

Farmington River Regional School District

School Committee

Meeting #449

Farmington River Elementary School Library

Monday, May 6, 2024

MINUTES

7:00 PM

Members Present: Melissa Bye, Deb Fogel, Denise Hardie, Carol Lombardo, Phil Magovern, Douglas Miner, Carl Nett

Also Present: Tim Lee, Carol Sauerhauser (via Zoom), Caroline Stamm

- I. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM by Denise Hardie
 - A. **Roll Call:** Melissa Bye, Deb Fogel, Denise Hardie, Carol Lombardo, Phil Magovern, Douglas Miner, Carl Nett
- II. **Public Comment:**
 - A. Denise would like to mention that this is the annual teacher and staff appreciation week recognizing all school employees. She sends her heartfelt thank you to everyone that works for the school district.
- III. **Acceptance of Minutes:**
 - A. Carl Nett made a motion to accept the minutes from Meeting #448 held on 4/1/24. Deb Fogel seconded the motion.
 1. **VOTE:** Melissa Bye, Deb Fogel, Denise Hardie, Carol Lombardo, Phil Magovern, Douglas Miner, and Carl Nett voted in favor. There were no objections, and the motion passed to accept the minutes from Meeting #448 held on 4/1/24.
- IV. **Superintendent's Report:**
 - A. **Upcoming School Events:**
 1. **Literacy Night** is coming up on Wednesday 5/8 from 4:30 – 7:00 PM. This is the second annual Literacy Night and is a shared learning event with students and families to learn ways to support reading, and is coupled with the Scholastic Book Fair. There are different literacy-focused centers lead by teachers, along with free pizza and a raffle. Tim invited the School Committee to attend.
 2. **Screen-Free Week:** There are a variety of after-school events in the next week or so sponsored by the PTA. Examples are the PTA Crafternoon, the Cliff Brodeur Hoedown on 5/17 (square-dancing event), and an in-school Ice Cream Social.
 3. **Math MCAS** for grades 3-6 are next week
 4. **Half-Day on May 24th**
 5. **School Musical:** This year's musical titled "Whatever Happened to Harry?" will be held on May 30th at 6:30 PM.
 6. **National School Nurse Day** is this Wednesday 5/8.
 7. **Last Day of School** is Tuesday 6/12, which is a half-day.
 - B. **Annual School Choice Participation Vote:**
 1. Tim has done research to see if this vote is required, referring to the inter-district law surrounding school choice. He would like to entertain a motion so FRRSD can

be logged as a school district participating in School Choice.

2. Carl Nett made the motion that in the 2024-2025 School Year the FRRSD will participate in the receiving inter-district school choice program. Deb Fogel seconded the motion.
 - a) VOTE: Melissa Bye, Deb Fogel, Denise Hardie, Carol Lombardo, Phil Magovern, Douglas Miner, and Carl Nett voted in favor. There were no objections, and the motion passed that in the 2024-2025 School Year the FRRSD will participate in the receiving inter-district school choice program.

C. Establishment of a Special Education Stabilization Fund:

1. Tim presented research on the Special Education Stabilization Fund. He provided context that this is presented following budget discussions concerning a possibility of having a high-needs student enter the district that would cause an increase in cost and not having the funds to meet this need. Tim noted the following points:
 - a) This would be a budget item effective for FY26.
 - b) In order to allocate funds from this Stabilization fund, this would require a vote from the School Committee and the Sandisfield and Otis Select Boards. There are a number of financial safe-guards in place.
 - c) Tim would aim to have a goal of \$150K in the fund over the course of a few years. This would come from the excess fund rather than adding to the annual assessments.
2. There was a discussion about the process of establishing the fund, as well as what the process would be to cover the cost should the School Committee choose not to establish the fund. Additionally, the discussion involved the benefit of having the district hold these funds rather than the individual towns setting aside money for a similar purpose, as well as how this fund would be apportioned.

V. Cafeteria/Food Service Audit, Corrective Action Plan:

- A. The Food Service department recently had a state audit. Coming out of this audit, there was a number of action items that the district needs to address, including:
- B. Adult Meal Price Increase:
 1. Tim explained that the district is currently charging adult staff lunch at a cost of \$3.80, however the state has established this cost at \$4.99.
 2. Tim would like to entertain a motion to grant authority to the Superintendent and the Food Service Director to increase the price of adult meals from \$3.80 to \$4.99 as of the start of 2024-2025 school year.
 - a) Carl Nett so moved, and Phil Magovern seconded.
 - b) There was a discussion about the reasoning behind increasing the cost, which has to do with having a meal program that is fiscally sustainable.
 - c) VOTE: Melissa Bye, Deb Fogel, Denise Hardie, Carol Lombardo, Phil Magovern, Douglas Miner, and Carl Nett voted in favor. There were no objections, and the motion passed to grant authority to the Superintendent and the Food Service Director to increase the price of adult meals from \$3.80 to \$4.99 as of the start of 2024-2025 school year.

VI. FRREA Grievance: Notice to School Committee:

- A. Tim gave the School Committee notice of a class-action grievance affecting approximately 8 individuals that was presented to the administration from the teachers association about a month ago.
- B. CONTEXT: There have been a number of individuals that have had no issues with pay, however due to a large number of transitions during the beginning of the school year, and the number of transitions in personnel and companies surrounding payroll. The grievance mainly has to do with errors in payroll that have been corrected, inconsistencies in retirement pay, and also involves individuals that have complex pay breakdowns due to working in multiple capacities in the district.
- C. Currently, the grievance is in a hold for the chance for the district to respond, and the district is giving them frequent updates.

VII. MOU Re: Part-Time Teachers and Professional Development:

- A. One of the 8-10 action items to resolve the grievances, there was one issue that involved a hybrid-employee that brought to light a missing detail from collective-bargaining surrounding professional development.
- B. On at least one occasion, we had a teacher that was asked to stay beyond the end of their work-day due to Professional Development related to their teacher duties, but was not paid at the teacher rate
- C. Tim would like to propose formally creating a memorandum to address this concern, which would require the addition of the phrase “or professional development” to the existing clause.
- D. To ensure it is covered, there should be a line added to the MOU where the School Committee can sign-off on it.
- E. VOTE: Tim proposed a motion to add the words “or professional development” to article 7, Section 11. Carl Nett so moved, and Phil Magovern seconded.
 - 1. VOTE: Melissa Bye, Deb Fogel, Denise Hardie, Carol Lombardo, Phil Magovern, Douglas Miner, and Carl Nett voted in favor. There were no objections, and the motion passed to add the words “or professional development” to article 7, Section 11.

VIII. School Business Administrator Search, Update:

- A. Tim provided an update on the search for a School Business Administrator since the last school committee meeting. He provided context of the search parameters, as well as updating that since the last meeting, the applicant decided to take a position at another district.
- B. Due to this, we have decided to continue with TMS for another year. Tim emphasized that Carol Sauerhauser has done a solid job in the capacity of SBA, and is confident in Heidi’s job in the business office.
- C. In the next year, Tim has asked TMS to look at consulting services to ensure the office is running efficiently and smoothly, as well as ensuring there are the same 2 dedicated people to be here throughout the year.
- D. Discussion involved answering questions on what may have caused the grievances and how continuing with TMS will aid in this.

IX. School Committee Policies:

A. There are no new policy to bring forward.

X. Subcommittee Reports:

A. Finance: They have not met since the last School Committee Meeting

B. Facilities: They have not met since the last School Committee meeting, but intends to have another meeting before the end of the school year.

C. Policy: They intended to meet tonight to discuss restructuring, but only joined to reconvene at a later date.

1. Carl Nett would like to look into policy surrounding how to handle vocational education and the cost of transportation at a future date.

D. RAAC:

1. Sandisfield has an open seat currently, and it is up to the Sandisfield Select Board to nominate someone to fill the vacancy to the School Committee.

- a) The School Committee would like to formally request that the town of Sandisfield appoint someone to fill the vacancy.

2. Carol Lombardo will chair the next meeting since she is the Vice Chair.

- a) Carol will remain on the RAAC for now, even though her term as a School Committee Member will be finished at the end of the School's calendar year.

E. Evaluation of the Superintendent: They met last week.

1. Melissa Bye asked to join the Subcommittee.

2. Typically, evaluation begins at the beginning of the school year, with a mid-point check in, and then the School Committee reviews at the end of the year, followed by a presentation of the evaluation. This timeline doesn't work for us given how late it is in the school year, but Tim would like some feedback.

3. A Google Form Survey will be going out to the School Committee, staff, and optional extension to parents in lieu of the typical DESE evaluation. This survey will be going out later in the month and will give people 1 week to respond back.

4. They also discussed the need for a District Improvement Plan which the Superintendent's goals are tied to.

- a) The School Committee intends to meet over the summer for a retreat led by Tim develop goals for the larger district/long-range plans to start the school year with.

XI. RDA Discussion - Topic: Apportionment:

A. Denise brought forth a letter from the town of Sandisfield submitted on 4/17 - one day before the Sandisfield Town Manager resigned. Carl gave an overview of the letter and some context - which explained that they needed a vote on apportionment or they would proceed with voting to withdraw from the district.

B. Denise provided more context regarding the response from the Otis Select Board regarding this letter.

C. The School Committee discussed options to respond to the letter, including establishing a plan of action that separates a vote on amending the RDA with apportionment methodology from changes to the withdrawal amendment.

D. CONSENSUS: The School Committee would send a letter to the Sandisfield Select Board

stating what was discussed tonight regarding apportionment, agreeing that they would bring the RDA up to current standards, changes to the apportionment methodology with the attempt to make the district more financially sustainable, and asking them to rescind their vote held on April 16th. The plan would not include anything to do with a withdrawal amendment until after the vote on the revised RDA with changes to the apportionment methodology.

- E. **TIMELINE:** The School Committee would ask the RAAC to send the updated RDA to the School Committee no later than August 1st to approve and provide to the towns by September 1st for voting in their town meetings.
- F. Discussion of Apportionment Objectives and Criteria:
1. Prior to discussion on objectives and criteria, Tim provided context of the current state of the District regarding apportionment.
 2. Tim asked the question to the School Committee Members from Sandisfield: Initially, does his interpretation of the current state of the District surrounding apportionment seem accurate? Additionally, what does it mean to be financially unsustainable and what impact does this have on the individual tax payers, and to the operation and services of the towns.
 - a) Douglas Miner responded by looking at the overall budget of the town - half goes to the school costs, and half goes to the roads, and there is very little margin for maintenance or other costs that arise.
 - b) Carl Nett responded by commenting on the Combined Effort Yield (the state's marker for what the town can reasonably expect to pay for the school). In the past Sandisfield was paying close to 150% of what the state establishes the town can afford to contribute.
 - c) Melissa Bye provided a personal antidote on her personal situation as a Sandisfield resident, living modestly on a fixed income. Her property taxes in Sandisfield on her home would be \$5,200, but if her same exact house was in Otis, her property taxes would be \$3,270 because of the tax rate.
 - d) The School Committee continued a discussion on comparing the tax rates and status of the two towns, with consideration of data that was predetermined to look at, and what the voters will need to understand.
 3. Tim redirected the conversation to discuss what are the data points that define what is considered sustainable (what are measurable things that are easier for individuals to understand than CEY that directly affects the voters).
 - a) Carl Nett responded that we need to figure out what the district's financial runway is - how long can we sustain a given apportionment method for and how frequently do we want to return to the conversation to reassess?
 - b) Understandability is huge - the voters have to understand the criteria that we are talking about. The School Committee discussed which apportionment methods may be easier to understand, but emphasized that ensuring understandability and simplicity is the most important.
 4. **CRITERIA:** State things in understandable forms that are clear and that the public will understand and are not experimental, but proven sustainable. For example, choosing not to discuss CEY, but instead talk about property values.

5. CRITERIA: Having a viable educational institution serving both towns matters and is important. Everyone has had access to an education, and everyone either has or knows someone that has students enrolled. Any sort of language that threatens withdrawing is not embracing this concept.
 - a) People of both Otis and Sandisfield value this school. Discussion involved asking if we should view the school district as a shared institution of both towns as if they are one large towns.
6. CONSENSUS: Tim observed consensus and posed the following questions:
 - a) Do we have consensus among the School Committee, for at least one of the member towns or both, that there is an issue of financial sustainability to which we provide relief.
 - (1) The School Committee agreed yes.
 - b) How much relief?
 - (1) The School Committee agreed that this is subjective, and there are other factors such as understandability.
 - c) There was consensus that both towns need each other and the education provided would not be the same nor would be financially sustainable should either town withdraw.
7. NEXT STEPS: The School Committee agreed that the following are their next action steps going forward given tonight's discussion:
 - a) Summarize the points of consensus to build upon and the criteria identified.
 - b) Come up with 2-3 apportionment options with the goal to be clear and understandable and be clear/look at 3 different models with scaled levels of relief. Denise would like to see 2-3 different people present this other than Carl to make it more understandable to voters.

1. **Other items not reasonably anticipated:**

- a. Denise asked Carol and Carl if they had any memory of having members of the School Committee at the BHRSD and LPS High School Graduation to give the diplomas from a community member from their town (to be better connected to the towns).
 - i. There was a consensus to look into having someone from the district at the graduation - have Tim reach out to the Principals to inquire if this can be done.
 - ii. They agreed that the future goals of the school committee should include increasing attention on the middle and high school students.

2. **Suggested items for future agendas:**

- a. Nothing at this time.

3. **Adjournment:**

- a. Carol Lombard made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:14 PM.
- b. Douglas Miner seconded the motion.
- c. Vote - Roll Call: Melissa Bye, Deb Fogel, Denise Hardie, Carol Lombardo, Phil Magovern, Douglas Miner, Carl Nett

Respectfully submitted,
Caroline Stamm