

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MINUTES
May 5, 2016

Attendance: Deirdre Burns, Laura Schulkind, Deirdre d’Albertis, Joe Phelan, Steve Jensen.

Social Media Policy?

Members of the committee began a very open-ended discussion of whether or not it makes sense for Rhinebeck CSD to adopt a social media policy. Teachers, students, and parents are increasingly reliant on a host of social media platforms in their everyday lives; how might these forms of communication enter our school community and to what end? Who is responsible for oversight of accounts maintained by individuals to relay information outside of the district’s website? How might safety/security concerns be addressed?

Joe has broached the subject with the District’s legal counsel. At a NYSSBA communications workshop this past fall, several board members heard about the importance of crafting a strong Acceptable Use Policy; Social Media Policy could fall under a school district’s AUP or stand alone (<http://www.rhinebeckcsd.org/policyview.php?PolicyID=111>).

Steve pointed out the value of openness in this domain; helping students to navigate social media, along with technology in general, is clearly important. Trusted adults in the schools can and should model prudent, informed digital citizenship. At the same time, he counseled proceeding mindfully with age-appropriate practices in this as with all curriculum development. The schools need to anticipate, not simply react to young people’s use of technology. It is our responsibility to help protect our students against making “high-risk” mistakes as they learn. The goal, in the short term, is to find out more about our teachers’ goals in communicating via social media, even as we affirm the importance of contact between school and home in service of student learning. Our counselors may also have valuable insight into patterns of student use of social media that can inform the conversation.

School District Website / RCSD App?

Our conversation turned to the desirability of creating access to content on the RCSD website via smartphone; the committee agreed that apps are one powerful response to communications concerns/preferences of parents, teachers, and students. This is a priority moving forward, then, talking to an app developer about how to make the district site more user-friendly for people connecting to the site by phone.

As media proliferate, we also noted, the challenge to integrate and update information on ALL platforms grows.

Task Force on “The Future of the School District”

The Communications Committee began discussion of what a “task force” to discuss the future of Rhinebeck’s schools might look like. Considering the not insignificant budget cuts currently in place for the 2016-17 school year we know that declining enrollments and a deeply uncertain fiscal climate are here to stay. A one-day round table with stakeholders in the district (PTSO, RSF, ENTA, Young Rhinebeck, and other school-affiliated clubs and organizations) seems to be the logical place to start. Members of the committee will begin planning for this session with the target date of Saturday, September 10th. An anticipated demographic trend—declining enrollments not only in Rhinebeck but across New York State—spurs us to ask how we as a community can work cooperatively to strengthen

our schools. Rather than passively accept dwindling numbers of students, we see this as an opportunity to build toward a future in which the district and our town continue to be seen as a place for families to thrive. Beginning with a “state of the school” presentation, the goal would be to articulate our vision, or “collective preferred future,” moving forward.

Next Meeting:

Friday, June 3rd at 9:30 AM in the District Offices.

Respectfully submitted,

Deirdre d’Albertis