

Chariho School Committee Meeting  
Regular Session – August 20, 2024

Committee Members Attendance: Chair Catherine Giusti, Vice Chair Karen Reynolds, Donna Chambers, Tyler Champlin, Kathryn Colasante, Polly Hopkins (arrived at 5:46 PM), Craig Louzon, Linda Lyall, Larry Phelps, Patricia Pouliot (arrived at 7:00 PM) and Jessica Purcell. Resigned: Andrew McQuaide.

Administrators and Others Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella, Systems Administrator Eric O'Brien, Attorney Jon Anderson and School Committee Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

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

Chair Catherine Giusti called the meeting of the Chariho School Committee, held in the Chariho High School Library, to order at 5:45 PM. She asked all to please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

II. Motion/Vote to go into Executive Session

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Linda Lyall and it was

VOTED: That the School Committee go into executive session and close the meeting to the public under the authority of R.I. General Laws Section 42-46-5(a)(3) for the purpose of discussion regarding the matter of security including but not limited to the deployment of security personnel or devices (Approval of Emergency Operations Plans) and under the authority of R.I. General Laws Section 42-46-5(a)(8) for the purpose of reviewing and/or approving matters which relate to the privacy of students and their records (1. Appeal of CTC Admission Denial; 2. Approval of Home Instruction Requests); any persons to be discussed have been so notified. In favor: Unanimous (Hopkins was not in attendance for the vote).

III. Reconvene Open Session/Pledge of Allegiance/Silent Meditation

Chair Giusti reconvened the meeting at 7:21 PM and apologized for the late start. She then asked all to please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

IV. Closing/Sealing of Executive Session Minutes

1. Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes regarding the matter of security (Approval of Emergency Operations Plans) remain sealed.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was

VOTED: That minutes regarding the matter of security (Approval of Emergency Operations Plans) remain sealed. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Pouliot. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 1 abstention.

2. Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes pertaining to the privacy of students and their records (Approval of Home Instruction Requests) remain sealed.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was

VOTED: That minutes pertaining to the privacy of students and their records (Approval of Home Instruction Requests) remain sealed. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Pouliot. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 1 abstention.

3. Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes pertaining to the privacy of students and their records (Appeal of CTC Admission Denial) remain sealed.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was

VOTED: That minutes pertaining to the privacy of students and their records (Appeal of CTC Admission Denial) remain sealed. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Pouliot. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 1 abstention.

#### V. Disclosure of Executive Session Votes

Vice Chair Reynolds reported there were six votes taken in executive session. The first vote, approval of Emergency Operations Plans, passed with 10 in favor with Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

The second vote, approval of Home Instruction Requests, passed with 10 in favor with Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

The third vote, a request for a five-minute recess, passed with 10 in favor with Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

The next vote, to return to executive session, passed with 10 in favor with Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

The next vote, regarding a CTC Admission Denial, passed with 8 in favor and 2 opposed with Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Louzon, Lyall, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor and Phelps and Hopkins opposing.

The last vote, to return to open session was unanimous with 10 in favor with Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

#### VI. Recognition – None at this time.

#### VII. Public Forum

Chair Giusti reminded all that those who wish to speak, need to sign up. She hopes all have done that. First on the list was Lola Fleischman from Charlestown. Lola stated that she was sorry to hear of Andrew McQuaide's resignation from the Chariho School Committee. She would like to read his parting words to the Charlestown Town Council. *To the Honorable Charlestown Town Council, Please accept this correspondence as my resignation from the Chariho School Committee. It has been an incredible honor to serve Charlestown and the Chariho Regional School District. I first served as a member of the school committee in 2006 and as I step away again, I'm incredibly proud of the progress the district has made and continues to make. As happens from time-to-time, Chariho is at a crossroads. Our elementary schools do not reflect the quality of the teaching and learning happening inside to the detriment of our students, educators and community. While some may long for the one-room school house, our reality requires 21st century schools for 21st century learning. Charlestown voters spoke clearly in support of a better vision for our elementary schools. If necessary, I would ask the Council to explore going it alone in building a new elementary school for Charlestown. We should not retreat from the need to provide Charlestown's next generations a learning environment that will facilitate boundless outcomes for their futures and, ultimately, Charlestown's future. This November Chariho voters will decide the future direction of our district. For at least the past two decades, the Chariho School Committee has chosen to partner with the administration to facilitate forward progress. The outcome of that work speaks for itself. However, Chariho is very close to having a majority of school committee members that would prefer a more adversarial, mistrusting approach to Chariho and its leadership. They are more focused on litigating national noise at the local-level regardless of its applicability and rarely do the actual work of a committee member. A memorable example of this is when members of the minority bloc voted against renewing our confidential student crisis reporting call-in resource because it was funded, at no cost to taxpayers, by the Sandy Hook Promise Foundation. This was after our Superintendent shared that this resource had saved a student's life and after Chief Johnson of Richmond told the committee of his support and its importance. They chose to risk students' lives with no plan should they have succeeded and now they are asking Chariho voters to put them in charge. While I'm, momentarily, unusually pessimistic my hope lies in what I've experienced in our schools. Our administration is laser focused on improving student achievement for all students, mindful of Chariho's fiscal constraints, and committed to setting our students and community up for success. I hope Chariho voters reflect on the progress of the past twenty years as they consider our district's future in November. Again, thank you for the privilege and opportunity to serve. Sincerely, Andrew McQuaide.* And thank you Mr. McQuaide for both your service and your wisdom.

Next on the list was Craig Louzon from Charlestown. Craig stated he has been on this Committee for quite a long time now and he truly respects that Public Forum is for the public. It is not for them but he chose to come up here tonight because the last meeting he was really upset. Some things happened during Public Forum where some people were arguing and fighting with one another. This is not the venue right here to A) be announcing you are running for political office not once, but two meetings in a row. This is not the venue to be having a political feud with another citizen. He sides with one of those citizens but this isn't the place to do it. OK. This is for the students. And last, maybe when someone gets up and speaks at Public Forum and complains about others, do a little self-reflection and see if you acted in the same manner you are condemning someone else for cause he knows the last two and a half years have not been pretty at School Committee meetings and he thinks that most of them can attest to that. Thank you very much.

### VIII. Business

A. Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) 2024-2025 Annual Report – Superintendent Picard recommended that the Committee accepts the SEAC 2024-2025 Annual Report and places it on file. She thanked Committee Members Chair Sarah Algieri, Vice Chair Nicole Allen, Secretary Erin Sefranek and Treasurer Christina Costa for all their work this past year. Jessica noted that they have money in their account. How do they get this and what do they do with it? Polly, who was the Chair of SEAC previously, replied that they do fundraisers and use the money for events such as the Unified Basketball Team get together with other teams. Jess commented that they didn't spend any money this year to which Gina replied that they do bring out the ice cream truck for some events.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Linda Lyall and it was

VOTED: To accept the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) 2024-2025 Annual Report and place it on file. In favor: Unanimous.

B. Legal Counsel Agreement – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Legal Counsel Agreement between the Chariho Regional School Committee and Brennan, Scungio & Kresge LLP (BSKLLP) from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. For your reference we included the legal budgets from our three member towns, East Greenwich and most recently our Building Committee Attorney Parmenter. As you can see, the attorney fees we pay in Chariho are significantly less than Hopkinton and Richmond. She also thinks it is important to note that the District is currently interviewing for a new Director of Administration and Finance to replace Ned Draper and preparing for interviews for a new Confidential Secretary to the Superintendent to replace Ms. Donna Sieczkiewicz this upcoming October. With that in mind the District is losing historical knowledge that has served us well. It is her advice that this is an important reason to retain Attorney Anderson. However, more importantly she would like to note that the legal advice Attorney Anderson has provided to the District and School Committee has been second to none. Mr. Anderson has shown time and time again that he has Chariho's best interest in mind at all times and during his tenure with us he has not lost a case. She can state that most school districts do not have a flat rate for their attorney which is a huge cost savings for us but, more importantly, it allows us to operate to be preventative versus being on the defense. It is for these reasons that she hopes the Committee will approve this contract. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Donna, to approve the Legal Counsel Agreement between the Chariho Regional School Committee and Brennan, Scungio & Kresge LLP (BSKLLP) from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. Donna echoed everything that the Superintendent said. Chair Giusti stated that she has enjoyed a good working relationship with Jon and the District would be foolish to lose him. Jon noted that it has been his pleasure to represent Chariho for the past seventeen years. He is very proud to be associated with Chariho. Kathryn commented that it is impressive that Attorney Anderson hasn't lost a case and his flat rate is impressive as well but for future reference she feels it would be more applicable to see what other school districts legal fees are. Gina explained that there is only one other school district that has a flat rate and that is North Providence. All other districts pay for every phone call they make; that doesn't happen here. Donna felt, regardless of the cost, Jon's historical knowledge statewide and of the District is valuable. She is a big fan of his and she absolutely approves of the Agreement.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Donna Chambers and it was VOTED: To approve the Legal Counsel Agreement between the Chariho Regional School Committee and Brennan, Scungio & Kresge LLP (BSKLLP) from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Louzon, Lyall, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Opposed: Hopkins and Phelps. The motion carried by a vote of 9 in favor with 2 opposed.

C. Learning Inside Out Initiative Memorandum of Agreement Between the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Chariho Public School Committee – Superintendent Picard explained that an extension was requested and granted by RIDE (Grant was approved on May 23, 2023) with the Approved Project expenditures not to exceed \$99,634 and can only be used for eligible expenses incurred between June 1, 2023 and June 30, 2025. She recommended approval of the Memorandum of Agreement Amendment #1 (change to the expiration date). If approved, all Committee Members will need to sign the MOA. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Karen, to approve the Learning Inside Out Initiative Memorandum of Agreement #1 (change to the expiration date) Between the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Chariho Public School Committee. Tyler questioned the need for the extension to which Gina replied that it allows the District more time to ensure the funds are going to the right places.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To approve the Learning Inside Out Initiative Memorandum of Agreement #1 (change to the expiration date) Between the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Chariho Public School Committee. In favor: Unanimous.

D. District 2023-2024 Annual Report – Superintendent Picard asked all to please join her in extending heartfelt thanks to Katie Kirakosian and Donna Sieczkiewicz for once again their exceptional hard work on the Annual Report for our school district. Their dedication and meticulous attention to detail have ensured that this important document truly reflects the achievements and progress of our District. We deeply appreciate the time and effort they invested to make this report a success. She recommended approval of the District 2023-2024 Annual Report. Once approved, a copy will be placed on the website for public viewing.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To approve the District 2023-2024 Annual Report. In favor: Unanimous.

E. Next Steps as they Relate to Elementary School Planning and the Phase-Out of Hope Valley Elementary School – Superintendent Picard stated that yesterday, the Bureau Veritas North America (BVNA) reached out to us as they have been retained by the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) to schedule Facility Condition Assessments (FCAs) and Facility Suitability Assessments for the District. The project is being overseen by the RIDE School Building Authority. To clarify, an FCA is an analysis of the condition of the present facility to determine the remaining useful lives of the building components and to develop a replacement schedule of value. A Facility Suitability Analysis is to determine the conformity of the school to desired standards. This analysis, along with other data and enrollment projections, will be used to report and forecast future funding requirements. This information allows the state to strategically and effectively spend available facility funding to provide the opportunity for student learning to occur in healthy, safe environments. They will be sending their project assessors to complete the site inspections during the month of September. They are required to speak with onsite personnel familiar with the facility. Jason Sullivan, our Director of Buildings and Grounds, will be there. They have shared that they will be reviewing the following: 100% of building interior spaces; maintenance areas, including mechanical/electrical closets; common areas; storage units; exterior of the property; roof access if the building has a flat roof (for safety reasons, BV assessors do not access sloped or pitched roofs); and any mobile/modular classrooms. As you know, the May Bond failed and RIDE requires us to have a new elementary capital plan. With that in mind, this review is designed to ensure we understand the most current needs of our buildings while also forecasting the needs for the next five years and beyond. It will also assist in revising our current plan on the Main Campus if need be which if you recall some members were

concerned about what should be a priority and if any changes are needed. We will be able to use this information to update our capital plan. As a result, we will be postponing the Necessity for School Construction meetings until we receive this information to ensure we are working with the most recent data. As it relates to Hope Valley – as you all know we have begun the phase out. There are no longer Kindergarten classrooms at Hope Valley. The two first grade classes are each at 14 students for a total of 28. As we plan for FY26, the Committee will need to determine if you want to continue with a slow phase out or begin moving additional grade levels of students to the other elementary schools for cost savings. Budget season for the School Committee begins in January but it will be important to understand that if we need budget cuts, the remaining classrooms at Hope Valley will need to be considered. The current total enrollment for Hope Valley grades 1-4 is 102 students. The overall enrollment in all Chariho Schools is approximately 3,000 students. Linda had a question but stated that the Superintendent answered what precipitated their coming in. Gina noted that she just received this so she will get more information. She notified principals and administrators and did reach out to the School Building Authority. She will put something in her Friday update about Bureau Veritas North America. Jess asked if they could have a summary timeline (a placeholder and add to it). Gina replied that the purpose of this item, which will be on every agenda, is for the School Committee to provide guidance to administration – what you want to see. Pat asked if any School Committee members will be invited to attend when they visit to which Gina responded she didn't know. Kathryn stated she had several comments: 1) she asked if Gina would please forward the email she received to the School Committee; 2) she knows it was quite expensive when the Jacobs Report was done; is this no cost to the District to which Gina replied no cost as of right now. The third comment from Kathryn is that some School Committee members would like to be there when they tour the facilities. Gina responded that she will first ask Necessity for School Construction Committee members to which Kathryn stated that she would like to attend. Gina noted that the Committee has to be careful about a quorum. Kathryn replied that she feels it is highly unlikely that 6 or more Committee members will go. Gina stated she will gather more information and report back once she has spoken with the School Building Authority. Craig asked Gina if she didn't already forewarn them this past winter that something like this could happen. Gina replied that RIDE knows the can has been kicked down the road for our elementary schools. She was actually afraid they would withhold funding. There is no cost to the District now but it could end up costing us. Kathryn wanted to publicly note that RIDE did require all schools be reviewed and none of our schools were found in need of replacement to which Gina clarified that was in 2016. Craig questioned when is the turning point for Hope Valley as far as full closure? If they stagger it another grade next year, the following year will only house students in grades 2-4 and preschool. He doesn't feel having this few number of students would warrant keeping it open another year to which Gina replied this is the direction that is needed from the Committee. Karen requested numbers for the other grades as it was mentioned that grade one has 28 students. Gina noted the total this year is 102; she will get the breakdown as requested. Jess noted one of the biggest concerns is where will preschool go. That is why she was in favor of the new schools. Kathryn stated that she did vote for the decommissioning of Hope Valley School because of the savings as they need to keep a budget that is not burdensome. She doesn't know how close the other schools are to capacity; how many can Charlestown take? Gina responded that Charlestown can take 100 more as the maximum enrollment is around 400. Richmond's maximum is around 600 so they too can take 100 more students. She is interested to see what Veritas says. We did a school enrollment projection for the new schools. There is space at Charlestown and Richmond but not at Ashaway. Kathryn commented that so long as enrollment projections are correct but the towns have to have affordable housing and this could increase the numbers as they have to meet the criteria. Gina stated this impacts every town differently. Enrollment studies are based on a lot of data; they are based on a ten-year forecast and there is no increase expected. Craig stated that he found the enrollment data and Charlestown School is certified for 443 and they currently have 253; Richmond is at 532 and they currently have 360; and Ashaway is certified for 258 with a current enrollment of 198. Gina added that Hope Valley currently has 234 with Preschool. She is not sure how Brushy Brook will impact this as we need to have more background information. Craig wondered if taxpayers ask should they say that Hope Valley will remain open for two more years to which Gina responded she is not saying that. It is the School Committee's decision to determine this. Chair Giusti reiterated that the impetus is when people say we don't discuss this, we can say we have been talking about it. If the budget dictates they need to close Hope Valley, they will have to make that decision. Jessica stated that she would like to get input from Hope Valley parents

as she feels they may have made missteps the last time around. Chair Giusti noted that it is a good opportunity as a School Committee member to let Hope Valley parents know that this is on the agendas for discussion. They should come to meetings or send emails. Pat commented that when they discussed this with Hope Valley, the Committee led them to believe it would be a phase-out. As time goes on they will need to re-evaluate that but she doesn't want to pull a fast one. Gina stated that they need to hear this from the School Committee that is why she is placing it on the agenda every meeting. Kathryn noted her appreciation that this will be a continuous item so they can be more transparent. It is a good thing to let Hope Valley parents know. Emails and texts should go out to Hope Valley parents. Gina replied that Mr. G does a good job with communication.

F. Budget Transfers – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Transfers for August 20, 2024.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To approve the Budget Transfers for August 20, 2024. In favor: Unanimous.

G. FY24 Budget Update – Superintendent Picard stated that if anyone has any questions, they should reach out to her. Tyler asked if Ned was still putting this information out to which Gina replied that Ned and Lynn worked on it. We have Ned and Sue still on contract. Jessica wondered how does the District share about free/reduced lunch. Gina noted that is a sensitive topic. We offer incentives to sign on and we communicate this at all events. Jessica asked if the Health and Wellness Subcommittee does anything to promote this to which Gina responded that she was not positive if they had any involvement with this.

H. Revised 2024-2025 School Calendar – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the revised 2024-2025 School Calendar. Preschool AM and PM classes alternated, on a monthly basis, attendance on Early Release Days. The revised calendar reflects a team decision to forego preschool attendance on Early Release Days. The change only impacts Pre-K. With the guidance and legislation passed as it relates to Pre-K, we will use the early release times to ensure our Pre-K teachers can work on the necessary professional learning and work required for curriculum development, parent consult meetings and home visits. If we didn't have this time for them on Early Release Days, we would have had to pay for them to meet after school and we did not budget for this.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Linda Lyall and Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To approve the revised 2024-2025 School Calendar. In favor: Unanimous.

#### IX. Consent Agenda Items

Chair Giusti asked if there were any items that needed to be pulled. Craig pulled Item C and Tyler pulled A-1.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Linda Lyall and Donna Chambers and it was VOTED: To approve the remainder of the Consent Agenda Items. In favor: Unanimous.

- A. Minutes: Approved the following:
  - 2. Regular Session Minutes of July 16, 2024.
- B. Bill Review – Accepted.
- D. Permission to Issue Bids/Request Quote – None at this time.
- E. Permission to Award Contracts – None at this time.
- F. Home Instruction – Action taken in executive session.
- G. Grants – None at this time.
- H. Donations – None at this time.

A-1. Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Executive Session Minutes of July 16, 2024 – Approval of Executive Session Minutes of June 18, 2024 (minutes not sealed).

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Jessica Purcell and it was VOTED: To approve the Executive Session Minutes of July 16, 2024 – Approval of Executive Session Minutes of June 18, 2024 (minutes not sealed). In favor: Chambers, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained (due to absence): Champlin and Lyall. The motion carried by a vote of 9 in favor with 2 abstentions.

C. Personnel Actions – Superintendent Picard recommended the Committee rescind the non-renewal of Aimee Louzon, 1.0 FTE Elementary Teacher.

Tyler Champlin made a motion, seconded by Jessica Purcell and it was VOTED: To rescind the non-renewal of Aimee Louzon, 1.0 FTE Elementary Teacher. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Lyall, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Recused: Louzon. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 1 recusal.

#### X. Reports

A. Subcommittee Reports – None at this time.

B. Superintendent's Report

1. Back to School Updates – Our New Teacher Orientation began August 20<sup>th</sup> and ends August 22<sup>nd</sup>. Teachers and staff return on August 28<sup>th</sup> and teachers have a professional development day on August 29<sup>th</sup>. The first day of school for all students is September 3<sup>rd</sup>. We are excited to welcome back our students, staff and families in two weeks. Our Welcome Back Flyer will be sent out on August 21<sup>st</sup>.

2. Kindergarten Registration Update – Current enrollment is as follows for K: Ashaway – 42 students (2 classrooms); Charlestown – 54 students (3 classrooms) and Richmond – 86 students (4 classrooms) for a total of 182 students in 9 classrooms. The largest class sizes are Ashaway Grade 4 at 23 and Charlestown Grade 3 at 23, 22.

3. Discipline Overview – As many of you know, superintendents must annually review the student discipline data we report to RIDE to “determine whether the discipline imposed has a disproportionate impact on students based on race, ethnicity, or disability status.” For those who may not be aware there is no hard and fast rule or universally accepted guidance concerning how to determine discipline disproportionality based on race, ethnicity, or disability status. However, we do use quality guidance from the US Department of Education and upon review, Superintendent Picard was happy to report that we continue to have no findings of disproportionality in Chariho.

4. Staff Orientation will be held on Wednesday, August 28<sup>th</sup> to welcome our educators and staff. It is held in the Middle School Auditorium at 8:00 AM. School Committee members are welcome to attend. Please let her know if you plan to attend so that I can recognize all in attendance.

C. Coming Events – The Superintendent asked all to please review upcoming events.

#### XI. School Committee Requests for Future Agenda Items or Legal Opinions

Craig stated that last year they deviated from the Budget Workshop calendar and combined two of the Workshops with School Committee meetings. He would prefer to go back to four meetings, separate from the scheduled School Committee meetings, as he does not feel they gave enough due diligence to the budget.

#### XII. Adjournment

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was

VOTED: To adjourn at 8:10 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

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Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk