

**Farmington River Regional School District
Otis/Sandisfield
555 Main Road, Otis MA 01253
School Committee Meeting #394
Via Zoom 7:00PM**

Meeting called to order by Jess Drenga at 7:02 PM

No Community Participation

Present: Jess Drenga, Carol Lombardo, Arlene Tolopko, Jennifer Hibbins, Roger Kohler, Deb Fogel, Tom Nadolny, and Eric Jesner

Absent: Billie Pachulski

Guests: Kendra Rybacki, Therese Gould, Steven Seddon, Sarah Tracy, Meaghan Martin, Amy Maxton, Michael Flower

1. Approval of minutes. Teresa DellaGiustina explained that the purpose of re voting on all the minutes from July 2020 to present. The numbering on the minutes were not chronological and they are all updated now. They were originally approved, but out of order. Jess Drenga motioned to accept the minutes, Carol Lombardo seconded. All Committee Members voted to accept the minutes.
2. Tom Nadolny updated the Committee on a feedback email from a concerned parent about the letter that he sent to all parents/guardians concerning COVID exposure in the school. There was one staff member and one student in school that were exposed to COVID, and one remote student who was exposed by a staff member. The person and student here in the school tested negative and the remote student tested negative as well. There was a concern that notification did not go out quick enough to the parents, but that was not the case. The day we found out about the positive case, notification to the parents went out. A few parents did pull their children from the school due to this scare. Everyone that needed to be notified were done in a timely manner. From the Tri Town staff to DESE were all notified.

MCAS testing will continue, but Tom is not sure what they are going to do or when. Remote students need to be taken into consideration as well. Arlene Tolopko asked Tom why there is a need for the students to take the MCAS? She feels that the pressure is so great on the students. Tom agrees and feels most schools want a pass for this year, but the push is coming from the Federal Government. There has been some regression, mostly in Math. But we have been giving extra attention to ELA and Math primarily in K-2. We have been adjusting staff as best as possible.

A night custodian has been hired. He will start on the 14th. Jeff Gray has been doing a great job with the help of Teresa DellaGiustina and Paige Gray. They have been helping so Jeff could get a break from time to time.

The School has distributed Thanksgiving baskets to families in need, roughly 26 families. There will be holiday help as well coming up.

Jess asked if there were any question on the Wellness Policy? Jennifer Hibbins thought her questions from last month were not understood to how she was trying to address her concerns. Jennifer thought that there should be a limit to what is given, not so much cut out the food rewards. Jennifer feels that the sweets occur often in the classrooms. Tom stated that the PTA usually puts together the ice cream socials for a reward for all the students. He has never seen a can of soda given to a student from any staff member. Popsicles are given during field day and Mr. Salomey has provided the ice cream truck as a reward to the students and staff at field day. The reward thought in the past was giving to a student an immediate snack or treat for doing their work. That does not happen anymore. Jennifer asked if there is even a Wellness Committee. The policy states that there needs to be a Parent, a community representative and any other interested volunteer. Tom explained that getting a parent is difficult since the meetings are held during the day and it is tough to get everyone together. The Committee is Kendra, Candy, Denise (nurse), Jenna Daley (gym teacher), Student Council, and Tom. Teresa did speak up and stated that she has represented the parents in the past due to her position here at the school. She was able to attend because she worked here at Farmington, and her children were attending Farmington at the time. Arlene wanted Kendra to weigh in about the sweets being served at the school. Jess spoke up and mentioned that during school there was one ice cream social and pizza as a reward does have to be rethought. Pizza is already an option for lunch at the school. Out of experience, Jess also added that parents did provide desserts for after school functions such as Family fun night. Jess feels as if cutting all treats out is not the solution. Jennifer did not want to eliminate treats all together, just limiting the amount being served. Maybe healthier choices need to be addressed. Tom did state that healthier choices is in the policy already. A healthier choice is encouraged to go along with the sweet snack. This year there is nothing going on as far as parties. Parents are not allowed to send in any classroom snacks at all. Teachers are allowed store bought snacks only. Kendra added that in the past, a signup sheet was passed around in each class for food needed for parties. Teresa DellaGiustina then spoke up and clarified that PTA removed the room parents from the classrooms. The room parents used to coordinate the food and such for all the parties and assigned a balance between sweets and healthier foods. Kendra also added that at the ice cream socials, there is always the option of fresh fruit as toppings along with the fudge and chocolate. Terry Gould (Otis Finance Member) thought we were wasting a lot of time on this subject. It sounds as if the parents and staff have a handle on all of this and we should trust them a little more on this topic. Jess does not have an issue with the sweets, nor has she ever had an issue when her children were attending Farmington. Tom mentioned that we need a decision now and we have been talking about the Wellness

Policy for 2 months. Teresa spoke up again and explained that one of her children has Celiac Disease and she had to work around the issue of snacks all the time. Teresa had to send in her own snacks during the holidays and other parties. She had to speak with her child and teach her which foods were acceptable to eat. Teresa's feeling is that the responsibility has to lie on the parents as well as the school. Both parties need to work together. Carol also feels that now is not the time to cut out rewards. There should be something for the students to look forward to at this time. Arlene agrees. Jennifer would like to look at the policy again next year. No one disagreed with that thought. Carol motioned to pass the policy as is, Arlene seconded that motion. All School Committee members voted to pass the policy as written.

3. Eric Jesner went over financial updates. The numbers for the FY21 budget numbers came out this week. Our Chapter 70 monies have been reduced by \$6200 and our Regional Transportation monies have increased by \$5000. This leaves us a difference of \$1100 for the year. This means that the monies that we have transferred from E&E may not be needed this year. The money can be rolled over to the following year.

The old red van that we owned, sold for \$7400.

The end of year report is complete and submitted. Eric is still waiting for the FY20 to close so the balances can be rolled over to FY21 budget. Eric cannot run reports that he needs without this happening. He is working with Vadar tomorrow to do that.

Eric is working with Mike Saporito and Laurie Flower to sort out the grants. They have to come up with a plan for the expenditures for the rest of the year.

Eric heard back from the Massachusetts Associations of Regional Schools about the formulas used by different districts across the state. It is common to use a one year, three year and five-year calculation. There is no one that is prevalent to the other. It depends on the districts.

4. Jennifer Hibbins wanted to share that she and Roger Kohler attended the All-Boards Meeting in Sandisfield last month. They have saving and initiative work sheet that needs to be handed in soon. Jennifer knew that Eric was opposed to this. Eric explained that if he handed in any information now, could possibly be misunderstood. Because the school increases by 2% yearly, this does not mean the budget will necessarily go up. Not enough information is available yet. Jennifer just wants to keep the lines of communication open with Sandisfield. Jennifer mentioned that Steve Seddon is here from the Sandisfield Finance Committee is here tonight. Jennifer asked Terry Gould if she had anything to say about the upcoming budget. Terry mentioned that Otis trusts the work the School Committee is doing; and she also thinks the School is always communicable and always have the answers to what is asked. Terry also thinks that the budget is always fair, and the children always come first.

Arlene wants to know if an article that was posted on the Otis Website should be discussed. Jennifer feels the Committee needs to respond back to the author with the

correct information. Jess Denga does not know if it is a good idea to respond and create a battle in a Town Newspaper. Eric feels that he needs to explain the answers to the Committee better, so if questions come up, answers will be explained better. Eric agrees with the article that facts are important, but the information that is backing up the facts needs to be understood and is equally important. The information states that there are 141 pupils that are going out of district. This represents all the kids tuitioned to Lee and Berkshire Hills and School Choice. The value is \$9800. For one student going to Berkshire Hills, the cost is over \$9000. If we are paying them that per person, how is the expenditure per pupil so small? Transportation and administration costs are not included in the tuition. All costs are being charged only to the elementary students. The biggest issue with looking at this chart in isolation is not understanding the difference between our district function and how all other districts function. If our middle and high school students were regionalized with other schools, the numbers would look differently. There would be a better way of assigning those costs. But because of the way we are set up, we still pay for our middle and high school students in full. The state views them as out of district. If Eric reported the transportation for those students as out of district students, we would not get any Transportation money from the state. The most important number is the total expenditures. If you look at our total expenditures and compare them with the state, that number is the true number. We are just over \$1000 over the average of the state's districts. Jess thinks that the problem lies in not asking Eric for information before writing an article in the paper. Eric stated that in the past, he has been called for information and the information was not properly translated before submitting an article in the paper. Jess made the comment that she goes into the school and sees how the Administration keeps the School running with all the obstacles of COVID and it is frustrating to her for the negativity. Jennifer does have a written rebuttal from Eric if the Committee would like her to publish the article. She feels a response is due but understands how the Committee does not want to battle with this citizen. The residents get their information through the Sandisfield Times and makes their decisions by what is written. Plus, the resident is vocal on the Sandisfield Facebook page. Jennifer would also like to add that everyone is invited to attend via ZOOM at any meeting. Jess still stands with not publishing anything and not getting confrontational. It makes her nervous. She does understand that the School Committee needs a voice but not this way. Arlene does not like how what is printed makes Otis look bad saying the School favors Otis. Jennifer just wants to try because it is exhausting to go and fight every year at Town Meeting. Roger Kohler spoke up and stated that he is the Creator and Administrator of the Sandisfield Website. He has not had time in the past 3 to 4 months to log on and check out the website, but the purpose was for positive information not negative. Jennifer stated that the PTA turns in articles to both Sandisfield and Otis newspapers. Otis always publishes the articles. Sandisfield turns down the articles stating they are not relevant enough for the paper. Carol agrees with Jess with staying out of the negative exposure in the paper. If anyone has a question or wants information and discuss the issue with the Committee. They would be happy to explain anything to anyone.

Jennifer shared information on the MASC annual meeting. The Delegate's Assembly was 3 hours long. Andrea Wadsworth was elected President of MASC which is a good thing for Berkshire County considering she is from Lee. Jennifer asked if there is anything in the library about diversity. That subject was brought up at the MASC meeting. Arlene spoke up and said it was in the works. She is involved in the Diverse Otis Committee. The Committee has written grants for books and information for the library and the school, including a book for each student in the school. As soon as the grants come through Arlene will update the Committee. The posters have been ordered.

Arlene did want to remind the Teachers that are present that the Cultural Council grant deadline is due soon, December 14th. This is for both Sandisfield and Otis. Meaghan Martin asked about the grants from last year. Arlene referred her to Jean Ransdorf for that information.

5. Jess Drenga motioned to go into Executive Session only to exit back into School Committee Meeting to adjourn. Deb Fogel made the motion, Carol Lombardo second the, unanimous vote to adjourn School Committee to enter Executive Session.

6. **Adjournment:** Meeting was adjourned at 8:18PM

Respectfully Submitted

Teresa DellaGiustina, School Committee Secretary

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