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Richmond Community Schools

35276 Division * Richmond, Michigan 48062 * (586) 727-3565 * www.richmond.k12.mi.us

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35320 Division

Richmond, Michigan 48062

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January 19, 2023

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This communication is to provide you with an update on events that have transpired in the district over the past couple of weeks as well as current issues affecting the district.

THREAT UPDATE

The anti-Semitic threat received by the Middle School (MS) Dean of Students on January 3, 2023, and the death threat received by a staff person on January 6, 2023 (discovered on January 8, 2023) are still being investigated by the Richmond Police Department. The district has provided documents and camera footage requested by the police. While an arrest has not yet been made, the Richmond Police have requested the assistance of the Macomb Area Computer Enforcement (MACE) Unit, Michigan State Police, and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Representatives from the Macomb County Commissioners and the Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD) have reached out to the district to offer support and assistance. The district has spoken to the State Police and the Macomb County Sheriff's office to review all options the district has during this ongoing investigation. It is important to note, Chief Costello has told the district on multiple occasions, this investigation is not going to be quick and there is a possibility the case may not be solved.

The OK2SAY confidential report that identified a possible threat at the Middle School was investigated by the Richmond Police. The police determined the threat could not be "substantiated" and the case was closed. All students involved were allowed back in the

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building based on the conclusion of the Richmond Police investigation, which occurred Wednesday night and Thursday morning, prior to my letter to the community on Thursday, January 12, 2023. The school social worker and counselor are working with the students involved in the investigation and precautionary measures have been implemented.

Today, Ms. Marella, MS Principal, sent middle School families a letter informing them of a threat made by a middle school student. Working with our Police Liaison Officer, it was determined the words used by the student were different than what was originally reported. This situation was managed swiftly thanks to the quick reporting by the student and the partnership with the Richmond Police Department. Families of students involved were called and disciplinary action was issued as outlined by the *Student-Parent Handbook*. At no time were any students or staff in danger.

POLICE PRESENCE

In my January 8, 2023, letter, I stated uniformed police officers would be in all buildings this week. Considering the recent events, Chief Costello and I have agreed to continue the presence of uniformed police officers in our buildings through Friday, January 27, 2023. As we did this week, we will evaluate the need for officers as January 27th nears.

INTERIM MIDDLE SCHOOL DEAN OF STUDENTS

Beginning Thursday, January 19, 2023, Jeffrey Kenward will serve as Interim Middle School Dean of Students. Before retiring in February 2022, Mr. Kenward served as Assistant Principal at Thompson International Academy (K-8) and Southfield High School in the Southfield Public School District. Prior to that, Mr. Kenward was the International Baccalaureate Diploma Coordinator and high school social studies teacher. Mr. Kenward also served in the military. While Mr. Kenward serves as Interim Dean of Students, the district will be conducting interviews. To date, the district has received over a dozen applications for the position of Dean of Students.

STAFFING UPDATE

Over the past couple of weeks, many parents and community members expressed concerns of teacher and staff resignations. Below you will find a staffing update:

- Mr. Hooks, MS Social Studies teacher, resigned from his position. Currently, the position is being filled by Mr. Noonkester, a long-term substitute, until the end of the first semester. Mr. Burg, current HS CTE Teacher, will be reassigned to fill the MS Social Studies position, per his request. Ms. Christensen was hired to fill the vacancy created by Mr. Burg's reassignment to the middle school. Ms. Christensen will begin on January 23, 2023. Ms. Christensen taught CTE at Eastpointe High School.

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- Ms. Bartels, MS Language Arts, resigned from her position. Ms. Kelly, former MS Title I/31a Teacher) was reassigned to fill Ms. Bartels' vacancy, per her request, beginning January 3, 2023. Ms. Walters and the Title I/31a Paraprofessionals will provide services to Title I/31a students in grades K-5.
- Ms. Wycinski, MS Social Worker, resigned from her position. Ms. Miller was hired to fill the MS Social Worker vacancy and will begin on January 23, 2023. Ms. Miller was a social worker in the Clintondale Community School District.
- Ms. Falk, HS Special Education Teacher, resigned from her position. Ms. Robbins, former MS Special Education Teacher, was reassigned to HS Special Education to fill the vacancy left by Ms. Falk. Ms. Piebiak was hired to fill Ms. Robbins position and began on January 3, 2023. Ms. Piebiak was a former Special Education teacher in Lakeshore Public Schools.
- Ms. Hercula, HS Special Education, resigned from her position. Ms. Kramer was hired to fill the vacancy and begins on January 23, 2023. Ms. Kramer was a special education teacher in Center Line Public Schools.
- Mr. Nash, HS Mathematics teacher, resigned from his position. Ms. Manchik is currently the long-term substitute in the position through the end of the first semester. Beginning second semester, Mr. Nash's classes will be reassigned to Ms. Carra, Ms. Germain, and Mr. Misko.
- Beginning second semester, Mr. Day will be reassigned to the vacant MS/HS Physical Education position and Mr. Barnes will be reassigned to the high school to fill Mr. Day's position. The district hired Mr. Williams to fill Mr. Barnes' vacancy as the K-5 Physical Education teacher. Mr. Williams will work with Mr. Barnes the week of January 23, 2023. Mr. Williams completed his student teaching last spring in the Port Huron Area School District.
- HS Science position remains unfilled. Ms. Lemon, a certified teacher, was hired by the district and will be assigned to the science classes. The district is finalizing plans for a science certified teacher to co-teach the class with Ms. Lemon in an effort to provide maximum support to students. More information will be sent home as details are finalized.

As you can see by the number of new hires, in many cases Richmond is hiring staff from other districts, leaving a vacancy in those districts. I encourage the community to take a minute to visit other districts' websites to see the number of teacher vacancies. The State of Michigan has a teacher shortage problem, which has been escalating for years.

As districts address teacher shortages, many districts are paying teachers with experience more than starting wages. Richmond is no different. As I stated at a previous

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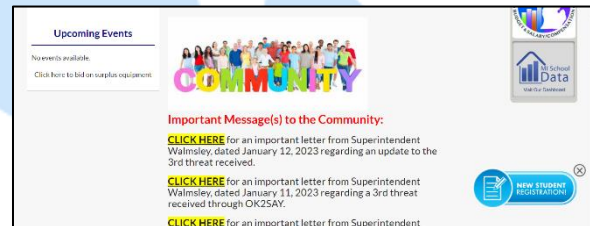
Board meeting, Richmond does not have the ability to match an offer a current teacher might receive from another district as contract language prohibits it. While Richmond may place a teacher beyond the first step outlined by the contract, once they are hire, all salary and benefit increases are defined by what has been negotiated. It is the district's preference to maintain and keep our teachers, but given the economics and teacher shortage, teachers are very marketable. The district is bound by contract language and cannot unilaterally offer a teacher more money or other benefits to retain them. It is devastating for a district to lose teachers with experience or vested interest.

COMMUNICATION AND NOTIFICATION

Over the past two weeks, I have received concerns from a handful of parents regarding the means and order in which the district notifies parents and guardians of important situations or school closures. There are three ways the district notifies parents or guardians regarding a situation at school and four ways the district notifies parents and guardians of a school closure. These are:

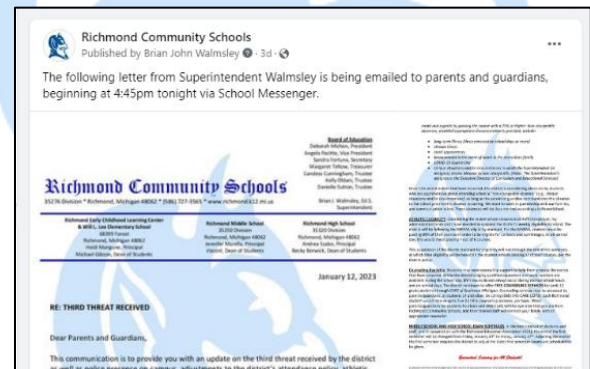
1. ***District Website.***

The district will post the communication on the main website of the district. After listening to parents speak during *Public Comment*, the district has made the notification links more prominent on the website.



2. ***Facebook.***

On the district Facebook page, the district will post the letter or a message to visit the district website to read the letter. When the district posts meeting notices or letters, the ability for individuals to comment on posts has been disabled.



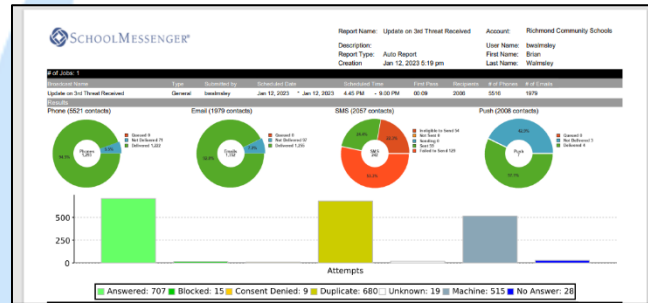
3. ***School Messenger Email and Automated Telephone Call.***

When the district sends out an email or automated telephone call by *School Messenger*, the system pulls parent and guardian email addresses and telephone numbers from PowerSchool. For automated telephone calls, you will either hear a computer-generated message or a computer-generated message directing individuals to check their email or visit the district's website for an important message.

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When the district sends emails by *School Messenger*, the system pulls the parent or guardian’s email address from PowerSchool. It is important to maintain an up-to-date email address in PowerSchool.

After each *School Messenger* email or telephone call sent, the district receives a report by student indicating which email addresses and/or telephone numbers were successful.



If you are not receiving emails or telephone calls, please contact Sarah Ogden (Community Liaison, PowerSchool, and Pupil Accounting Coordinator) at (586) 727-3565, ext. 6011, to verify the correct email addresses and telephone numbers are listed in PowerSchool as your information may be outdated.

4. **Television and News Stations.** In the event of a school closure, whether for inclement weather or a building problem, the district utilizes a website portal to notify Fox 2, Local 4 (NBC), Channel 7 (ABC), WWJ 950 News Radio, and WJR 760 News/Talk Radio.



There has been no specific order in which notifications were used to notify parents and guardians. Going forward, if one individual is responsible for notifying parents and guardians, the order of notification will be (1) website, (2) School Messenger, (3) Facebook, and (4) television and radio stations. In the event of a school closure due to weather, multiple people are part of the notification process and may occur simultaneously.

FREE COUNSELING AVAILABLE

Students may need counseling support to help them process the events that have occurred. While the district’s highly qualified counselors and social workers are available during the school day, life’s issues do not always occur during normal school hours and on school days. The district continues to offer **FREE COUNSELING SERVICES** for preK-12 grade students through *CARE of Southeast Michigan*. Counseling services may be accessed by parents/guardians, or students 14 and older, by calling (586) 541-CARE (2273). Each Richmond student is provided up to five (5) FREE counseling sessions, per topic. When parents/guardians (or students fourteen and older) call, tell the operator that you are from Richmond Community Schools, and their trained staff will connect your family with an appropriate counselor.

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Finally, and most importantly, if you or your child hear or read something of a concerning nature, **SAY SOMETHING**. Report it to the police department or school immediately. We need to support each other as the past few days have been frightening for students, parents, and staff. Please take time to review with your children the dangers of threatening harm to individuals or spreading misinformation on social media and the possible consequences. The safety of your children and our staff are my highest priority.

I continue to ask for your patience as I have received dozens and dozens of emails and telephone calls from parents and guardians and news outlets. I am returning them as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Walmsley, Ed.S.
Superintendent

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