

Chariho School Committee Special Meeting/Budget Workshop  
Regular Session Minutes – January 4, 2022

Committee Members Attendance: Chair Linda Lyall, Ryan Callahan, Donna Chambers, William Day, Gary Liguori, Craig Louzon, Lisa Macaruso (arrived at 6:00 PM), Linda McAllister, Karen Reynolds and endawnis Spears. Absent: Vice Chair Catherine Giusti and George Abbott.

Administrators and Others Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Assistant Director of Administration and Finance Gail Wilcox, NEA ESP Union President Tom Pirnie, Charlestown Town Council President Deb Carney, Richmond Resident Mr. MacInnis and District Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

I. Meeting Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance, Silent Meditation

Chair Lyall called the Special Meeting/Budget Workshop of the Chariho School Committee, held in the Chariho High School Library, to order at 5:46 PM. She wished all a Happy New Year. The Pledge of Allegiance was then followed by a moment of silent meditation.

II. Motion/Vote to go into Executive Session

Ryan Callahan made a motion, seconded by endawnis Spears and it was VOTED: That the School Committee go into executive session and close the meeting to the public under R.I. General Laws Section 42-46-5(a)(2) for the purpose of discussion pertaining to collective bargaining (Memorandum of Agreement Between the Chariho Regional School District and NEA Chariho Certified Staff – Article 12B of the Collective Bargaining Agreement). In favor: Unanimous.

The Committee returned to open session at 5:54 PM. At 6:00 PM Chair Lyall requested a motion to change the numbering of Items III and IV on the Agenda so that Reconvene Open Session is now Item III.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was VOTED: To change the numbering of Items III and IV on the Agenda so that Reconvene Open Session is now Item III. In favor: Unanimous.

III. Reconvene Open Session

Chair Lyall reconvened open session at 6:00 PM. Ryan Callahan noted there was one vote in executive session; to return to open session. The vote passed with Callahan, Chambers, Liguori, Lyall, McAllister, Reynolds and Spears voting in favor and Day and Louzon recusing from the discussion.

IV. Closing/Sealing of Executive Session Minutes

Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes pertaining to collective bargaining (Memorandum of Agreement Between the Chariho Regional School District and NEA Chariho Certified Staff – Article 12B of the Collective Bargaining Agreement) remain sealed until such time as an agreement has been reached.

Donna Chambers made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was VOTED: That minutes pertaining to collective bargaining (Memorandum of Agreement Between the Chariho Regional School District and NEA Chariho Certified Staff – Article 12B of the Collective Bargaining Agreement) remain sealed until such time as an agreement has been reached. In favor: Callahan, Chambers, Liguori, Lyall, Macaruso, McAllister, Reynolds and Spears. Abstained: Day. Recused: Louzon. The motion carried by a vote of 8 in favor with 1 abstention and 1 recusal.

V. Memorandum of Agreement Between the Chariho Regional School District and NEA Chariho Certified Staff – Article 12B of the Collective Bargaining Agreement

Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Memorandum of Agreement Between the Chariho Regional School District and NEA Chariho Certified Staff – Article 12B of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Donna Chambers made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was

VOTED: To approve the Memorandum of Agreement Between the Chariho Regional School District and NEA Chariho Certified Staff – Article 12B of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. In favor: Callahan, Chambers, Liguori, Lyall, Macaruso, McAllister, Reynolds and Spears. Abstained: Day. Recused: Louzon. The motion passed with 8 in favor, 1 abstention and 1 recusal.

VI. Budget Workshop

Superintendent Picard welcomed and wished all a Happy New Year. She thanked the Administrators and all involved with the budget for their hard work. Her presentation and all budget information can be found on the Chariho website. She walked through the highlights and detailed where ESSER funds will be used. It is expected that ESSER III funds will be approved by the end of January; use of these funds has to align with State guidelines. The goal is to add two student support positions to address mental health concerns and move one of these positions into the budget for the next year. We have completed safety and site assessments which are done every three years and are prioritizing needs. The phone system along with some intercom systems and radios need to be updated for safety purposes. She then reviewed the budget development process. Both Hopkinton and Charlestown are expected to receive less State Aid while Richmond is expected to receive more. These numbers are preliminary but this is all we have right now to work with. We have negotiations with both Unions and both DCYF placements and utility costs have increased. RIDE is looking at changing criteria for CTCs and the end result could be that receiving districts become responsible for transportation. There is a lot of conversation about CTCs and she feels that if the State is holding districts accountable, we should not have to pay to send a student to a school district that is not doing better than ours. We currently have about 215 student that are being home schooled; 12 have returned from last year. She added that Katie Kirakosian, the District's Development Officer, has brought in \$250,000 this year in grants. She then reviewed the numbers. As of right now, Charlestown is at +3.51%; Richmond +2.96% and Hopkinton +1.96%. An overview of the fund balance was provided with an explanation of what is required per policy. The District's policy requires a minimum of 2%; maximum of 4%. We are typically at 2.5%. The more that is cut from this, the more you will worry about emergencies. The budget this year was figured with the fund balance at 2.25%. We were mindful of the impact of the reduction of State Aid to two of the towns. Administration also felt that because we will be supported by ESSER III funds, they can support an aggressive 2.25% reserve posture. Craig questioned, of all the sending districts, why did only Narragansett and South Kingstown go up? Gina explained that the number of students from these two towns increased but we got more from Westerly than we expected. Craig asked for someone to explain why Charlestown is up. He understands the impact from State Aid that went down and population went down so why did the cost go up to which Donna asked when they could expect any changes from the State. Gina responded that she hopes they have information this month from the State. The State was surprised when they saw the numbers as some districts are looking at millions of dollars in decreased aid. Ned added that Charlestown only had a shift of about one student. Richmond went up but Hopkinton went down. It is because of the relationship of the proportionate share of the remaining two towns. We have done well retaining our students so we did not get hit as hard as other districts. Relatively speaking, we are stable. Craig explained to all that Charlestown pays over \$3,000 more per student than the other two towns because they get such little State Aid. He wanted to share this so that when people start harping, which they do every year, that Charlestown actually pays more. The residents of Charlestown are tired of hearing it. We understand the dynamics at Chariho and it is our turn to take the hit. Ned then reviewed the structure of the budget which is broken down into eight sections. Each section was reviewed.

Donna noticed a significant reduction in professional development to which Ned explained that a lot of this went into ESSER. Donna noted that she just wants to make sure it is still there. Ryan requested a refresher on ESSER funds. How is it that ESSER III monies are not able to offset our operational costs? Gina replied that the District submitted its plan in December for initial review and we were told it looks good. The total of all ESSER funding is captured in this budget but the District has to follow the guidelines set by the State. Ned noted that additional capital items are also being covered by ESSER funds to which Gina added that 1:1 was also covered by ESSER. Bill questioned what conversations has the District had with its Senators and Representatives. Is there any indication of what the State is going to do with some of the State money that has not been spent; can this be used as State Aid. We will work hard to lower this budget for the taxpayers and then all our work will be for nothing if the State steps up. Gina stated that they have worked on the Transportation Categorical Aid for us. Having these partners is a huge lift. She is hoping they will reinstate our Aid. Advocacy across the three towns would help. Bill commented that he would hope they would step up early in the process to which Gina noted this was an excellent point. The numbers for State Aid are preliminary and the louder ones seem to get the money. Bill suggested that maybe at the next Town Council Meetings this could be mentioned – reinstate the State Aid. We have had very little town movement in the past. Gina noted that this would help with transportation as paying \$8,000 a month for one student for State transportation does not make sense. Ned added that they met with the towns when preparing the plan for ESSER funding and they are also working with the State and Ocean State Transit on transportation. He does think the District is in a unique position to advocate as we are stable with enrollment. Craig questioned when ESSER funds are gone, will the District have to maintain anything covered by this funding? Gina explained that the plan calls for training for the trainer so we don't need ESSER. This person can train others. Having these grants has helped us build capacity. She did reiterate that the goal is to add one of the two FTE positions for mental health to the budget. Linda McAllister asked if, in Section 4 (line 5607) the telephone/maintenance service is for the new phone system to which the Superintendent replied "yes". There is a one-time cost for the initial upgrade. Linda then questioned the substitute line item which was explained. We have used \$728,000 of what was budgeted. Lisa questioned if class sizes are where they need to be – mainly looking at Richmond School which has the largest enrollment as compared to a smaller school like Ashaway. Do they have the needed supplies as well? Superintendent Picard explained that every school gets the same (figured on the enrollment of the school). She noted that she was thoughtful about class size and Richmond's numbers are back in line with the other schools. Every school has the same math specialists as they are District employees so they can be shifted. Lisa then asked about CALA data. Do we have lower numbers because students are succeeding and graduating? Gina noted that there were a few who moved out of District and one student left to get a GED. Lisa questioned if there is a move to reintegrate students and does this budget allow for this? Gina replied that getting CSIP money has helped and "yes" the budget does allow for this. We are revising/rethinking the High School schedule for CALA needs so integration can happen. Lisa then focused her concerns on Charter School numbers; 108 students is a lot of money going out. She wondered if the reason Richmond had a larger number going to charter schools was because Richmond School has a higher enrollment. She commented on the work that she and Clay Johnson on the Marketing Subcommittee in an effort to sell our schools. Gina explained that when reviewing out-of-district data, she questioned why and was informed that many wanted a smaller High School while others stated it was about athletics. She does not think it is 'one size fits all'. It is a case by case reason; more individualized. Lisa suggested they consider doing a survey because when you lose one student you lose a family. They saw at the transition years is where they need to recruit. If there is funding that could be put towards this, she would like this considered. She questioned the total cost to send 108 students to Charter Schools. Gina stated that they will compile all questions and respond to them together. Gary noted that he liked what Lisa brought up but it is hard to tell on one year's data; they need to base the data on five years. Maybe we are way above other districts and we should take these steps but if we are way below other districts, he would prefer to put the money elsewhere. We should be preventing students from leaving; that would be the way to go. The Superintendent added that it is the same for those being home schooled.

Gary noted that the pandemic has made this more complicated. The children of faculty members who work with him at URI all go to Kingston Hill or Compass because they are closer to URI. Bill stated that he would like to know how many students are going to a different elementary school instead of their 'home' school. Gina stated that she will supply the numbers for him. Ryan commented on the 4.1% predicted for health care increases. When can we lock that in? Ned responded that they should have some indication before a final decision is made. Craig questioned Davies Vocational School which is funded by the State. Are sending districts subsidized by the State for their CTC programs? Gina noted that North Providence has to pay to send students to Davies. Districts are questioning CTCs. This remains a hot topic at the State House. Bill wondered who was paying for the 30-second commercial on The Met School as he thought this was a State school. Gina replied that she believes it is a public Charter School; she will check on this. Bill then commented that Chariho was one of the few districts that had in-person learning all last year. He would like to know, are we one or two of the only districts? The Superintendent responded that RIDE did not capture data that way. Some schools like South Kingstown and North Kingstown ended early. There is no way to pull this data. Lisa stated that Gina does not need to bring information back to them on Charter School tuitions as she has found the data. She would like to know, however, what the total is including transportation. It looks like the District has spent the same each year. She noted that about \$100,000 has been cut from this line item. Are we expecting fewer students to go? Gina replied that some have returned to Chariho and Ned added that there is also a senior population that will graduate so that is why they have budgeted less. Craig stated that they have to get this budget approved by the Town Councils and we don't have any media coverage like we did in the past. He suggested that they reach out to the media outlets so people are informed. Gina noted that *The Westerly Sun* has asked us to submit stories. We all see what has happened since Cynthia retired. She has spoken with Jason and there is money in their budget to get someone to cover Chariho but the position has not been filled. Gary questioned where the big population decreases are in the State as there was data that more people were moving into Rhode Island. Ned replied that both Westerly and South Kingstown saw impacts. Middletown and Newport saw reductions in tourism. He feels that some of the loss is due to second home tenancies. Tom Pirnie, NEA ESP Union President and CALA employee, commented on the number of current custodial and teacher assistant vacancies. He hasn't seen the numbers yet but questioned if this was taken into consideration and how it looks going forward. They are working with a bare bones staff and it can't continue. Wage increases are needed as these positions are paid close to what the minimum wage is. We are drastically behind in these categories. Gina replied that they are not looking for major reductions in staffing. The goal is to be competitive while being fair to the taxpayers. Losing staff would be problematic. Craig commented on the extra work that has been added for research related to information requests to which Gina replied that they are planning to add a .5 position to shift some of the responsibilities that Donna, Nancy and Dorothy have. Dorothy's work should be data entry and she has spent a lot of time on building the e-registration system and training so parents can go online for this. We also received another APRA request today. This consumes a great deal of time to which Donna Chambers added that they will need to hire another person just to handle APRA requests. As the Committee did not have any other comments or questions at this time, Mr. MacInnis was asked if he had any comments to make. Mr. MacInnis noted that the overall increase is about 3% which is close to the increase in the rate of inflation. They should identify any outliers that swing high or low. Make it easy to identify them; that would help. Another thing that would help to make it easier is to identify new line items or ones that ended last year. He was thanked for his comments.

## VII. Adjournment

Ryan Callahan made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was VOTED: To adjourn at 7:45 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

---

Donna Sieczkiewicz, District Clerk