

Chariho School Committee Meeting
Executive Session – March 26, 2024
Review of Superintendent's Contract – Minutes not sealed.

Committee Members Attendance: Chair Catherine Giusti, Vice Chair Karen Reynolds, Donna Chambers, Kathryn Colasante, Polly Hopkins, Craig Louzon, Linda Lyall, Andrew McQuaide, Larry Phelps and Jessica Purcell. Absent: Tyler Champlin and Patricia Pouliot.

Administrators and Others Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper and School Committee Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

II-4. Review of Superintendent's Contract

Superintendent Picard noted that her contract will automatically roll if not approved prior to May 1st. An additional year was added to bring her to a three-year contract which is what all other superintendents in the State have. Kathryn clarified this is a three-year contract to which Gina responded "yes"; it goes to 2027. The Superintendent then reviewed contracts of other Superintendent's in the State with many newer superintendents starting off at more pay and benefits than she receives. All superintendent contracts are public record. She commented that she does not take health insurance and does not receive a car allowance (a benefit many of the others receive). She does, however, put in some mileage forms; reimbursable at the going rate. Barry's salary was \$171,412. She and Mike are "bargains" as Jane's salary was more than Mike's. Craig asked, amongst all superintendents in the State, where are you to which Gina replied her base salary is right at the bottom. Craig stated that he just wanted people to hear this. Linda noted her appreciation for all the information Gina shared although she doesn't need to hear it because she knows Gina is at the bottom. She feels Gina does an outstanding job and puts in a lot of extra hours attending all activities and community events. She has also taken over emergency operations and the plans and drills have come a long way. First responders have a lot of respect for her. Gina is a bargain and she wishes the District could do more for her. Karen reiterated what Linda said. For background purposes, she noticed that Barrington is looking for a superintendent and their base salary is \$265,000. Andrew added that everyone always wants to compare us to Barrington. Kathryn asked if Gina was the lowest paid of all to which Gina responded that she is not sure about Scituate but she is definitely near the bottom. Jessica stated, according to RIASC, she is 5th from the bottom. Donna also reiterated what has been said. She loves a good bargain and is thrilled with Gina's service. She, too, wishes they could do more. Polly questioned her Superintendent's certification; Providence College in 2013 but her resume doesn't reflect this. She would think this would be on her resume. Gina explained that when she became a superintendent, you had course work then to get RIDE certification. She did all of her course work at URI but had to do the last course at PC as URI did not offer it; only PC did. She was then certified as a superintendent. She did not "fast track" this process. Jessica wanted to point out all of the difficult circumstances that Gina has had to deal with. The first was the death of the person in charge, second was the pandemic and third was the Stage II application to RIDE and the opportunity we are giving to all of our voters. Not everyone likes the person who is on top yet Gina doesn't seem to care; she does not let this bother her and Jessica stated she appreciates that. She runs this District well. Donna added that Gina is challenged but she handles it with grace. Donna noted that she marvels at how well Gina is able to keep her composure. Gina replied that she tries to model this for other administrators. You may not like all her decisions but she advocates for everyone's child. Craig knew he was right when he nominated her for the position of Superintendent then and now when he approves her contract. Chair Giusti stated that she has a statement from Assistant Superintendent Dr. Comella who isn't in attendance this evening as he is at a meeting at RIDE. Dr. Comella requested his following comments be included in the record: *As the Superintendent of the Chariho Regional School District, Gina Picard has demonstrated a commitment to fostering an environment of academic excellence, professional growth, and innovation to ensure the success of every student. Her goals*

are enhancing student achievement and success, promoting equity and inclusion, and strengthening parent and community partnerships. I want to recognize and share specific examples highlighting the Superintendent's successes. As you know, Chariho schools have demonstrated tremendous growth over the past three years, with most of our schools returning to pre-pandemic levels of growth and achievement. All four of our elementary schools are rated four stars or higher. Chariho Regional High School is rated 7th in the state. While we recognize that the middle school still has room for significant growth, the Superintendent has worked closely with the school administration to develop and implement a thoughtful plan to ensure that the school has a direction for overall growth and success. Student attendance has increased, and our graduation rate is over 95%. This past Saturday, the District once again hosted Artessy. Artessy celebrates our students and their talents in the arts and sciences. Artessy had been a tradition for 25 years but was recently canceled due to the pandemic. For the second consecutive year since the pandemic, a record number of parents, families, and community members visited the middle school to celebrate our students and their accomplishments. It's often hard to understand and see the impact a superintendent can have on student success beyond the daily duties of maintaining safe schools and balancing budgets. Educator and business consultant Peter Drucker states that the difference between managers and leaders is as follows: "Management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things." Superintendent Picard balances the demands of the day-to-day operations while ensuring that our schools continue to succeed and grow. I want to offer an example of her leadership. Superintendent Picard meets with principals several times weekly to provide in-the-moment coaching, which is the highlight of her week. The coaching sessions include classroom visits designed to sharpen our principals' skills in classroom observation and in providing targeted feedback to teachers. After the classroom visits, the principal meets with the teacher to discuss the observation and provide feedback. The Superintendent observes and listens to their conversation to provide feedback to the principal, which is a proven method for developing the capacity of school administrators to become effective instructional leaders of their schools. The principals have the option of allowing the teacher to observe the principal receiving feedback from the Superintendent. I am unaware of any other school district in Rhode Island where this is happening. While this cycle of observation and feedback can take some time to get used to, it reflects the Superintendent's transparency. Here, she shows that no matter one's title or years of experience, we must be open to receiving constructive feedback to continue to grow as professionals. Superintendent Picard embodies the idea of continuous professional growth and development. She demands the highest expectations of herself and models this for everyone she leads. Success does not happen by accident. It takes vision and a commitment to make this happen. Chariho is fortunate to have Superintendent Picard's vision, dedication, expertise, and leadership. Chair Giusti noted that we recently celebrated Artessy and had a record number visit the Middle School. When they lead the search for a superintendent, they didn't have people who went to bat for them like Mike just did for Gina. No one else had someone under them that gave them a great rating. Yet to meet someone who works as hard as Gina and as Barry did, that is not the norm. Gina answers our questions and if she doesn't know the answer, she finds it. Kids feel comfortable with her as she brings the same level of respect to students. Donna stated that she hopes they can be unanimous tonight in approving her contract. Kathryn wanted to reiterate on the history of Gina's contract. She started with a two-year contract and Ryan Callahan proposed a three-year contract so it was changed. So this is the same contract she started with to which Gina responded "yes". The only change has been the three years. The District Clerk noted that she could have retired last year but did not do so because she enjoys working for Gina. One thing that really sticks out in her mind is the way Gina handles student issues. We have a student who met with Gina and was told that if they needed someone to talk to, please come back. We did not expect to see the student return and the student did come back and waited over half an hour for Gina to finish a meeting. Gina has the ability to connect with all students. Ned did a little reflection. Over the past 21 years he has worked for five superintendents, two city managers and four provosts. Leadership has a tendency to turn over every four years. Gina's leadership is very transparent; this is the reason he enjoys working at Chariho. It is the genuine caring for kids. When you have that stability, it draws kids and resonates through the organization.

Jessica noted her appreciation for everyone sharing. They aren't with Gina every day so it is good to hear from those who are with her on a daily basis. Craig commented that there are a lot more of these stories – more than people realize in this District. Andrew concurred with everything that was shared. He raised this concern at the last meeting and feels the need to mention it again. The Superintendent's contract and supervision is a core responsibility of the School Committee. He finds it disconcerting that people who vote against her contract do not provide any feedback before opposing it. He is on the School Committee to do the work. He stated that he finds Gina's knowledge of the District's policies and practices amazing and the fact that she can speak to policy and integrate it well. Trying to balance the variety of strategies she uses to communicate messages to the stakeholders is challenging but we do appreciate her transparency. Maybe tweak or tune the communications out to stakeholders would be his only constructive criticism. He did say the same thing about Superintendent Ricci. Gina agreed that this is a challenge. She always asks parents for their feedback as it is a balancing act. She is always adjusting and working on this. Kathryn agreed with Jessica. It was nice to hear the inside comments from people because they aren't on the inside. They were genuine and deserved. She asked Andrew if there was anything particular about communication to which Andrew commented that it is an opportunity to strengthen communication from educators. Gina added that principals are now supposed to be taking the lead as they are the leaders of their schools. She needs to be their coach. She wants principals to own the communication at the school level. She met with a parent Friday Night who suggested they do an FAQ as he was not aware that this had already been done. Kathryn noted that she likes to hear positive comments and is happy with what she has heard. She did have a couple of comments: 1) when answering questions for the public, she asked that Gina talk slowly and 2) when discussion was taking place regarding renovation or new construction, Gina put forth her point of view. The way it was presented last April was both options would be explored. Kathryn stated that her perception is that once it came out of the building subcommittee, new construction became a hard sell as opposed to pros and cons of both being presented. We have to admit both sides when presenting something. Gina replied that she was open-ended until RIDE said that they would not consider renovations unless the building project goes down. They questioned why they would put taxpayer money into 90-year-old buildings. She would have loved to be able to go a little more with the options. The new Building Committee member from Richmond, Andrea, is an architect and she agreed that the cost of renovating will be the same, if not more than building new. It is not cost effective to renovate. There has been a level of mistrust in this District for years. Jessica added that this was discussed at the Necessity for School Construction meeting. Kathryn continued. To say the cost would be the same...Chair Giusti then asked all to please stay on topic which is review of the Superintendent's contract. Andrew clarified that in open session the Committee has to speak specifically to the language in the contract if any comments are made. They cannot discuss job performance in open session. Craig felt Gina has been more than transparent on all issues but agreed with Kathryn about slowing down when speaking.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk