

**Farmington River Regional School District
Otis/Sandisfield
555 Main Road, Otis MA 01253
School Committee Meeting #408
Monday, November 1, 2021, 7:00PM
via ZOOM**

The meeting was called to order by Carol Lombardo at 7:05 P.M.

Community Participation: Barbara Cormier from the Sandisfield School Options Committee and Moderator of the presentation that was given to the Sandisfield taxpayers. She wanted to read a statement from the Sandisfield Options Committee. She stated that the committee was not on a witch hunt. They were appointed by the Selectmen to look into school options. Many hours were spent researching DOE and state sites. All data came from these sites. She wanted to address that the committee did not bad mouth the teachers. They did address those two classes were falling behind on their test scores. The committee also noticed that the teachers' pay is on the low end of the pay scale in comparison to the Administration and Nurse staffs' pay which is on the high end of the scale. They never said the school was the worst school in the state. They questioned if the Administrator was doing his job by providing the proper tools and guidance for the teachers to teach their class. They feel as if the Administration and some of the Board members deflective to criticism their committee had for them onto the teachers. They did note that before 2014 the school was operating at a high level, but with the new Administration it has steadily declined. In reviewing data in the past, we found out only one evaluation was done without the knowledge on most of the School Committee. It was done by the Administrator's Assistant's husband, only signed by him. Is this ethical, they think not. They know the committee is talking about the Administrator's evaluation this evening; They hope you are giving him proper goals and let him decide on how to accomplish this.

Barbara's personal opinion on how to obtain change and progress is by replacing the Administration and its staff members. Barbara's opinion is to resign from the existing district to form Sandisfield's own tuition only school district.

The Options Committee feels Sandisfield's School Committee members have never had a fair voice on this Committee. At an earlier meeting she observed one member saying the only thing lately being discussed was money. As members their job is always:

1. Education, using correct data from your resources,
2. Finances. You need to pay for your goals,
3. How to encourage change.
4. Options.

The School Options Committee feels this should be the order in which the School Committee should follow. Barbara then stated the Options Committee would be very happy to come to Otis and share their information if anyone would like to listen. Presentation of this statement along with the statement, will be posted on the website if you would like to listen to or read.

Guests: Michael Saporito and Laurie Flower

Members Present: Jess Drenga, Carol Lombardo, Carl Nett, Roger Kohler, Deb Fogel, Arlene Tolopko, and Jennifer Hibbins.

- 1. Vote to accept Minutes #407 as submitted.** Arlene Tolopko motioned to accepted minutes as submitted. Deb Fogel seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of excepting minutes #407.
- 2. Principal/Superintendent's updates.** Tom Nadolny started his updates by informing the School Committee of a positive COVID case in our Early Kindergarten class. We were notified by 1:24 P.M. By 1:58 P.M we had every student in EK tested, providing a permission slip from parents/guardians. Everyone came back negative. Notifications were posted on the website and sent via email to all families and School Committee.

The Otis Fire Department conducted one of our required fire drills for the year. This would be the School's second since the beginning of the school year. A lockdown drill was scheduled for Wednesday, November 3rd with the State Police Department, but the State Police had to postpone due to lack of staffing.

The cleaning of the school is still at the same level as last year. They still clean and fog every night trying to keep everyone safe.

Parent/Teacher conferences occurred on October 21st. The families had the option of in-person or via ZOOM for their meeting. Approximately 90% of the families are participating. The PTA was gracious enough to provided dinner for the staff.

There are many after school programming coming up due to the ESSER III Grant. Tom has solicited ideas from teachers for after school programming. So far, we have intramurals on Mondays through Thursdays. Mondays and Wednesdays are for 3rd Grade through 6th Grade. Tuesdays and Thursdays are for kindergarten through 2nd Grade. Arts and Crafts are on Tuesdays, which already started. Other programming consists of Spanish Club and another Art Club. There are more proposals that Tom must look into to make sure they do not conflict with anything we currently do.

Tom started teacher observations. He hopes that the first round of observations will be completed by Thanksgiving. Tom's findings are going very well.

Tom has had conversations with teachers last month. It was determined that there are not many great standardized or packaged deals for writing programs. Tom charged the teachers with research and developing their own. The findings will be placed in a binder so they can pass it on from year to year so that new teachers can look at that binder and see what our program curriculum is.

Michael Saporito had a great outdoor assembly, which the students responded very well to. It was a great morale booster for the kids.

Each classroom started their collection of Thanksgiving items for baskets to donate to families in need. Every year the school along with the Teachers' Association fill baskets for Thanksgiving. The baskets include everything for a dinner including a turkey.

The PTA snow sports program is fully funded this year. A big thank you to an anonymous donor who provided the donation to the PTA program for any student that attends Farmington River School. This means the students can participate for free this year.

3. **MCAS presentation.** Michael Saporito and Laurie Flower were present to help explain the MCAS data from 2020 test results, as well as helping people understand how the MCAS testing affects the school's rating with the state. I have shared the audio presentation and the slides to the presentation on our website along with the minutes.

Michael asked if there were any questions on the presentations. Jennifer Hibbins asked if Mike could clarify what he meant when he mentioned the scores in the district. Mike stated he was referring to the Elementary School only. The other question Jennifer had for Mike concerned the students that did not meet expectations. Does Mike have a plan to work with those students to raise their scores. Michael commented that the teachers are primarily responsible, but they did not test the students right off the bat this year due to everything they have been through. The teachers are now starting to reevaluate the students to see where the students need the most help. We are starting to realign our resources to provide the help needed. Jennifer asked another question concerning the 6th Grade class this year. The class had a difficult time with MCAS last year and in 2019. She would like to know if there are plans to bring up the scores with those students. Mike stated that he knew this question would come up, but that particular group were victims of several maternity leaves for three years. The substitutes did a great job covering, but it is not the same as having the regular teacher teach the class. Mike stated that this is not an excuse; it is a fact. It makes a difference if the teachers were present all year, rather than half the year. Jennifer asked Laurie Flower to explain her enrichment program that is being set up for the advanced students. Laurie explained that there are three stages set up. There are schoolwide stages that Laurie set up. An example of what Laurie did was an estimation station where the students could estimate the number of Legos in a jar. There is a pull-out program to which Laurie helps them with critical thinking based on targeted standards where there may be weaknesses in terms of trying to incorporate real life problems and activities to address those standards. Laurie is also pulling out students who scored seventy-five or above on the AIMSWEB testing and doing some continental mathlete program, which is a national program. She will also pull out all students who need work with critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Carl congratulated Mike on his presentation. He was happy to hear a report that is comparable with other schools like Farmington River. He feels Mike did a great job by comparing Farmington with other peer groups most common with our situation. Carl feels that the 6th Grade class needs extra love and care. He understood why the sixth grade was behind. Carl is concerned

about that class. Mike agrees with Carl. Everyone is trying to ensure that the class gets some make up time. Carl brought up that the school should track the students from third grade through the sixth grade to see their progress. When the students reach sixth grade, the scores should be at the highest. All agreed that more attention needs to be given to the sixth grade. Carol thanked Michael and Laurie for the presentation.

4. **Discuss and vote on the Superintendent's goals.** The sub committee (Jennifer Hibbins, Jess Drenga, and Roger Kohler), along with Tom Nadolny, put together goals for Tom to work towards for the year. Jennifer Hibbins spoke and described what they all came up with.
- The first is a student learning goal to help raise Math and ELA scores by creating a block of 90 minutes set for Math and ELA, utilizing the specialist teachers to help students that need the extra help, and continually monitoring student progress.
 - The second goal is to improve internal and external communications. There was a desire to improve staff communications. There is a Monday morning memo about the upcoming week. Tom will send out frequent COVID updates as he gets them. Updated communication goals will be discussed in the December meeting.
 - The third goal concerns financial efficiency. Tom will be working with the Business Manager to develop a budget to be presented to both the School Committee and the two Towns.
 - The fourth goal identified is a professional practice goal. This goal is continuing with cultural diversity. Working with Diverse Otis is one strategy in meeting these goals.

Jessica Drenga made a motion to accept and approve the Superintendent's goals. Jennifer Hibbins seconded the motion. Carol asked for a discussion before the vote. Tom had a question about creating the budget with the Business Manager. Tom would like to have the Committee clarify what the expectation is if the Towns do not like the budget presented. Jess Drenga feels that Tom should not be responsible if the budget does not pass the Towns' vote. The budget must be approved by the School Committee. Jess stated that it would be unfair to have the Superintendent's evaluation based on this procedure. For example, based on the speech given during the Community Participation, there are people that are obviously unhappy, but they never stay present long enough through the meetings for full information. This would be unfair to have Tom's evaluation based on the Towns accepting or denying the budget. Roger Kohler agreed with Jess on her feelings with the budget. Carl feels that the goals should reflect the results that the Committee wants to see achieved. From those results the Superintendent is supposed to formulate the actions necessary and will lead to the achievement of those results. The document that was sent out was a list of activities, not results. The activities were worthwhile, but again not results. The Committee has not specified what they want as results. There is no quantitative and there are not any results specified. Example, Carl thinks the State will update the accountability percentile in the next round of tests and he thinks there should be a goal that states we need to be in the 35 and 50 percentiles. The sixth grade should be 30-50% meet or exceed expectations. Low target would be below 30% and on target would be above 50%. Carl stated that he cannot vote in favor to what

has been presented because they do not specify what the performance results that the Committee wants for either academic or financial achievements. The only budget goal listed is currently being done. Producing a budget to present to the towns is not a financial achievement. Jess Drenga replied that she disagrees with Carl in the manner of holding Tom responsible based on the teachers' performance and presenting a budget that must be approved by School Committee. Jess feels it is not fair to place the blame on Tom if the expectations that he gives the teachers does not reach the 30% that is being asked. Roger Kohler wanted to clarify what Carl was trying to state. Roger believes that Carl wants a number to reflect the goal given to Tom. Carl agreed. Carol asked if an evaluation at midterm would be better before the full evaluation so if the goals are not being met, then more work can be done, rather than waiting until it is too late at the end of the school year. Arlene Tolopko spoke up about the goals. She feels they were delineated well by the presentation that Mike Saporito had given. She does not understand why the goals that were presented are not satisfactory. She never heard of incentive goals. She has seen goals set through encouragement to strive for better results. She feels some students find learning more difficult than others and may not be able to increase their scores by 20-80%. That should not be on the shoulders of the Superintendent. Teachers can work as hard as they can, but you can not make a student perform better. Arlene believes in a vision, but the quantitative issue is not as important. We are a school, not a corporation. Roger stated that Arlene has a good point, and in the discussions with Tom, he was shooting for 90% of all students passing MCAS. That may not be attainable, but it is great to aim high. Roger thinks maybe it is a good idea that a number should be set. He suggests possibly a 10-20% increase. Jess replied that no one person has that much control of the outcome of the scores. Tom could be doing all he can do, but the students may still test low. This seems to be a set up to fail due to the lack of control on how well a student will perform. Carol Lombardo agrees with Jess. She feels anything can unexpectedly happen to throw off a goal. She feels Tom should get a little leeway due to the unexpected circumstances. Carl agrees with the uncertainty of something unexpectedly coming up, but believes it is all relative. Other schools are in the same position. You cannot plan for catastrophe, but if something were to come up again, then all the schools will be reflected, not just Farmington River. The accountability percentile is the most important part the state sets. The percentile is based on a bunch of factors, such as attendance and the rate you are improving or decreasing in scores. The percentile is not just the absolute scores. When the accountability of the school falls below 10%, the state steps in. We are at 18% in 2019, and 35% in 2018. We would be at 50% now. Carl can not understand why people would not want to set a goal of 35% like we were in 2018. Jennifer had a hard time finding a metrics to the goals. She feels it would be black and white. But, Jennifer agrees with what Carol stated about the uncertainty of our times. Carl responded that if something does come up, they do not evaluate against the goals. Roger stated that good goals should be measurable and results oriented. Roger feels we should put the goal at meeting or exceeding the 25th percentile. He feels with the way the school is progressing, this goal should be achieved. Tom agrees with the goal being set at the twenty-five percentile. The motion on the table is accepting the Superintendent's goals as presented by the sub committee with the change of the Superintendent being accountable for the students to meet or exceed the 25th percentile on the MCAS scores. The vote was 6-1 in favor of accepting the motion of

approving the presented Superintendent's goals with the change of the Superintendent being accountable for the students to meet or exceed the twenty-five percentile on the MCAS scores. Carl Nett was the only member to vote against the motion.

5. **Financial updates.** Eric Jesner stated that the end of the year report has been filed within the last month and the E&D was submitted to the Department of Revenue. The end of year report Eric will not get results on, but the E&D Eric will hear from the D.O.R if there are any questions. Depending upon when Eric gets the certification on the E&D, he is hoping there will be enough time left between now and the next meeting, so we do not have to add a meeting in between the two monthly meetings. There is a certain amount of time for which the School Committee must vote on the money to go back to the towns. Eric will keep Carol updated on the dates. Carl asked for the End of the Year Report and the Report on the E&D. Carl also asked if the School Committee has to vote on the E&D money. He was under the impression that the overage of the E&D money exceeding 5% did not need to be voted on. Eric explained that the School Committee needs to vote on the budget again. Once E&D is certified we will have the excess money, but if we keep the current budget in place, our current budget does not allow us to return money to the towns. The way the money gets returned to the towns, Eric would need to increase the E&D usage for this year and it would lower the assessments to the towns. School Committee would then approve the vote and then the assessments can be recertified to the towns so their payments moving forward would be lowered. This is assuming that the towns are paying their monthly assessments, which neither Town is at this point in time. Eric can not return money to the towns without the ok from the School Committee. Carl thought Eric could go ahead and automatically return the money to the towns. Eric clarified that he, himself cannot. The School Committee must allow him to do so. Eric did ask if the School Committee Members could reach out to the towns and ask for the monthly payments. Eric is not receiving any payments from either Town at this time. According to the Regional Agreement, which many people feel the School is not following, the Towns are not following as far as having the monthly assessments paid by the first of each month. Carl asked Eric if Roger Brown reached out to him explaining there was a mail issue. Carl thought the issue was corrected. Eric replied that he did not get an email from Roger, but he did get a phone call from someone different from Sandisfield over a month ago. Because of transitions, they did not have a check. That was over a month ago and now the assessment is 2 months behind. Carl said he will talk to Roger Brown tomorrow, and he will talk to the Selectmen. Carl thought the mail issue was already corrected.

6. **Adjournment.** Jess Drenga motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:48 P.M. Arlene Tolopko seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted

Teresa DellaGiustina

tld

*attached document on Community Participation

11/1 /School Board Meeting

Hi,

I am Barbara Cormier, A member of the School Options Committee and the moderator of the presentation we shared with the Sandisfield taxpayers and on zoom..

We were not a witch hunt committee going after the FRS, we were appointed by our Selectboard to look into school options.

Many hours were spent researching DOE and State sites. All the data came from these sites I would like to address remarks that were made through email and meeting minutes.

We in no way bad mouthed teachers. We did address the fact that two classes were falling behind in their test results. We also noticed that their pay scale was on the low end of the scale,

In comparison, the Administrator and their staff were on the high end. We never said that it was the worst school in the State. We question if the administrator was doing his job to make sure the class teachers had the proper tools and guidance to do this. I feel the Administration and some board members are deflecting the criticism we had for them onto the teachers.

We did note that before 2014, the School was operating at a great level, but with the new administration it has steadily declined. In reviewing data on his evaluation in the past we found out that only one valuation was done, without the knowledge of most of the school board, and it was done by the administrator's assistant husband and only signed by him. Is this ethical? I think not. I noticed you are talking about his evaluation at tonight's meeting. I hope you will assign him proper goals, and let him decide how to accomplish them.

My personal opinion, i am speaking for myself not the committee, is that in order to obtain change and progress you need to consider changing administration and its staff.

We were then asked for school options, we did a lot of research in this area.

After much discussion, my personal opinion is that we should resign from the district and form our own tuition only school district. This has been done in several Towns and works well.

I don't see our school board members ever having a fair voice on this committee. At an earlier meeting I observed one member said all we seem to do lately is talk about money. As members your job is always 1. Education using correct data from your resources, 2. Finances You need to be able to pay for your goals.

Our Committee always said that our direction would be, first Education and results, 2. Financial Responsibility, 3. How to encourage change, and four options.

Your board should have the the same values. You need to decide if the Administration works and confers with you, or you work for the administration

The School Options Committee would be happy to come to Otis and present our findings..

Thank you for your time.

Barbara Cormier