OLD ROCHESTER REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
September 6, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.
Marion – Mattapoisett – Rochester, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Members Present: Michelle Smith, Chairperson (in-person), Jason Chisholm (remote – arrived at 7:07pm), Frances-Feliz Kearns (in-person), Margaret McSweeny (in-person), April Nye (in-person), Joseph Pires (in-person), Rosemary Bowman (in-person), Matthew Monteiro (in-person) and James Muse (in-person).

Members Absent: None.

Others Present: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools; Sharlene Fedorowicz, Asst. Supt. of Teaching and Learning; Howard Barber, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations; Kristine Lincoln, Interim Director of Student Services; Michael Devoll, Principal, ORR High School; Vanessa Harvey, Asst. Principal, ORR High School; Silas Coellner, Principal, ORR Jr. High School; Kelly Chouinard, Asst. Principal, ORR Jr. High School; Lauren Millette, Director of Guidance; Melissa Wilcox, Executive Assistant to Supt.; teachers, parents, students and members of the press.

Mr. Eugene Jones toured the building with school committee members Michelle Smith, Frances Feliz-Kearns, Margaret McSweeny, Matthew Monteiro and Joseph Pires prior to the start of the meeting.

Meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Chairperson Smith. Ms. Smith informed everyone in attendance that the meeting was being recorded. Chairperson Smith made the following statement: *This meeting will be conducted in a hybrid format. School Committee, Administrators and public will have the option of meeting in person in the Media Room located at the Jr. High School at 133 Marion Road, Mattapoisett, MA 02739 or via zoom.*

Recognition
The following new staff members were recognized by administration and welcomed by school committee.
Kristine Lincoln, Interim Director of Student Services
Teah Keogh, ELL Specialist
Christopher Carrig, Athletic Director/Campus Aide
Hannah Long, World Language Teacher (Latin)
Emma Fenton, Special Education Transition Teacher
Carolyn Ross, ISP Teacher
Caitlin Lavoie, Instructional Assistant
Aaron Strothers, Instructional Assistant
Brittany DeMedeiros, Instructional Assistant
Laurie Cunningham, Instructional Assistant
Liam MacCurtain, Instructional Assistant
Caroline Murphy, Instructional Assistant

I. Approval of Minutes
A. Regular Minutes
MOTION to approve the regular meeting minutes of June 21, 2023
MOTION by Mr. Monteiro
MOTION Seconded by Ms. Nye
MOTION PASSED
Smith; yes, Bowman; yes, Kearns; abstain, McSweeny; yes, Monteiro; yes, Muse; yes, Nye; yes, Pires; yes

OLD ROCHESTER REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
June 21, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.
Marion – Mattapoisett – Rochester, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Members Present: Michelle Smith, Acting Chairperson (in-person), Jason Chisholm (in-person), Margaret McSweeny (in-person), April Nye (in-person), Joseph Pires (in-person), Rosemary Bowman (remote), Matthew Monteiro (in-person) and James Muse (remote) arrived at 7:00 p.m.

Members Absent: Frances-Feliz Kearns

Others Present: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools; Sharlene Fedorowicz, Asst. Supt. of Teaching and Learning; Howard Barber, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations; Craig Davidson, Director of Student Services; Melissa Wilcox, Executive Assistant to Supt.; Michael Devoll, Principal, ORR High School; Silas Coellner, Principal, ORR Jr. High School; Vanessa Harvey, Asst. Principal, ORR High School; Lauren Millette, Director of Guidance; teachers, parents, students and members of the press.

Meeting was called to order at 6:37 p.m. by Chairperson Smith. Ms. Smith informed everyone in attendance that the meeting was being recorded. Chairperson Smith made the following statement: *This meeting will be conducted in a hybrid format. School Committee, Administrators and public will have the option of meeting in person in the Media Room located at the Jr. High School at 133 Marion Road, Mattapoisett, MA 02739 or via zoom.*

Recognition
Superintendent Nelson and Chairperson Smith welcomed and recognized retirees Kathy Dranchak and Kathleen Souza, along with retirees Rosa Pedrosa and Kevin McCarthy who were not present. Chairperson Smith presented Ms. Dranchak and Ms. Souza with the books *Ay, Mija!: My Bilingual Summer in Mexico* by Christine Suggs and *Honestly Elliot* by Gillian McDunn respectively. These books will be placed in the library in their honor. In honor of Ms. Pedrosa and Mr. McCarthy, the books *Portuguese Spinner: An American Story* and *Waves and Beaches: The Powerful Dynamics of Sea and Coast* will be in the library respectively. Principal Devoll and Principal Coellner elaborated on the roles of each retiree and thanked them for their contributions to the ORR school community over the years.

XI. Executive Session
MOTION to enter executive session at 6:46 p.m. for purposes of exception #3, to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or non-union personnel and #7, to comply with the provisions of any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements.
MOTION by Ms. Nye
MOTION Seconded by Mr. Chisholm
ROLL CALL VOTE:
7:0 (Chisholm; yes, Monteiro; yes, Bowman: yes, Nye: yes, Smith: yes, Pires: yes, McSweeny: yes)

MOTION to exit executive session at 6:55 p.m. and return to the regular meeting
MOTION by Mr. Monteiro
MOTION Seconded by Mr. Chisholm
ROLL CALL VOTE:
7:0 (Chisholm; yes, Monteiro; yes, Bowman: yes, Nye: yes, Smith: yes, Pires: yes, McSweeny: yes)

This item is in relation to the school committee's District Adopted Procedures related to policy IJ-R - which is Reconsideration of Instructional Resources. The District received two appeals per this policy from Ms. Karen Thomas for the books "Push" and "Felix Ever After". Leading up to the appeals to the school committee this evening the following proceedings occurred in alignment with the district adopted procedures to IJ-R-Reconsideration of Instructional Resources:
- the Principal (Mr. Devoll) met with Ms. Thomas, referred to as the "questioner" in relation to the district adopted policies - to have informal discussions regarding her questions and/or concerns about the two books.
-the Assistant Superintendent, (Dr. Fedorowicz) convened the appropriate members (a school committee member [Member Michelle Smith, Chairperson], the assistant superintendent [Dr. Fedorowicz], principal [Mr. Devoll], teacher [Mr. Beihl, ELA Coordinator], and the appropriate subject area coordinator from the District [Ms. Barker, Librarian]) as outlined in the procedures to form a Standards Committee;
-the Standards Committee met with the questioner to review their questions and any other information they wanted to present;
-the Standards Committee considered other pertinent facts and information and voted on each book that was requested for review;
-each book was unanimously approved by the Standards Committee to remain in the school libraries and their decisions were rendered in writing to the questioner.
-Consequently, the questioner appealed the Standards Committee's decisions to the Superintendent of Schools for review and consideration;
-The Superintendent of Schools met with the questioner to hear their questions and/or concerns about each of the two books, reviewed the Standards Committee's decisions, and rendered written decisions to uphold the Standard Committee's decisions on the two books.
-The questioner since has appealed the decisions of the Superintendent of Schools to the school committee per the adopted procedures to IJ-R-Reconsideration of Instructional Resources related to the two books under review.
As a result, tonight the school committee should hear the questions and/or concerns from the questioner and review the previous proceedings as just outlined and render a decision on the books. All decisions should be confirmed in writing. Once decision(s) by the school committee has been made - as stated in policy IJ-R-Reconsideration of Instructional Resources - the decision(s) will not be reconsidered for a period of three years beginning with the end of the school year when the adoption is made. In the school committee's packets - all related documentation has been provided for each of the books under review (including the questioner's citizen's request for review of a book forms, the Standards Committee's written decisions, the Superintendent's written decisions, and the questioner's written appeals).

Chairperson Smith enabled community member Karen Thomas to address the committee regarding her appeal of these two books. Ms. Thomas stated the following:
There has been a tremendous amount of concern voiced about certain books available in the school library. Are they developmentally appropriate and do they meet educational suitability? As parents/caregivers, we have an obligation to protect our children and always have their safety in mind. Regardless of race or sexual orientation, extreme sexually explicit books should not be easily accessible in school libraries. Following policy IJ-R Reconsideration of Instructional Resources, I completed the required request for citizen's review of a book in December 2022, met with the principal, standards committee, and the Superintendent. The decision has been to have the books remain in the high school library so I decided to continue to the last step in the process, which is to bring my concerns to the school committee. Do these books support curricular and personal information needs? Book Looks has a 1-5 rating system, it was developed to provide a means of assessing the appropriateness of a book for a young child or young adult based on the content of the book. Quick guide to communicate objectionable material found between a book's cover. Provides a wide array of potentially controversial content. Strives to be as objective as possible. Another review used by a district public library includes sources such as Booklist, Kirkus Reviews, Publisher's Weekly, and School Library Journal. Challenged Books:

Chairperson Smith reiterated that there is a thorough rubric that the standards committee follows when reviewing the book and Ms. Thomas' comments of the books.
Mr. Pires thanked Ms. Thomas for creating awareness and for her persistence. He believes that the committee needs to look at the processes in place and clear out material that is not age appropriate.
Ms. McSweeny reminded the committee and the public that the books are located in the library, not in the classrooms or as part of the curriculum.
Mr. Monteiro asked if this was the first time *Push* has been brought up since it has been in the library since 2008?
Superintendent Nelson and Principal Devoll confirmed yes, to their knowledge.
Ms. Nye asked if we could get more information out regarding the process of opting out of books?
Mr. Pires said part of the issue is communication. What is in the library, what is in the curriculum? Superintendent Nelson is making strides in the right direction.
Ms. Nye agreed that people do have a voice.

MOTION to uphold the recommendation of the school's standards committee and maintain the book *Felix Ever After* in the library.
MOTION by Mr. Chisholm
MOTION Seconded by Mr. Monteiro
ROLL CALL VOTE:
7:1 (Chisholm; yes, Monteiro; yes, Muse: yes, Bowman: yes, Nye: yes, Smith: yes, Pires: no, McSweeny: yes)

MOTION to uphold the recommendation of the school's standards committee and maintain the book *Push* in the library.
MOTION by Mr. Chisholm
MOTION Seconded by Mr. Monteiro

Ms. McSweeny commented that she knows the book is controversial. There are students that go through painful experiences and need something to relate to. These books exist for that reason so that there are other viewpoints out there and other experiences that we have not gone through.
Mr. Chisholm added that there is a distinction between what is being taught in school and what is a book that is available in a library. We can do a better job of making sure parents know how to limit access to their student. It is not being taught in the school.
Mr. Pires said there is a significant amount of people in the community that have opposing views to the decisions that have been made. It's really dividing us and hopefully in the near future we can compromise so that both sides are met.
Ms. McSweeny mentioned that recently Mr. Hardy donated books and two of the books were accepted that were professionally reviewed in order to have different viewpoints in our library. She believes the majority of the committee is there to uphold and maintain freedom of voice.

ROLL CALL VOTE:
7:1 (Chisholm; yes, Monteiro; yes, Muse: yes, Bowman: yes, Nye: yes, Smith: yes, Pires: no, McSweeny: yes)

E. Approval of Lease
Superintendent Nelson made the following statement:
There is one lease for review and approval tonight between Old Rochester Regional School District and Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative (SMEC).
MOTION to approve the Memorandum of Agreement between the Old Rochester Regional School District School Committee and the Southeastern MA Educational Collaborative for the rental of classroom space at the Old Rochester Regional for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2024.