get their students to our CTC as this is a run that Statewide has informed us they cannot do. As for congestion issues on the main campus, per a suggestion from Gary Liguori, URI sent a professor and student from their engineering department to look at the campus to hopefully come up with some options. The reason we are having traffic issues is because we ran about 75% in-person last year and we are back to 100% in-person. He reviewed transportation revenue and expenses and transportation categorical aid amounts. Our expenses have climbed but we had a drop in income in FY22 mainly due to private school area. Our first bill from Statewide had transportation fees for some students ranging between \$7,000-\$8,000 for one month. Craig stated the reason he requested this is because seven years ago when he was Chair, Barry enlightened him. When the State phased out the regional bonus, they put in transportation categorical aid to make up some of the difference. It is up to the State as to whether or not they give it to us. Rep. Kennedy stated that statutorily they are supposed to give it to Chariho. People in RIDE make cuts and then we have to fight to restore the funding. Craig noted that he is tired of the dog and pony show to which Senator Algiere agreed. They are just as frustrated. Craig asked if the District had any legal grounds to which Rep. Kennedy responded that there is a statute and a formula and they are supposed to follow it. RIDE blames the Governor; the Governor blames RIDE. He shared an email he sent nine days ago to the Governor and he followed up twice to his email with no response (the last one was at 1:30 AM today). He received a response this afternoon in which the Governor's Office claimed they were waiting for a response from RIDE. Statewide was unable to provide service for two of Chariho's routes; the main issue is the transportation of South Kingstown students to Chariho CTC. Rep. Kennedy stated that he was looking for an answer; this was not what he was looking for. The Superintendent has a solution but RIDE doesn't want to hear it. Craig noted that Chariho is \$251,144 short (again). Is this happening to all regional school districts? Sen. Algiere commented that they need to get back to RIDE and the Governor to put this back in the budget. Craig asked if Chariho could sue and say they are not following the statute. Bill added that both gentlemen are doing a helluva job but the State is working against us. Chariho is the largest school district in the State. We have to be over twice as many square miles as Bristol-Warren yet they are getting almost as much as we are. There is something wrong with this math. It is a political issue. Sen. Algiere stated that they will work on this to which Rep. Kennedy added that the budget is expected to be submitted to the Governor by the end of January. He would expect that RIDE is already working on next year's budget. They play a game every year. There is no reason there should be a cut to this program. Chariho is one of the very few districts to operate during COVID and provide buses. Most other school districts did not operate last year. Craig noted that statute is a law. Why does RIDE have the ability not to follow the law? Sen. Kennedy stated they asked that question when Barry was here. Superintendent Picard commented that the District has offered up ideas that we could do to alleviate the statewide bus issues we are having. We offered an alternative but RIDE would not reimburse us the dollars. Rep. Kennedy replied that laws only apply when they want them to apply. Ryan thanked all three gentlemen (Sen. Algiere, Rep. Kennedy and Rep. Filippi) for coming tonight and for fighting for Chariho. Sen. Algiere responded "you run a great district."

B. High School Course Proposal for 2022-2023 – Statistics – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the High School Course Proposal for 2022-2023 – Statistics. High School Assistant Principal Jean Bradanini is here to address any questions or concerns. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Ryan, to approve the High School Statistics Course Proposal for 2022-2023. Ryan asked if, prior to this, there was no statistics class. Jean explained there was a half-year class for those who elected to take it. They want to offer a full year plus a pathway. Ryan clarified that this is an elective to which Jean replied that it is and students have to take 4 credits of math. She reviewed the courses available and noted that they wanted a middle ground (offer CP and Honors) to give students an option. Ryan stated that he totally supports this and feels it should be mandatory for all students. Chair Lyall agreed and questioned if there appears to be interest in this. Jean noted that they may first run one section of each. Donna felt this was a great addition and Jean was thanked.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was
VOTED: To approve the High School Statistics Course Proposal for 2022-2023. In favor: Unanimous.

X. Consent Agenda Items

Chair Lyall requested items to be pulled; nothing was pulled. Craig acknowledged the donation and thanked the donor.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was VOTED: To approve the Consent Agenda Items. In favor: Unanimous.

A. Minutes – Approved the following:

1. Executive Session Minutes of October 12, 2021 – Approval of Executive Session Minutes of August 10, 2021 (minutes not sealed).

2. Regular Session Minutes of October 12, 2021.

B. Transfers – None at this time.

C. Bill Review – Accepted.

D. Budget Summary – As per enclosed.

E. Balance Sheet – As per enclosed.

F. Personnel Actions – Staff Updates included in FYI.

G. Permission to Issue Bids/Request Quotes – None at this time.

H. Permission to Award Contracts – None at this time.

I. Home Instruction – Action taken in Executive Session.

J. Grants – None at this time.

K. Donations – Accepted the following:

1. Donation of lumber, valued at \$543.24, from Riverhead Building Supply, Wyoming, RI to the Richmond Elementary School Green Team for up to five (5) new raised garden beds in the existing outdoor garden.

XI. Reports

A. Subcommittee Reports

1. Special Education Local Advisory Committee met on October 21, 2021. Included in the packet was a copy of their approved minutes of May 13, 2021.

B. Superintendent's Report

1. ESSER III Update – The Superintendent reported that they have met with RIDE and ESSER III funds should be out in a couple of weeks. They are using current enrollment figures so we may see an increase.

C. Coming Events were highlighted.

XII. School Committee Requests for Future Agenda Items or Legal Opinions

Donna Chambers requested an update on the status of the Anti-Racism Task Force.

Craig Louzon asked that the Superintendent get back to the Committee after the Senators and Representatives meet with the State. He would like a legal opinion or guidance on whether or not the District can sue. Ryan asked if they wanted to wait until they got formal feedback. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Ryan, to seek Jon's opinion on a variety of legal options on how the District can challenge the State or RIDE in its obligations in regards to transportation categorical funding. Jon stated, because this is an agenda item this evening, he can provide an answer right now. When the General Assembly passes the budget, the budget is the same as law so the General Assembly has the final say. Ryan withdrew his second and Craig withdrew his motion.

XIII. Adjournment

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 8:09 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

Donna Sieczkiewicz, District Clerk