

**Roanoke County Public Schools**

**Parent Advisory Council**

January 15, 2020 6:00 pmSchool Board Meeting Room

Meeting Minutes

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Attending: From RCPS--Mr. Chuck Lionberger, Dr. Rhonda Stegall, Dr. Rebecca Eastwood, Mr. Mike Riley, Ms. Stephanie Hogan, Ms. Jessica Beemer. From the PAC--Laura Bowman, Andrea Carter, Kathleen Thorell, Shelley Clemons, Julie Owen, Amy Driver, Amanda Foutz, Tina Bourne, Victoria Rosenberg, Paulina Kasmer, Susan Robertson, Jen Garrett, Courtney Bass, Kori Webb

Parent Advisory Council representatives from the following schools attended the meeting: Bonsack Elementary, Cave Spring Elementary, Cave Spring Middle, Clearbrook Elementary, Ft. Lewis Elementary, Glenvar Elementary, Herman L. Horn Elementary, Hidden Valley Middle, Hidden Valley High, Oak Grove Elementary, WE Cundiff Elementary, and William Byrd High.

PAC Chair, Laura Bowman, called the meeting to order at 6:05. The meeting agenda, a RCPS Finance Department power point presentation packet, contact information for Roanoke County’s representatives in the General Assembly, and a sample letter to those representatives were given to attendees.

Laura welcomed the attendees to the meeting.

Members of the Roanoke County School Board and Superintendent, Dr. Ken Nicely, came into the meeting room. School Board Chair, Don Butzer, and Vice Chair, Mike Wray, explained some of the pressing needs of the school system, including pay increases for teachers, funding to modernize aging school buildings, and funding for essential support staff. The school board stated support for the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) in launching a communications campaign with a focus on these needs. The campaign would address the need for the General Assembly to amend Governor Northam’s 2020-2021 education budget and could include letters, emails, and phone calls from parent organization members to their representatives in the Virginia General Assembly. They encouraged stakeholders to share the needs they see at their own children’s schools. The school board thanked the attendees for being in the PAC.

Dr. Nicely shared that Governor Northam's proposed education budget would give teachers a raise next year, but the raise is not enough to get them even close to the national average. Virginia is consistently ranked in the top 12 wealthiest states in the nation but ranked in the bottom 12 for teacher salaries. When we take out the salaries of the wealthier portions of the state, we're ranked in the bottom 5 for teacher salaries.

Dr. Nicely shared that the state's arbitrary cap on support staff funding affects Roanoke County and the impact is staggering. Because of the cap, RCPS loses $4.8 million in next year’s budget that should be coming from the state. Even using simplified numbers for illustration purposes (11 years since the recession times $4 million lost per year), RCPS has been denied $44 million. These are positions RCPS has to pay for anyway meaning these funds taken away from other areas of the budget.

A question from a PAC member was raised about whether parent organization leaders had the authority and ability to advocate for the needs of their schools. The question was answered by PAC Chair, Laura Bowman, in the affirmative.

Roanoke County Public Schools’ Finance Manager, Jessica Beemer, gave a presentation on school funding and the school board’s 2020-2021 Annual Budget. This included the budget development process, revenues and expenditures, student enrollment, Roanoke County’s role in the budget, the Governor’s budget, and links to RCPS’ Finance webpage (<https://www.rcps.us.Page/4120>). The Finance webpage includes the Budget Blog, School Board work session booklets, and a calendar of upcoming meetings which are open to the public. The slideshow presentation Ms. Beemer presented to the PAC is on the RCPS Finance webpage.

PAC Chair, Laura Bowman, spoke about the great and growing needs of the school system and shared that a letter writing and phone call campaign was not unprecedented in Roanoke County parent organizations. When education funding was threatened in 2012 due to sequestration, the Roanoke County Council of PTAs collaborated with the school system and sent hundreds of letters to the US Congress, asking them to not cut funding for public education.

Laura Bowman explained the process of the communications campaign: PAC leaders could first share the campaign with their parent organization boards. If there was consensus to participate from their boards, they could send the provided sample letter templates to their memberships along with contact information for Roanoke County’s representatives in the General Assembly. These could be sent to members via email and shared on social media.

Laura Bowman asked the PAC representatives whether they would like to encourage their memberships to participate in the communications campaign and they answered yes. Laura Bowman asked if the PAC leaders would like to send a letter to Roanoke County’s representatives in the General Assembly from the RCPS Parent Advisory Council requesting amendments to the Governor’s budget that would better address the needs of RCPS, and the PAC representatives answered yes.

Laura Bowman asked for any ideas from the PAC on how to best make the communications campaign effective. Making it easy for stakeholders by providing the sample letters and contact information via email and social media was suggested. Hard copies of the sample letters to state representatives were available at the meeting for PAC leaders to take back to their schools.

Dr. Rhonda Stegall, Director of Administration for RCPS, gave a presentation on school safety and lockdown drills. The Secret Service conducted an eye-opening analysis on targeted school violence (<https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/usss-analysis-of-targeted-school-violence.pdf>). RCPS has made a concerted effort to understand these threats and has invested time and resources in learning how to prevent violence from occurring on school campuses and keep students and school faculty members safe.

RCPS has a Safety Task Force and a Safety Advisory Committee and these groups guide and inform RCPS administrators and the school board. Each RCPS middle school and high school has a Life Counselor. All RCPS elementary schools have full time guidance counselors. Random visits to Roanoke County’s public schools by local law enforcement that include safety checks are performed on a consistent basis. RCPS has implemented the Expect Respect program that addresses bullying and coming soon, they will implement a program focused on being a Trauma Informed school system.

Mr. Lionberger directed PAC members to go to the School Safety and Security portion of the RCPS website (<https://www.rcps.us/safety>). Laura Bowman shared that this portion of the website could be shared by parent organizations with the parents at their schools.

Dr. Stegall shared that four lockdown drills per school year are mandated by the state of Virginia. Parents are alerted before the first lockdown drill of the school year. The three drills later in the year are not shared with parents and students ahead of time. RCPS has a new phone system that alerts up to 40 police and fire and rescue departments in the Roanoke Valley area. These departments know to not respond to lockdown drills. If advance notice of a lockdown drill is given to the public, and a potential perpetrator knows there will be no response to the drill from public safety officials, they may take this opportunity to come onto school property and cause harm.

School staff are trained in how to conduct lockdown drills. Students are alerted to a lockdown drill five minutes prior to the drill. Lockdown drills include turning off lights and staying away from windows. Classroom doors should always be closed and locked throughout the school day. If a student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) requires it, that student is provided with different accommodations for the lockdown drills. Students who’ve expressed that the drills are traumatic for them can be accommodated as well, and parents can request this accommodation.

RCPS uses Gaggle (<https://www.gaggle.net/>) on RCPS computers used by students. Scanning of the devices is done 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and alerts RCPS when there are references to guns and suicide, for example. All alerts go to three RCPS administrators.

RCPS has an app called ‘Speak Up’ (<https://www.rcps.us/Page/4018>) wherein students may anonymously report bullying or threats. Dr. Stegall shared that 90% of acts of violence are leaked by the perpetrator prior to the act. If a weapon is acquired to commit an act of violence, it’s commonly used within two weeks of acquisition. So, it’s important for people to say something if they see something. There are threat assessment teams at every Roanoke County public school.

PAC members expressed that the lockdown presentation was extremely helpful and there was a request to provide the presentation at schools in each RCPS district so all parents had the opportunity to better understand RCPS’ school safety measures and lockdown drill protocols. Mr. Lionberger asked that RCPS presentations of this nature be heavily promoted to increase attendance.

Dr. Stegall asked the PAC if they thought a survey to parents on a proposed school calendar change would be beneficial. The proposed calendar change would occur in two years as families may already have made vacation plans. The proposed calendar change includes making Spring Break the same week each year; the last week in March. Schools would be closed the Friday before Easter. The change is being proposed to address the changing date of Easter each year and the amount of time between Easter and the last day of school. RCPS is also looking at closing schools the day before Thanksgiving and changing early dismissal times for the three Professional Development days RCPS has on its calendar on Wednesdays each year. Instead of a two-hour early dismissal, there would be a three-hour early dismissal to ensure enough time for these important school staff meetings to take place. The PAC agreed that a survey to parents would be a good idea.

The meeting had run 20 minutes long at this point and Laura Bowman asked that anyone with more to share stay after the meeting or contact her afterwards.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50

The next meeting is scheduled for April 15th, 2020

Respectfully submitted by Laura Bowman