

Roanoke Valley Governor's School Regional Board Minutes of October 5, 2020 Meeting - **DRAFT**

The Roanoke Valley Governor's School Regional Board met on Monday, October 5, 2020, at 6:30 p.m. in the Roanoke Valley Governor's School Lecture Hall. Individuals present complied with social distancing and face covering mandates issued by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The following Board members were present:

Mr. Mark Cathey	Roanoke City	Chairman
Mr. Jason Johnson	Bedford County	Vice Chairman
Mr. Trace Bellassai	Craig County	
Dr. Michael Chiglinsky	Salem City	
Mrs. Michelle Crook	Botetourt County	
Mrs. Julie Nix	Franklin County	
Mr. Mike Wray	Roanoke County	

Also present: Roanoke City Public Schools Superintendent, Mrs. Verletta White, representing the Committee of Superintendents; Governor's School Director Mark Levy; Clerk Cindy Poulton; Deputy Clerk Paula Buch; Roanoke County Schools Superintendent Dr. Ken Nicely; Botetourt County Schools Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Russ; and division representatives Sam Foster (Craig), Jamie Soltis (Salem), Chris Taibbi (Salem), Jody Robinson (Franklin), and Karen Woodford (Bedford).

Call to Order

Mr. Cathey called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and welcomed Mrs. Verletta White, Superintendent of Roanoke City Public Schools, to her first meeting of the Regional Board. As there were a number of new faces present, the Chairman called for introductions.

Approval of Agenda

On motion by Dr. Chiglinsky and Mrs. Nix, the Board unanimously approved the agenda as distributed.

Approval of May 11, 2020 Meeting Minutes

On motion by Mr. Wray and Dr. Chiglinsky, the Board unanimously approved the May 11, 2020 meeting minutes as distributed.

2021 Meeting Calendar

On motion by Mrs. Nix and Mr. Johnson, the Board unanimously approved the 2021 Meeting Calendar setting the dates for the Regional Board meetings in 2021:

February 1, April 26, June 7, and October 4

State Diversity Report

Mr. Levy reminded the Board of the General Assembly's action during its last session to include language in the budget bill requiring all Academic Year Governor's Schools (AYGS) to produce diversity goals and report document on an annual basis for submission to the Governor's Office by October 1; he stated prior to the document's submission to the State, the report was submitted to the Board members for review. Mr. Levy reviewed the report noting the primary diversity goals, "The Roanoke Valley Governor's School, in collaboration with the participating school districts and feeder school communities, will work toward building RVGS student population demographics that mirror the gifted population demographics of participating districts and the overall demographics of the region." Mr. Levy reviewed current student demographic comparisons and stated to make progress toward the goals, RVGS and participating districts would explore the following actions during the 2020-21 school year:

- Disaggregate each district's participant data by past elementary school enrollment to identify level of equity between communities for discussion with the Regional Board and district administration.
- Explore and discuss possible revisions to evaluation and acceptance policies.
- Continue meetings of the RVGS Diversity Team and follow through on the 2019 recommendations from the Team, many of which have been accomplished or will resume when safe to do so.
- Support and continue collaboration with NAACP and ACT-SO STEM competition (two students medaled at the national competition in 2020).
- Establish student-led RVGS Diversity Club to promote positive, supportive culture for current students.
- Explore mentorships and possible tutoring opportunities matching current RVGS students with students from Title I elementary and/or middle schools.

Mr. Levy stated recruitment and screening practices completed through RVGS will include a different model for counselor visits due to COVID-19 and will feature brochures and a recorded presentation that students can view on demand; the hands-on robotics/engineering lesson targeting middle schools will resume when it is safe to do so; and advertisements will be placed in the newspaper and on social media prior to the January informational meetings, which will include an asynchronous version for families that cannot attend in person. Mr. Levy stated interested students obtain the admission packet from RVGS but submit the completed packet to their home school as districts evaluate applicants according to their own metrics, and RVGS notifies the students from each district of their acceptance. He stated in 2020-21 each district will provide their full applicant spreadsheet, including demographic information and past elementary school attendance, with the scoring matrix for all applicants, noting accepted students and alternates approved by their selection committee, and provide the overall percentage of applicants who are economically disadvantaged.

Dr. Chiglinsky encouraged Mr. Levy to look at increasing the diversity of the faculty stating he "respectfully requests that you keep this in mind as you work to increase the diversity of the student population." Mr. Levy stated he was in complete agreement and noted he had reached out to historically black colleges and the National Association of Black Engineers in search of viable candidates to fill the three

positions that were open for this school year. Dr. Nicely asked if there was a focus on the male/female ratio given the STEM focus of the Governor's School; Mr. Levy stated RVGS is solid in this area with more than 50 percent of the student population currently female. Mr. Cathey stated Mr. Levy has regularly reached out to students whose parents may not push them to apply so they know that if they are willing to do the work, the Governor's School is for them. He commended Mr. Levy for doing a great job on this front and pledged the Board's continued support.

Mr. Levy reviewed recent news articles regarding admissions issues in other Governor's schools around the State; he discussed efforts by Secretary of Education Qarni to emphasize increased diversity and to meet with the communities by way of listening sessions. Mr. Levy reviewed the current State position that includes:

- AYGS diversity should be directly representative of the region served;
- Screening and admissions need to focus on aptitude tests rather than achievement tests;
- Admissions proposals that have been discussed consider a lottery system, quotas by middle school, removal of math requirements, replacement of existing assessments with new aptitude tests, and elimination of funding.

Mr. Levy stated he spoke with Secretary Qarni regarding the impact on a majority of the AYGS programs. He noted that Secretary Qarni is researching and writing a proposal for the Governor, which would serve as the foundation for a legislative bill targeted for this year's session, with the goal of a State-mandated overhaul of the application/admissions process. He noted the plan would be piloted at Thomas Jefferson and Maggie Walker before scaling to other Governor's schools. To date, no information has been formally shared with the directors committee and the committee has not been directly engaged in the process. Mr. Levy stated he wants to discuss an alternative proposal to demonstrate RVGS is taking steps in order to address diversity locally and that a local process would yield more productive and nuanced results than a one-size-fits-all model. He added the diversity goals should be developed in comparison to the population of eligible students rather than the total demographics of the region. Mr. Levy stated the process could be accomplished through an equitable evaluation of fully de-identified applications, prioritization for aptitude/ability-based testing over achievement-based testing, establishment of a reserve proportion of each district's enrollment slots for geographically equitable distribution based on past elementary school enrollment, continued use of the personal statement essay or an interview component, active outreach to historically underserved communities, and active efforts by districts to deepen equity in their gifted populations such as improvements in identification methods and additional opportunities for identification. Mr. Levy stated this alternative proposal could mark a considerable change to multiple aspects of the application and enrollment practices, and cautioned that some components of this proposal could meet resistance from various stakeholders; he added that locally-led actions to address equity in the AYGS programs are preferable to inaction that may result in a State-mandated model and/or a disproportionate student community.

Resolution in Support of Locally-Initiated Steps Toward Deepening Student Diversity

Mr. Levy stated in an effort to convey the commitment to addressing student diversity in the Roanoke Valley Governor's School, the Board was asked to adopt a resolution affirming its support of equitable access to the Program. On motion by Mr. Cathey and Dr. Chiglinsky, the Board unanimously approved the adoption of the following resolution:

WHEREAS, the Regional Board, Regional Superintendents, Director, and stakeholders of the Roanoke Valley Governor's School affirm the importance of equitable access to our program, with the goal of a diverse student population; and

WHEREAS, the Regional Board, Regional Superintendents, Director, and stakeholders have collaborated to take action in support of these values in recent years, but acknowledge continued progress is warranted; and

WHEREAS, the Regional Board believes that continued improvements with effective results can be best achieved through local leadership, with support of local School Boards, and administrators.

BE IT RESOLVED that the Roanoke Valley Governor's School Regional Board requests the Director, with input from district liaisons, formalize an alternative model for application, evaluation, and acceptance of applicants for discussion and consideration at the next meeting of the Regional Board.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the proposed model shall consider the feasibility and effectiveness of elements including:

- Equitable evaluation of fully de-identified applications;
- Establishment of relevant demographic targets for inclusion in future diversity goals;
- Inclusion or prioritization of aptitude-based testing over achievement-based testing;
- Establishment of a mechanism to support geographically equitable distribution of a portion of enrollment slots;
- Further adjustments to the RVGS application packet and application process;
- Continued outreach and recruitment of historically underserved communities;
- Active efforts by districts to strengthen the pipeline of applicants through deepened equity in their gifted populations; and
- Additional ideas raised during development of the model.

Mr. Johnson asked if guidelines would be given to the localities to develop the process; Mr. Levy stated he wanted to convene district liaisons to work together to develop an aligned plan, evaluate the best way to implement the plan, review the information with the superintendents, and then bring a recommendation to the Board in February. Mrs. Crook asked if Mr. Levy had been able to gauge the alternative proposal; Mr. Levy stated the same plan will not work for every AYGS because of the varying demographics, and there is room for RVGS to stake out what is appropriate while the State works through the pilot. He added there is a possibility that the legislation would be voted down. Mr. Wray stated with the local governments around the region being different, what are they asking us to do in the end; Mr. Levy stated he would be tracking the proposal and would let Board members know when there is a first step so that legislators can be contacted. He added that by taking some aggressive steps, RVGS will demonstrate that the seven districts are committed to making progress. Mrs. White thanked Mr. Levy for the presentation and thanked the Board for taking up this important discussion around increasing student and faculty diversity.

Financial Reports

Mr. Levy highlighted the operating budget year to date as compared to the similar timeframe last year noting the significant difference in debt service as the mortgage was paid off, which helped cover the cost of the additional staff position. He noted slight variations in the approved 2020-21 budget that included a reduction of one student from 267 to 266 and corresponding reduction in State funding, an increase in the employer paid amount for VRS and FICA from \$241,168 to \$250,453, and an increase in the unspent funds category from \$513,309 to \$565,287, which is well above the Board's target of \$400,000. Mr. Levy stated the budget continues to reflect a slight deficit and spending is carefully monitored; he reported RVGS has applied for CARES Act funding, which will help offset some of the additional expenses incurred due to the Pandemic.

Mr. Wray stated the Average Daily Membership (ADM) is down for his district and asked if thought had been given to the impact on smaller districts; Mr. Levy stated he had not spoken with any of the districts about this and was unsure how it would impact a district's current slots. He noted efforts to maintain the current tuition level in recent years adding RVGS costs are increasing but spending has been curtailed, and stated that he expected districts would reach out to him in the coming months if this becomes an issue.

Director's Report

Reopening—Mr. Levy stated the reopening has gone very well, the student attendance rate is 99.3 percent, and he has been impressed with how the students have handled the transition, especially new students, noting he believes that students will be more responsible having been through this experience. He stated a statement summarizing

the current instructional model and continued high expectations has been prepared for seniors to include with college applications. Mr. Levy stated a recent survey was distributed for students and parents, and results indicated that the majority of students and parents expressed a moderate or high degree of satisfaction with the schedule, instruction, and communications from the RVGS.

Staff and Courses—Mr. Levy reported three new teachers joined the staff this year—Drew Hurst, Physics and Engineering; Connor Wade, Physics and Engineering; and Steve Villers, Biology and AP Environmental Science. He stated a new research elective, Computational Biology and Bioinformatics, was added this year; and two summer institutes enjoyed considerable student participation, Biomedical Science and Leadership, which included a diverse group of speakers from all walks of life.

Community Outreach/Collaboration—Mr. Levy reported the Roanoke Valley Governor's School is committed to ensuring equity of access for all students; middle school visits have been replaced with a virtual presentation from School Counselor Kathy Sebolt, and he expects the January information sessions to be virtual; an online, student-led math-help program is being offered for fourth and fifth grade students. Mr. Levy stated other outreach efforts are on hold until the public health crisis improves.

Student Supports—Mr. Levy reported student supports are always a priority and all new first-year students received five summer enrichment sessions, Mrs. Sebolt continues to provide counseling assistance to students, both in-person and virtually, and the RVGS Determined Program and other social/emotional learning efforts continue in an adjusted format.

2021 Project Forum—Mr. Levy stated Project Forum will be a virtual event and will be held on March 6; options for a virtual open house and public viewing are being explored.

Board Discussion Items

Mr. Johnson conveyed that he had heard from the mother of a student who was highly complimentary of the communications and instruction plan and expressed kudos to the Governor's School team. Mr. Cathey added that RVGS conveys more of a semblance of normal than anything else going on, and he appreciates everyone's efforts understanding how tough it has been on the teachers. He noted this is a high-functioning organization, a real success story, and it is a real pleasure to be part of the Board. Mr. Cathey asked Mr. Levy to convey to the staff the Board's appreciation.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is Monday, February 1, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.

Adjournment

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 8:08 p.m.

Mark K. Cathey, Chairman

Cindy H. Poulton, Clerk