

**Farmington River Regional School District  
Otis/Sandisfield  
555 Main Road, Otis MA 01253  
School Committee Meeting #409  
Monday, December 6, 2021, 7:00PM  
via ZOOM**

**The meeting was called to order by Carol Lombardo at 7:00 P.M.**

**Community Participation:** Steven Seddon, Sandisfield Selectman as well as a resident of Sandisfield, would like to request an item for discussion on next month's agenda. Steven would like to discuss amending the Regional District Amendment. He feels Sandisfield should have an equal say in the decisions and votes passed by the School Committee. Steven's statement to the School Committee, and the suggestion of what the amendment should say is posted on the website along with the approved minutes.

- 1. Approval of minutes #208 and #209.** Due to grammatical errors, the minutes will be revised and voted on at the next School Committee meeting.
- 2. Principal/Superintendent updates:** Tom Nadolny updated the Committee on the petition he put in with the Commissioner of Education regarding the relief of the five days we had to close school due to COVID 19 at the beginning of the FY21 school year. The petition was based on the lack of aid with our transportation dilemma, not receiving any relief like other districts received throughout the state. The National Guard was sent to many other school districts, but Farmington River was denied any help regarding this situation. Other school districts were able to switch to remote learning. Farmington River was denied the opportunity to go remote. Tom pleaded with the Commissioner to relieve Farmington River for the five days we needed to shut down. No one returned any of Tom's messages until just recently. Robert Curtin (right hand man to the Commissioner on attendance and how they affect AP scores) finally returned one of Tom's messages. Robert responded by letting Tom know that if he pushed the petition to the Commissioner right now, the answer would be no relief. Tom was told to wait and see how many snow days we need to use this year. Tom reminded Robert of our location and five snow days are not uncommon each year. They will speak again at the end of January to discuss this further. Robert feels the Commissioner more than likely will agree to give two- or three-days relief, rather than five. The Commissioner is not giving anyone any relief from the 180 days requirement.

Tom also asked Robert Curtin, who was stated earlier as being one of the heads of attendance for the state, about attendance and the scoring of attendance. The Department of Education is going back to the traditional way as how attendance is factored into your AP scores. This is unfair due to the COVID protocol still in effect. Students need to stay out of school for ten days if contracting COVID. This affects attendance. There will not be much wiggle room if students get sick again. If a student does get sick again, even for other reasons besides COVID, they will be considered chronic absences. This is not fair for the student nor the school. Robert's response was a roundabout answer stating they are only looking for improvement. Tom's

impression is that the state does not know what to do at this point in time. Tom hopes the state will let us know before spring about the relief.

Tom updated the Committee on the school's COVID cases. There was one case a couple of weeks ago that did not spread. It was contained to one family.

Tom is wrapping up on all the teacher evaluations. He has two more to go, then Tom will continue with the specialists.

The after-school program is a huge success. Most students are there until 4 P.M., but some parents are taking advantage of the 5 P.M. pickup time. A few more programs will be starting after the first of the year. Mrs. Mielke will be heading up a Spanish Club. There will be two groups. One club is K-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade. The other club is 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade. Intramurals with Mrs. Daley will pick up again in January. Learning with Legos with Mrs. Digrigoli. This club is focused on social and emotional skills through        based counseling. The club will also focus on friendships, self-esteem, growth mindset, and emotional management. This club is for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Graders. A knitting club will be offered to the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> graders by Mrs. Flower. Knitting helps students to learn hands on problem solving and also will help with math skills. Mr. Keller and Mrs. Flower will be providing a Minecraft Club for the students who like gaming. This club is for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Arlene Tolopko asked Tom what Minecraft is. Tom explained that it is a video game that is allowed to be played in school. There is no violence. The game is based on strategies by the player to build villages.

A shortage of food and supplies are hitting the kitchen staff. This is an issue throughout the state, not just Farmington River. Kendra Rybacki and Candy Chaffee are doing a great job in keeping up with the lunch menu. Some days they do have to alter the lunches with what we have on hand.

Roger Kohler commented on the absentee scoring. He feels that is going to be a problem as well. To be considered chronic, you are out over fifteen days. Tom stated that we already have a student who was out for twelve days due to COVID. Roger also wanted to comment on how well the after-school program is going. Tom responded that the after-school program was stopped a few years ago due to lack of attendance. Farmington went from roughly twenty students to half of the student population. Carl Nett asked Tom what he thought the reason why the students are interested in staying now than before. Tom thinks it has to do with the type of programming that is offered now. There are more programs to choose from now than in the past. Jennifer Hibbins stated that her children love the after-school programming. She asked Tom if there could be a progress report in February to see if there is an improvement with AIMSWEB scores as a result of the extra activities. Tom stated that he has spoken to Mr. Saporito about this. They are not sure if they have the time to do the extra testing before the winter break. The students do lose some learning over their time off. Tom would like to test because he is interested in seeing if all the extra resources that are being poured into the grades that need to improve are working. Also, to see if the after-school programming is helping.

3. **Follow up and discuss the safety of brake maintenance on school vans.** Carl Nett spoke about this item. Carl brought up the issue of the smoking wheel on one of the vans. He feels there needs to be a root cause corrective action when one of the vans needs maintenance. This will also help with the entire fleet because we can perform preventative measures to make sure the same problem does not occur in the other vans.

It was pointed out by Carl that in his opinion one of vans had a caliper freeze which created a tire to smoke. Carl proceeded to explain the physics of a caliper freezing.

Carl looked at the maintenance log for the van and there hasn't been any replacement of brake fluid. Carl also looked at the van manual, and the manual suggests that the brake fluid be replaced every two years or 32,000 miles. We should follow the Ford manual just in case anything happens we can say we followed the manual's maintenance schedule. Carl then stated that once the caliper starts freezing, there is time to repair the problem. The van drivers need to be aware of any anomalies going on such as pulling of the van. There is a 7D maintenance schedule that the van drivers follow containing a pre-inspection of the van and a post inspection. Carl feels the inspection should be more detailed. He suggests filling the logbook out in a more detailed manner. Carl also feels there should possibly be more training for the drivers to go along with their 7D training. Carl looked at the maintenance log for the 2016 Transit Van. The van had 88K miles on it and it was more than a year from the last time the brake pads were changed from the time the caliper froze up. The pad was probably worn. If we were changing pads every year, we would have noticed that the pads were getting worn. Carl feels that we should change the brake pads no longer than a year's time. The brake fluid should be changed every two years or 30 thousand miles. Also, we should change the calipers every three to four years. Carl noticed that the Ford Transit Vans are two-wheel drive. We should consider getting all wheel drive vehicles when the time comes for replacing the older vans. Eric explained that the vans go through thorough inspections when brought in for the 7D inspections. He also noted that when the vans get taken to A&M Auto, they check all the fluids and are good about telling us what needs to be done. The van drivers always bring up issues that they feel need to be checked on to Eric. At that point, an appointment is set up to have the vans looked at. Carol Lombardo asked Eric why did the tires smoke on the van? Eric replied that that van had been sitting in the parking lot for over a month. The van was only driven about two miles to a student's house and back to the school. When the van reached the school, the driver immediately informed Eric of the smoking tire. The driver and Eric both took a drive together to see what was happening. When Eric started to drive the van, the caliper was no longer seized. The brake pads were never at the point of being metal on metal. It was just the point of the van sitting for over a month without use. Eric did research on the caliper and found out that a vehicle sitting over time will seize the caliper. Carl informed Eric that you do not get smoke unless there is metal on metal. Eric did not want to debate with Carl but disagrees with Carl's statement. Jess Drenga spoke and agreed with Eric. At times, you do not need metal on metal to create smoke. Eric also informed the Committee that the two new Transit vans are all wheel drive. The van that was just ordered is also an all-wheel drive.

Eric wanted to know if the School Committee wants to be more involved with the maintenance the school vans. What parts of the maintenance does the School Committee want Eric to follow?

If the School Committee wants to follow all the scheduled maintenance as required by Ford, then Eric feels we need to start bringing the vans to the Ford dealership in Winsted, where they keep track of everything that needs to be done and when it needs to be done. That is taking the maintenance one step further than how the vans are being maintained by A&M Auto. If that is the case, the budget needs to reflect the increase in maintenance costs. If this is what the Committee would like, Eric would be happy to follow the decision the School Committee recommends. Carl replied that he is making a point that the brake pads need to be changed every year and we need to change the brake fluid as directed by the Ford manufacturer's schedule. He feels it is in the best interest for the students and the expense is not too high. Eric wanted to know if there is anything in the schedule that he is currently not following that he needs to be aware of? Jess Drenga replied that if we were to follow the schedule, we would need to do everything that the manufacturer suggests doing to maintain the vans. Anything can go wrong with a vehicle at any time. Carl doesn't feel we need to go to Ford to maintain the vans. He feels any competent mechanic can maintain the van. Carl thinks that if any issues come up with the van, the Administration needs to let the School Committee know. Tom wanted to explain the conversation that he and Eric had about the maintenance of the van. He feels that there is a liability here as well and if the van is not serviced as the manufacturer suggests, then there may be a bigger problem. Tom feels the vans should follow the manufacturer's schedule. We could continue going to A&M for the routine maintenance, but to cover all liability we should be going to Ford. Tom commented on the fact of the budget going up if we go with Ford for all maintenance. Carl and Roger both agreed that following the maintenance schedule should be done, but not going to Ford. Any mechanic would suffice. Tom said they must be ASEC certified. He will make sure A&M is certified. Carol asked if everyone is satisfied with following the maintenance schedule. Carl would like the School Committee to be notified of any problems involving the vans.

- 4. Discuss and vote on the District Improvement Goals.** Jess Drenga motioned to accept the District Improvement Goals. Deb Fogel seconded the motion. Discussion: Jennifer Hibbins suggested putting a number or percentage on school choice enrollment. She is suggesting a 10 percent increase as a goal to achieve.

Carl brought up a couple of questions for Tom and wanted to expand on Jennifer's comments. The first question was concerning the clarification of the percentile of the AP scores. He wanted to know if Tom was going to try to achieve a 25 percent increase each year or reaching the 25 percentiles. Tom responded by saying he is striving for 25 percent per year. Another comment that Carl made was how troubling it is not to see a science goal for improvement. He also doesn't like that there is not a financial goal for financial efficiency in the improvement goals either. Given this is a two-year plan, there needs to be an understanding of what constitutes being on track. There should be a time in between to see if the goals are still on track. As far as the 25 percent increase each year, Carl feels that is too conservative. The increase will take two years to get the scores back to what they were in 2018. He feels the increase is modest. Tom offered to strive for an increase of 45 percent. Carl agreed that is good; he can support that increase over the 25 percent. Tom feels with all the added resources that have been implemented to the students, there should not be any reason why the scores would not reach that percentage increase. As far as the Science goal goes, Tom explained that the focus is on ELA and Math this time around. The Science block is not as long as the Math and ELA blocks. There is not enough time

in the day to have three ninety-minute blocks of time. It would be hard to incorporate all the other curriculum throughout the day. A lot of times, Science is incorporated in with the instruction of Math and ELA. That will help with improvement in science too.

Arlene commented on the number of families with children that have moved into Otis Woodlands. She was informed that there are several new families that have school aged children. She suggests that we get the information out as quickly as possible to the new families and public to get a jump on having them enroll into Farmington River. We could start by placing information in the Otis Observer. Jennifer Hibbins commented on this topic by again asking the Committee to place a percentage on reaching a goal for school choice. Tom spoke up on this topic of school choice. When Tolland and Granville closed their elementary school, he along with Teresa called and reached out to the families in those towns to see if they would be interested in enrolling into Farmington River. Both Tom and Teresa offered information and tours of the school to many families. Many people responded and were interested, no one enrolled. Tom likes the idea of updating information and getting it out to the public, but we have to be careful as to where to place our information. We cannot go to other towns and place a brochure in their local papers. That is frowned upon by all Superintendents in all districts. We place notifications in papers such as The Berkshire Eagle, The Shoppers' Guide, The Country Journal, Otis Observer, and the Sandisfield Times. Every year registration information is submitted to the papers listed. What scares Tom about the ten percent is the fact that enrollment is decreasing throughout Berkshire County. Tying a number to enrollment is not going to work with already decreasing rates. Carl agrees with Tom. He feels we need to focus on students who choice out of district and try to get them back into the elementary school. Tom also suggested reaching out to the homeschoolers as well. He feels we start by updating the brochure and communicate with the public and surrounding towns showing them how good of a school we are. Jess had a couple of questions. She feels it is too difficult to put a number on enrollment increase. There is no control over who enrolls, especially if the reason is for keeping siblings in the same school district. Jess also wanted to ask about school choice busing. Is there a way we could provide transportation to those students? Tom stated that there is transportation for school choice students coming into the district. They just have to meet a bus at the closest bus stop that the bus drives in accordance with where they live. We cannot pick them up in another town. Tom stated that Teresa explains all this information to the new candidates. Jennifer still feels we could put at least a five percent increase on school choice incoming students. Tom explained that if we have a class that is at the limit and they graduate, that is 20 students that need to be filled to keep the numbers even, plus adding on another five more students to achieve the goal. Tom said he will do whatever the School Committee wants, because it will not affect Tom's evaluation or goals, but he suggests that first we find out why they left and try to get them back. Some students there will not be swayed to return due to convenience to the parents. Roger likes the sound of all of the strategies of trying to increase enrollment. He also likes the after-school programming. He feels this may be a positive in the decisions to enroll at Farmington River and help with students staying at the school. Jess asked if the after-school programming will be funded to continue in the future. There is only so much money that is available to keep the programming going. Tom agreed with Jess in that the money will not be available forever. Tom stated that he did not approve every program that was presented for an after-school activity. One reason being the same program was submitted twice. Tom explained that it depends on the summer school program. We need to continue summer school for regression students who need

the extra help, but not for all students like this past summer. Eventually all the programming will hit the budget. Jennifer shared that she attended a MASC meeting on recovery learning. There was a progress report informing the state the return on their investment. If they feel the money is being used appropriately, they may give us more to continue the programming. Tom stated if they budget that money on the state or federal level then that would be great.

- 5. Vote to amend the FY22 budget to utilize the excess E&D funds to reduce the assessments to both towns.** Carl Nett motioned to amend the FY22 budget to utilize the excess E&D funds to reduce the town's assessments for the total budgeted expenditures of \$4,653,196 and the E&D utilization amount to \$504,175. The vote was unanimously passed for approval.
- 6. Financial updates.** Eric Jesner sent the budget report to everyone to look over. He asked if anyone had any questions concerning the report. No questions were presented. Eric stated that he and Carl had a debate over email today on what to include in the budget report. Eric would like to know what the thoughts are on what should be included in the report and if there is anything that Eric needs to change. Carl would like to include some of the revolving fund balances in the expenditure accounts. Eric feels it is conflating information. The report that Eric is presenting is the approved budget general fund as well as the approved grant funds that are being used in FY21. The revolving fund accounts are a very different issue. It is money that we cannot entirely spend. It is very specific as to where the money is spent. The E&D revolving account is not an expense account, nor is the Capital Stabilization fund. The balances would not be shown on the expenditure account. There should be a different report showing revolving fund balances. Eric just wants clarification as to what the School Committee would like to have reported so there is no confusion with any of the reporting going forward. Carl wants a report showing all the sources of funds and their balances. The School Committee has a fiduciary responsibility of all the funds. The Capital Stabilization fund is a revolving fund. That fund is already depleted due to the paving project. What it doesn't show is what is left in E&D. This is important because it lets the Committee know the current balance if something unexpected were to come up. Relative to other revolving accounts, Carl doesn't feel the other funds need to be shown per se, because they are not as relevant to the budget as the E&D or Capital Stabilization accounts. The School Committee needs a clear view as to what is in the rainy day fund. That is the reason why Carl would like to see the balance of that fund on the report. If money is put in or taken out, they can see where they are financially if they need money or not. Eric stated that the amount that is shown on the expenditure report is what was budgeted for this year and how much was spent, just like the rest of the accounts that were approved for the FY21 budget. Carol asked Eric if he could somehow show the Committee what is left in E&D? Eric said yes, but the balance that is left is not allowed by the School Committee to spend after they allocated an amount for the FY budget. The Committee would need to bring an additional amount to the towns if more money is needed out of E&D for an unexpected expense. Eric would be happy to provide a revenue report or a revolving report with all the information on it. Eric wants to be clear that the expenditure report is not the right report for what is being asked for. Carl and Carol both agreed that having the information requested on a separate report is acceptable. Jess Drenga agrees that balances or information must be separated. The general public may not understand how the accounts and funding work. There would be too much confusion. That is exactly what Eric wants to avoid.

Eric has one more item to bring up on assessments from both towns. Otis is current with their payments. Sandisfield is still behind with their assessments. Sandisfield did pay September and October months, but they are still behind for November and December. Eric did receive a check dated November 5, 2021. He was curious why the payment for November was not included since that payment was due on November 4<sup>th</sup>. Eric understands that Sandisfield is currently reorganizing their town hall, but he was told the issue of not getting the assessment checks was due to the mailing system. The mail would not have been an issue if the check was written on a date after the late payment was due. Eric wanted to let the Committee know what was going on, so they know what he is dealing with. He proceeded to show the Regional Agreement where it states that the assessments are supposed to be paid by the first business day of each month. Eric does send out an invoice each month as a courtesy and he will be more than happy to continue this method if the towns would like him to. Eric wants to work with the towns to make things run as smoothly as possible. Carl explained that he did follow up with the Select board on this issue. Roger Brown and George Riley stated that this issue has been addressed. Carl is shocked to hear that Sandisfield is still not current with their assessment. Carl doesn't know what more to do to help in this situation. He will follow up with Roger Brown and George Riley and to see what happened. Carl is tired of being embarrassed in School Committee meetings when he was assured that this would be taken care of. Carl was told that George was in touch with Eric. Eric did say that George Riley did call. Carl again stated that he will talk to George Riley again. Arlene Tolopko suggested a possible fine for being late in payments. Both Carol and Eric said no. Carl did state that the new treasurer is back logged. She is trying to catch up. He did say that this is not an excuse, but maybe this is why they are behind.

**7. Vote to adjourn into Executive Session only to return to School Committee to adjourn from School Committee meeting.** The vote was unanimous to enter Executive Session, then vote out of Executive Session only to adjourn from School Committee meeting.

**8. Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 8:46 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Teresa DellaGiustina, Secretary of the School Committee

tld

\*attached document

## Amendment Request

Hi, my name is Steven Seddon. I am a resident of Sandisfield, and a member of our Selectboard. With the current structure of the RDA for voting requirements most substantive matters are decided with simple majority. This means that Otis School Committee members can simply vote in unison and deny Sandisfield School Committee members the opportunity to participate. With only two member towns in our current RDA this is extremely unfair for Sandisfield.

I would like to request an item for discussion at the next School Committee meeting. I am proposing an amendment to the RDA to help correct these inequities and give Sandisfield representatives an actual voice in school matters. This amendment would simply tie the vote on substantive matters to the same requirements that constitutes a quorum in the existing RDA.

This is what I think the amendment should say:

“All motions on Committee business shall be decided by a majority vote of the quorum in attendance, unless otherwise required by law, provided that at least one Committee member from each town votes on the prevailing side of any such motion. This should apply to setting the agendas for future meetings as well.”