**Roanoke Valley Governor’s School Regional Board**

**Minutes of February 6, 2023 Meeting**

The Roanoke Valley Governor’s School Regional Board met on Monday, February 6, 2023, at 6:30 PM in the Governor’s School Lecture Hall. The following Board members were present:

Dr. Susan Mele Bedford County School Board

Mrs. Anna Weddle Botetourt County School Board

Mr. Trace Bellassai Craig County School Board

Dr. Kevin David Franklin County School Board

Ms. Laura Leroy Floyd County School Board

Mr. Mark Cathey, Chair Roanoke City School Board

Mr. Michael Wray Roanoke County School Board

**Members Absent**

Dr. Nancy Bradley Salem City School Board

**Also Present**

Roanoke City Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Verletta White, representing the Committee of Superintendents; RVGS Director Mark Levy; Clerk Dawn Winter-Ware; Deputy Clerk Paula Buch.

**Call To Order**

Mr. Cathey called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM. He welcomed newly appointed members Dr. Kevin David with the Franklin County School Board and Ms. Laura Leroy with the Floyd County School Board.

**Approval of Agenda**

On motion by Mr. Cathey and seconded by Dr. David, the agenda was approved as distributed.

**Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman**

Mr. Cathey turned the floor over to Dr. White for the election of the Chairman. Dr. White opened the floor for nominations for Chairman. There was a nomination of Mark Cathey for Chairman. Hearing no further nominations, nominations were closed. By unanimous vote, Mr. Cathey was elected Chairman for 2023. Mr. Cathey expressed his appreciation as he continues to serve on the Regional Board.

Mr. Cathey opened the floor for nomination for Vice Chairman. The nomination was made for Mike Wray as Vice Chairman. Hearing no further nominations, nominations were closed. By unanimous vote, Mr. Wray was elected Vice Chairman for 2023. Mr. Wray expressed his appreciation for everyone’s confidence and support.

**Election of Clerk and Deputy Clerk**

The Board unanimously approved the appointment of Dawn Winter-Ware as Clerk and Paula Buch as Deputy Clerk for 2023.

**Personnel List**

The Board unanimously approved the Personnel List as presented establishing stipends for the Clerk and Deputy Clerk.

**Approval of the October 3, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

The Board unanimously approved the October 3, 2022 meeting minutes.

**Legislative Update**

Mr. Levy provided a brief update on the funding from the State for new Regional Board members. Mr. Levy stated he is constantly advocating for state funding because he firmly believes the State is not providing what they should. As Co-chair of the State Director’s Committee, Mr. Levy heads up advocacy efforts and works each year to obtain better funding. He stated he did not expect other financial issues to impact Governor’s schools as they are funded separately with a specific allocation that he does not believe is impacted by other concerns that are occurring. He expects stable funding for the next year.

**Proposed Amendment to the Constitution and Bylaws**

Mr. Levy introduced the next item on the agenda as the proposed amendment to the constitution and bylaws. Board members have been presented with a page describing the overview of changes, which is simply to add Floyd County among the list of participating school divisions. The vote at the previous meeting in October 2022 approved Floyd County joining the Regional Board. The second item was the actual amendment, so all the divisions are appropriately represented by adding in Floyd County with the remainder of the constitution and bylaws remaining in effect. As this is the first time the Regional Board is viewing the entire amended document, the amendment was presented as a first reading, and it will appear on the April agenda as a second reading and a vote.

**2022-23 Budget Update**

Members received a page detailing the current year operating expenses and operating report. The report was pulled on January 10 to make it as similar as possible to last year’s report which was pulled on January 11. Mr. Levy pointed out the delivery of funds from the State throughout the year is somewhat inconsistent, so it is not a concern that revenue is not matching up to the same point from the previous year. Repair and maintenance expenses has not had anything requiring work or funds to be expended and the same goes for books and subscriptions for educational services, and equipment outlay. Mr. Levy said purchases of significant pieces of equipment have for the most part been placed on hold for the year since the budging is tight. Mr. Levy reassured members there is excellent equipment in place as demonstrated by the tremendous work students do.

The biggest financial concern currently is staff-related costs because of the way Governor’s schools are funded from the State. When there is an increase in salary it is not well-reflected in what is received from the State because it’s subdivided as part of the per pupil amount that is allocated. The State does not look at actual staffing or even the predicted staffing through SOQ, they simply tack on a little bit more and RVGS receives less than the State share. Even with salary increases that are important, it takes a big bite out of the budget. Mr. Levy stated there needs to be a better way for the State to recognize the actual cost of staff.

**2023-24 Preliminary Budget**

Mr. Levy said it looks like there is a slight increase, but the school is not receiving additional funds as hoped. RVGS has been working with a deficit budget and in the proposed budget there is a tuition increase. Mr. Levy explained for individuals who are new to the Board that RVGS does not charge anything to the students because of the local contributions from the school divisions. The proposed increase is a tuition increase to $5,000 per student, up from the current tuition of $4715 per student. The increase represents a larger increase than a year-to-year basis that the school would have preferred to manage, however, there has not been an increase in tuition since 2017 representing the longest stretch of no increase in tuition since the start of the school. Mr. Levy said everything has been looked at to avoid a tuition increase in the hopes of trying to obtain additional funding from the State. If the Board is comfortable with increasing tuition to $5,000 rather than a straight calculation of what it would take to keep above a $400,000 reserve operational balance, the increase will move forward. Mr. Levy stated for the newer members of the Board, prior to this year there was a $400,000 reserve that was truly held in reserve so if a participating school division drops out, the State pulls funding or something catastrophic happens, there is a reserve. There was a carryover cushion of just over $250,000 saved since Mr. Levy took over as Director, but there has been a need to use some of that and will continue to need to do so to the extent there will be a need to tap into the $400,000 reserve fund after the $250,000 is expended.

Mr. Levy stated he is hopeful funding will be better than expected so there would not be a need to increase tuition quite as much the following year. Mr. Levy said basically the one increase is in staffing and staff-associated costs and the tuition increase is a response to not dipping into the $400,000 reserve. Mr. Levy said the proposed tuition increase and perhaps another $250 tuition increase the following year will bring the Board to where there would not be a need to dip into the $400,000. Mr. Levy said he is projecting 257 students the upcoming year and stated the mid- 260’s is a good target number. He said the largest number of students in recent years was 272.

Mr. Levy said during the pandemic there was a little bit of concern with recruitment and students not completing the program and waiting for those slots to come back around to fill in a way that is balanced. Mr. Levy restated the only method RVGS has control over revenue is through tuition and with an increase in the number of students, RVGS will be in a better financial situation.

**Preliminary Priorities and Growth Objectives Document**

Mr. Levy stated he provided a preliminary version of this document in April 2022 and it was refined in June 2022 based on initial feedback. Mr. Levy stated the document has again been refined with additional input and has been titled a priorities and growth objectives document. Mr. Levy stated for the benefit of the newer board members, all Governor’s schools are evaluated in a six-year cycle. Once every six years the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), sends a team to conduct an evaluation. The team spends several days and visits classrooms during the school day and during the evenings the team is meeting with stakeholders. The team comes forward with a very thorough report. Mr. Levy said he has served on evaluation teams for other Governor’s schools and confirmed it is thorough on both sides.

Mr. Levy said RVGS is in very good shape on not receiving many “needs improvement” categories, however; the team made some recommendations that needed to be addressed and RVGS has been working on the recommendations over the past few years. That is the largest part of what is represented on the document and is a type of road map of taking the mid-year evaluation through until the next full evaluation site visit. The document is not something that needs to be voted on but is an opportunity to review and provide input on how to continue to make progress. Once a year a survey is conducted of students and parents on an anonymous basis providing a good perspective from parents. Mostly the parent feedback is positive and RVGS is asked not to change a thing about the program. The document has been shared with liaisons as an opportunity for input and it has been shared with division Superintendents as well.

Mr. Levy briefly took members through the document detailing central priorities, instruction, student well-being and the unique learning experiences that students receive at RVGS. The document also contains some specific growth areas and priorities that need focus and progress as well as recommendations by the VDOE.

**Director’s Report**

Mr. Levy reminded members that RVGS recently completed the intercession research period which culminated in the Project Forum. He thanked all who were able to stop by for the Open House. He said overall, the Open House was well-attended after being a virtual event for the past few years. Mr. Levy expressed appreciation to Melissa Fisher for the excellent job she did of coordinating the event as well as Paula Buch and Kathy Sebolt, and the rest of the RVGS staff. Each member has a detailed list of the awards and categories, and the Clerk will forward an email that will contain the digital version of the document that could be sorted by school division.

Mr. Levy stated the recent annual fundraiser was incredibly successful, bringing in $36,000. He praised the tremendous support from the community and the RVGS Foundation. Mr. Levy said he has also been busy hitting the road to the participating school divisions for new student applications with the goal of making RVGS accessible to everyone who wants to apply by providing a variety of options for folks to do so. He said there was a slight decrease in some of the minority groups but there are a lot of reasons and factors that could play into that, and he will continue to have conversations with school divisions about anything that could be done to make sure that there is a reach to all communities and a pipeline built early on. He stated RVGS is committed to a fair and transparent process for all the individuals who apply, ensuring they feel comfortable applying and know they will receive a fair review during the application process.

Mr. Levy stated rigor and expectations of the program is an important piece and is consistently one of the top positive comments from parents. It is the high expectations that compel students to complete the work and value the program. Mr. Levy said staff watch for students who may be having difficulty with steps made toward supporting students who show difficulty adjusting. During second semester, there are conversations, much like coaching conversations, set up with any student having below a B for first semester. Of course, teachers might offer some advice, but the goal is for the student to feel able to talk about it at a deeper level, developing a real relationship between student and teacher. Mostly first year students transitioned well overall but of course for some, it is a culture shock, and they are provided free tutoring sessions weekly with a retired teacher. Students have access to their current teacher, but Fred Hoffman is a former RVGS physics teacher working part-time at RVGS and knows what it takes to be successful. Students enjoy working with him and he is set up to offer group tutoring sessions after school, so students do not have to pay for the sessions. Most students do well and thrive, but for those having a tougher time, there are supports in place.

Mr. Levy added there will be a new opportunity added for students interested in computer programming or computer science. Two courses will be offered as year-long, half credit courses. Students will have the opportunity to take quantum computing or machine learning. The quantum computing will be in partnership with IBM. There will be live sessions they can watch with lab sessions and students can write code that will be used in actual quantum computers at the IBM facility, providing a tremendous opportunity. The head of IBM signs off on the certificate for completion. Tuition is approximately $1000, for individual students however RVGS is working on a partnership with the program so students will be participating entirely free of cost to the student and to the school.

The second course, machine learning, is basically the same type of situation except the sponsoring organization is the Department of Defense and it will be more of an artificial intelligence-type course. It also is a tremendous opportunity for students. It is not expected to interest a tremendous portion of the school population, but for students who are more interested in computer science. Mr. Levy expressed excited about the opportunity during the next year, when RVGS will develop a partnership with the coding school for students as he has wanted to expand in the area for a while.

Mr. Levy announced the RVGS Senior Dinner will be held at the Hotel Roanoke on May 8 and invitations will be sent soon.

**Superintendent Discussion Items**

Members thanked Mr. Levy for his vision and efforts to keep tuition increases down until the upcoming year.

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the RVGS Regional Board will be on Monday, April 17, 2023, at 6:30 PM, at the RVGS Lecture Hall.

**Adjournment**

The RVGS Regional Board meeting was adjourned at 7:40 PM.

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RVGS Regional Board Chair

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RVGS Regional Board Clerk