**RRTA Meeting (Virtual on Zoom)**

**April 8, 2021**

**Attendance:**  R. Allen,Z. Artson-Crichlow, M. Barnum, C. Bonsignore-Kitchen, P. Brody, B. Buckingham, C. Dean, L. Espinosa, K. Evans, K. Fager, S. Flynn, B. Gerace, K. Huey, W. Humphrey,F. Macek, L. Rapkin, E. Robinson, K. Schultz, G. Shakes, S. Silvio, A. Smith, C. Smith, B. Swan, F. Valente, D. Voellinger, Y. Wooten, M. Zimmer, J. Zuniga

**Absent:** D. Altobelli, K. Barkley, M. Ferenchak, M. Jenkins-Cox, A. Johnson, M. Keating, D. Sullivan

**Also in attendance**: A. Urbanski, L. Kotwas, M. Ludwig, S. RaymondJ. Robillard, M. Lavonis (RTA Secretary/zoom administrator)

1. The meeting was called to order at 10:02.

2. A moment of silence was observed for teachers who have passed away in the past month: Claire Finity, Edward A. Sauers, and Robert J. Stevenson. A $25 donation is made to Books for Kids in memory of any RRTA member.

3. The March RRTA minutes were approved as written.

4. Adam Urbanski was asked to come to the meeting and give a **President’s Report**:

\*AFT has said that 85% of teachers have been vaccinated.

\*With NYSUT, 1200 vaccines have been brought in for teachers and the district has made another supplement of vaccines available.

\*RTA is not in favor of making vaccinations mandatory.

\*RTA will be sending out a survey to active teachers to ask how many have been vaccinated and to determine how many do not want to be vaccinated.

\*RTA has recently sent out a message to reps of how the district is pretending to have a relationship with the union when they are corresponding privately with teachers; CO is ignoring their responsibility to negotiate and are trying to sidestep the union by going right to teachers asking them to join focus groups to plan for next year.

\*This is an anti-union school board, stonewalling negotiations.

\*CO is trying to pit teachers against their own union;

\*Tim Cliby (ASAR president and soon to be retired) has opposed this plan in a memo of the Superintendent’s call for administrators to find teachers to be in these focus groups because the administrators are also working without a contract with whom she does not negotiate in good faith.

\*A day after Tim Cliby’s memo, the Superintendent sent out to principals to name a teacher from each school to the “Teacher Advisory Group”.

\*Urbanski said that many of her tactics remind him of Jean Claude Brizzard’s way of administration.

\*CO is looking for give backs especially the retirees’ benefits saying that retirees are not in the union anymore. Urbanski said that health benefits are non negotiable and that there will be no give backs for any health benefits.

\*Urbanski said that he will be the RTA president for the next 2 years because he ran unopposed in this spring’s RTA officer election.

Questions and Answers to Urbanski:

\*RRTA thanked him for his work for teachers over these many years and for advocating for the retiree health benefits.

\*The role of Shelley Jallow is the person appointed by Betty Rosa from State Ed after funds had been missing. Urbanski said she is the one who is advising the Superintendent about taking back health benefits, laying off of teachers, closing schools, employees should be living in the city, etc. RTA invited her to speak to Executive Council and open communication with her, but she canceled and never rescheduled.

She has been quoted several times about “right sizing” (downsizing) the schools by closing 6 schools, being anti union, having too many teachers, salaries that are too high, the union has too much influence, and teachers receive too many health benefits. She is backed by Ricardo Adams, Beatriz LeBron and Cynthia Elliot.

\*A rep asked how the district should encourage young people to go into teaching. Also the district should reinstate the program that would help TAs and paras to get their teaching credentials. Urbanski said that teachers should be included in going to colleges to recruit new teachers. Lucia Espinosa said that there should also be API (Asian/Pacific Island) candidates recruited to reflect the student body.

\*Urbanski was asked about Mayor Warren’s call to change the Taylor Law (for police but would effect all public employees) in Albany. Adam said that it is highly unlikely that Albany would take up this issue because of her weak position with her recent problems. NYSUT is aware of the issue and is monitoring it.

RTA is endorsing Malik Evans for mayor but the union has an agreement with Mayor Warren not to speak negatively against each other. Mayor Warren and the RTA have lived up to this agreement. Therefore, during the campaign RTA will work in sharing the positive aspects of voting for Malik Evans.

Adam said that the union has made a mistake not to endorse Van White which was recommended by Executive Council but voted down at the March rep meeting. The issue will be brought up again at the April rep meeting. Urbanski said that Van White has been an advocate often for teachers in ways Urbanski cannot divulge publicly.

\*NYS Budget is likely to be signed by the governor which is excellent news for schools. The Foundation Aid has been restored.

The Retirement Incentive was taken out of the budget.

For one year there will not be any significant layoffs or school closings in 2021-22, but there will be school closings (6) and substantial layoffs for September 2022.

\*Urbanski said that this Superintendent tends to flip flop. She said that she would keep 6 feet distance between student desks and now said it will be 3 feet.

Urbanski guesstimates that there are now 1/3 students back in school; in September there should be 2/3 back and 1/3 doing remote learning. He wants to negotiate remote teaching for those with underlying conditions themselves or someone in their family. He wants to begin negotiations now so that it is in place in September.

\*Most teachers are doing simultaneous teaching which Urbanski has said teachers feel it is not working out. The Superintendent says it is going well. He had suggested a way teachers could accommodate a better instruction by each school working out their best plan which the Superintendent agreed to and then took back her approval. Urbanski said it is difficult to trust what she says without wondering if she’ll take it back. He said she is not advocating for her employees; that she seems like a good person but is being influenced by others.

\*From questions about declining enrollment, Urbanski said that he doesn't know of a study about why the district is losing students. He said that about 10% of city students are at charter schools, private and parochial schools. He also said that some families are moving out of the city to the suburbs.

However, it is a lie about what Jallow and CO is saying that student enrollment is declining while teacher numbers are increasing. RTA records show that in the year 2000 there were over 4,000 teachers and in 2020 there were 3,000 teachers, a decrease of 25%. RTA will expose their lies through a media campaign.

\*How can retirees help? Urbanski said that RTA needs to become more effective in publicizing all teachers do and that teachers keep giving even after retiring, ie Dress A Girl/Savvy Sewers and Books for Kids, as well as individual volunteerism. He suggested we bring back the topic and discuss initiatives how employed teachers and retired teachers are active in the community.

At that point, Urbanski left the meeting.

5. **Dress a Girl/Savvy Sewers** — Gaya Shakes said that the group all have materials and are working at home with a goal of making 100 blankets by December for homeless shelters and organizations. They are also considering working with the homeless village (across from Nick Tahoe’s). A group from Harley is building a house there and Gaya suggested they get Edison Tech involved, too.

The group hasn’t been into the RTA office and Charlie Dean says that he hopes that the proper air filters will be installed so that groups can go back into the office in September.

6. Freddi Macek reported that the Labor Council and Building Trades are endorsing Malik Evans for mayor. The Workers Memorial Day will be commemorated Wednesday, April 28 at 5 pm in Highland Park (across from St. John’s). Please wear a mask and practice social distancing.

7.  **Vote Cope** — Mary Barnum reported that they are starting to receive Vote Cope donations and encouraging everyone to contribute. The August issue will list the Vote Cope donors.

8. **RRTA Newspaper** — The deadline for articles and pictures is May 1 sending them to Mary Barnum. The June paper will have a call for RRTA rep nominations.

There are 618 dues paying RRTA members. Last year at this time there were 750 members. This may mean that the number of RTA reps could be decreased by 7. There was a motion made to have the call for nominations in June but not to have the election until September. This may increase the number of reps and may eliminate the election mailing. The motion was seconded by Linda Rapkin and passed by consensus.

9. **Books for Kids** — Mary Barnum said that the group may meet to prepare for the 2021-22 school year.

10. **Calendar** — Linda Rapkin is working on a Hurd’s luncheon for the fall.

It will be decided at the May meeting whether to reserve a lodge for a fall picnic.

The next RRTA meeting will be May 6.

11. **New Business** —

\*There were 1200 NYSUT obtained vaccinations for teachers, but not enough teachers were signing up so retirees were contacted and slots were made available. Mary Barnum told a story of one RRTA member living in Albany driving up to Rochester for a vaccine. We thank Adam Urbanski, RTA, and NYSUT for providing the opportunity to retirees.

\*Van White endorsement— Mary Barnum said she hopes that retirees will speak up at the next rep meeting. She said that Van White still has a vote on the Board of Education while the union is trying to negotiate a contract. He also may not win the judgeship and remain on the Board of Education and we need his support, especially with the anti union sentiment of Adams, LeBron and Elliot. The union endorsed Adams and LeBron who have now worked against teachers.

Mary Barnum said that the new candidates for the Board are even more anti union/anti public education and the Legislative Committee had a difficult time finding 3 candidates to endorse.

\*Mary Barnum said she was contacted by Janice Insalva, who said she was a past city teacher and VP. She is working for a program called Sisters of Notre Dame Tutoring Project at Charles Street Settlement and is looking for applicants for a paid position managing volunteer tutors Monday through Thursday from noon to 6 pm. Contact Mary Barnum to get the email address from this person.

\*Gaya Shakes reported that she spoke with Karen Lahr, N&E chair, about making sure that those without emails would be getting a traditional paper ballot. There are not many contested positions. The RTA officers and the RRTA are non contested positions. Therefore, there will be no ballots sent, though there may be a informational letter sent out to name each person in their position. There is a contested election with the per diem subs and many RRTA members are in that department.

\*There was a question about why Mary Barnum had an RRTA newspaper article about pensions and how they can be changed by the NYS legislature. She said that we need to be friends with our political representatives and public employers as public employees to retain pensions. Also we need to be vigilant as public employee systems across the country were hit by losses during the pandemic, but that the NYS retirement system said they are solvent now and will be in the future.

\*Health Benefits because of RTA:

Cathy Smith said that MVP has a benefit that many retirees aren’t taking advantage of called “Healthy Roads” (phone number 1-877-748-2746) in which you can earn monetary gift cards for answering a questionnaire and from activities.

Each health plan has different benefits, ie Silver Sneakers, Silver and Fit, etc.

Retirees from other districts have no health benefits because it is a contractual issue and we need all retirees to be a member of RRTA (yearly dues are $39.30) to have power in numbers and encourage RTA to continue to negotiate for all members.

Meeting adjourned at 11:55.

Mary Zimmer

RRTA Secretary