



Volunteer Meeting | April 23, 2024 – Essex Place (4-5:30 pm)

Meeting Minutes (draft)

1. Call to Order and Welcome to Volunteers and Guests (Barbara Haines)

Barbara welcomed all to the meeting. 19 were in attendance. Connie Connor was thanked for hosting our meeting at Essex Place. Cynthia Clegg was thanked for the support the Community Foundation of Middlesex County has provided for the RVFF Leadership Team. Barbara also acknowledged Henrietta Mountz, a volunteer from Old Saybrook, for suggesting that RVFF's child literacy initiative be brought to book groups – she plans to share our plans for the Summer Reading Kits with her book groups. Barbara had just met with her book group and all members were enthusiastic about supporting the Summer Reading Kits. Barbara encourages everyone to spread the word! Barbara then outlined what would be covered in the meeting.

2. The State of Reading in Our Schools – Guest Speaker Introductions (Joan Falcigno)

Joan introduced speakers from Old Saybrook and Clinton

- **Brittany Macellaro, Literacy Specialist and Language Arts Consultant**

 - **Lewin G. Joel Jr. Elementary School, Clinton**

 - Brittany spoke first about the children she works with from kindergarten through second grade. She works with children individually and makes recommendations to classroom teachers. The school has a significant number of multilanguage children. In working with these children, she's found that books with two languages – English & Portuguese or English & Spanish are books that are great for families. Parents can read to children in their native language and children can read to parents in their second language.

- **Teresa Gingrave, Principal**

 - **Lewin G. Joel Jr. Elementary School, Clinton**

 - Teresa talked about the demographics in the Clinton Elementary School. Of the approximately 500 children, 93 are multi language students with a range of English-speaking abilities. Over 40% of children in the school have special needs of some kind. Teachers are having to work very hard to stay on top of educating their students and helping them progress.

- **Heston Sutman, Principal**

 - **Kathleen E. Goodwin Elementary School, Old Saybrook**

 - Heston also spoke about the demographics in Old Saybrook schools. 16 years ago, when he started in Old Saybrook, 10% of the children were special needs. Now that percentage is up to 45%. Both principals cited the reasons for these increases: the COVID-19 pandemic, technology – greater exposure to “screen” time, and children moving into a new community.

All three speakers described teachers as being under stress to effectively educate the students in their classes. They stressed the importance of children having books at home and parents taking the time to read with their children.

A question-and-answer period followed. One question was about the importance of community awareness of what is going on in the schools – is there a way for schools to inform the community about schools’ status? RVFF is a good example of community involvement. Also, how can RVFF best support the schools? Answer: by acknowledging teachers and the work that they are doing with students. Teachers would appreciate the support.

All volunteers attending voiced appreciation for the opportunity to learn about the schools in Clinton and Old Saybrook and the challenges schools are dealing with in these times.

2024 Activities

- **Community Awareness at Libraries (Barbara Turley)**

On April 6th, RVFF was at the Essex Library Book Sale with a table offering handouts for parents and families, with insights on promoting reading habits and access to free book resources. Additionally, worksheets were available for children, designed to engage them in reading. Embracing our literacy theme, “We Read!”, we distributed bookmarks featuring RVFF/CFMC information, further spreading awareness about our cause.

- **Summer Reading Kits (Joan Falcigno)**

Items for 100 Summer Reading Kits have been purchase with RVFF funds – bright yellow backpacks and various activity materials – colored pencils, crayons, pens, and scissors. The next step will be to have schools provide RVFF with book requests based on a child’s age, gender, reading level and language. Once this information is received, tags with the information and book lists will be distributed to RVFF volunteers and friends in mid-May for book purchasing. There will also be an option to make donations for purchase of books.

Reading kits will be assembled in early June in time to be given to children before the end of the school year. The towns participating in the Summer Reading Kit program are Clinton, Deep River, Essex, and Old Saybrook. All schools in schools in the River Valley and Shoreline area were contacted, these are the towns that responded.

- **Closing Comments and Adjournment (Barbara Haines)**