

Dr. Christopher Tamburro, President
Mary Anne Halbert, Vice President
Diana Romano, Vice President
Heather Darata, Treasurer
Corrie Majestic, Secretary

**RESOLUTION OF THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP OF THE VERONA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
OCTOBER 8, 2020**

WHEREAS,

Before and throughout the COVID-19 educational environment, Dr. Dionisio has engaged in decision-making practices that have had severe detrimental impacts on the staff and students of the Verona Public Schools. While he puts forth a narrative that there is stakeholder involvement in decision-making, his unilateral approach to crafting policy and plans rarely incorporates, in any measurable way, feedback from the staff designed to optimize the educational and workplace environments. This has resulted in harmful effects on students and the community.

The district did not provide teachers with the supports necessary to optimize remote instruction in the Spring of 2020, including hardware and software applications. The schedules and plans were changed without an understanding of the classroom environment on the part of the Superintendent. He did not make attempts to determine what was providing the most optimal outcomes for students. This created a difficult and fragmented learning environment.

Despite months of time to plan for the Fall of 2020, Dr. Dionisio chose to engage in fragmented, compartmentalized deliberations when determining district- and building-level plans. While representing to the public that dozens of stakeholders were intimately involved in planning, Dr. Dionisio limited decision-making to a few key individuals. He released plans prior to the completion of committee deliberations which did not allow for the incorporation of final recommendations. This created an environment in which the staff leading classrooms, the parents supervising children, and the students were alienated from decision-making. While representing that the stakeholders were a significant part of the process, Dr. Dionisio released plans that were often diametrically opposed to the recommendations of the committees. There was nobody on the decision-making team that had actually conducted remote instruction or had any expertise in the area. This led to plans that did not incorporate the best interests of students and staff as the district moved to its "Hybrid A" schedule.

Dr. Dionisio moved from Hybrid B to Hybrid A without consulting the VEA and most building administrators, making a surprise announcement at a Board meeting. This move created specific educational challenges for all students and staff with limited planning time. Prior to the beginning of the school year, he did not conduct a survey of the instructional, health, and family needs of staff in order to gather data from which to make decisions.

Verona's teachers, medical staff, counselors, child study team members, administrative assistants, custodians, maintenance staff, paraprofessionals, and technicians united in service to our community and profession.

Further, Dr. Dionisio was inflexible with work-from-home accommodations despite his reasoning for staff to teach remotely from buildings being unsubstantiated, as high school staff were forced to work from home due to mismanagement of the referendum. This resulted in teachers having to take leaves of absence, requiring the classes to be covered by less qualified and inexperienced replacement teachers and by faculty who were compelled to teach sixth classes despite being under immense pressure in their five existing courses. This greatly affects student learning and will have lasting impacts on individual growth. The teachers have been financially, personally, and professionally disadvantaged when their needs and those of the students could easily have been fulfilled. The district is paying teachers \$200/day under FFCRA to not work, in addition to paying for coverage. They could have saved money by simply allowing those teachers to work from home.

Without the benefit of data and trend information related to COVID transmission in public and schools, Dr. Dionisio announced the move from Hybrid A to Hybrid B six weeks in advance. This move requires staff to engage in planning not only for this model, but also the possibility that it may not occur, requiring them to stay on a mostly remote schedule. Before announcing this change, Dr. Dionisio did not survey or attempt other data collection on the experiences of Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, First Grade, and self-contained special education teachers in order to inform decision-making regarding the structural shift. As a result, the success and challenges of those staff were not considered in the plan and cannot be analyzed in order to optimize student outcomes moving forward. This will hurt students. The building administrator announcements to the PK-8 faculty of Wednesday, October 7 that schools would be opening for in person learning occurred the day after Dr. Dionisio informed the principals of this change. This move was not based on any feedback from the buildings, and further limits the time that administration and faculty have to make the best plans for student success.

Dr. Dionisio did not schedule health and safety walk-through inspections of the elementary schools and H.B. Whitehorne Middle School until requested to do so by the Association. During the visits, which he did not schedule until the day prior to teacher return, dozens of serious health and safety issues were identified in each building. Despite representing to the public that these had been addressed, he did not provide the records of the repairs that the Association requested. He stated that rooms were safe despite the fact that window replacement and other construction had not been completed.

While he represented to the public during a Board of Education meeting that the buildings would be equipped with MERV 13 filters which have some effectiveness in stopping the transmission of particulate that attracts COVID, Dr. Dionisio admitted on the phone and during the walk-through that these buildings were equipped with MERV 7 and 8 filters which are completely ineffective in COVID filtration, providing less than half of the needed air changes per hour to keep occupants safe. He previously claimed in a public board meeting that all classrooms would have MERV 13 filters. Dr. Dionisio has not shared with the public the actual MERV ratings of the filters. He has yet to provide records of the filters in each unit. Despite agreeing during the walk-through that windows must be open in order to provide adequate ventilation, (to the point that he stated that staff must “layer up” when it is cold) he changed

his position on the day that he announced school reopening to one in which windows need not be open. He also suggested that individuals could work in rooms alone even if they did not have adequate mechanical ventilation, a violation of NJDOE and indoor air quality standards. Despite the Association providing him with alternatives including leasing of HEPA filters, portable unit ventilators, and air scrubbing units, Dr. Dionisio has not made an attempt to ensure student and staff safety, ignoring engineering best practices put forth by the CDC and ASHRAE. Instead, he argues, without providing requested evidence, that the district is meeting the minimum standards set forth by the New Jersey Department of Education. These standards are for normal building operations and were not updated for pandemic conditions. More protective controls are clearly needed to ensure the safety of our students and staff.

The staff of the Verona Public schools have been working diligently to put forth questions, concerns, and feedback in order to have safe and healthy environments for our students. While Dr. Dionisio attended one meeting of the faculty to answer questions, he was unprepared on several responses even though the Association provided him questions in advance. Despite promises to provide answers on these remaining questions, he has yet to provide responses. Several of these concerns, including policies regarding staff absences became issues in the first weeks of school. When questioned, Dr. Dionisio simply replied: "we are working on it." The same attitude was present when the teachers and paraprofessionals who would have student contact in September created a list of questions to which they needed responses. After a several-day delay, Dr. Dionisio failed to adequately respond to the questions, often giving an answer that was unrelated to the query.

This dismissive approach has been consistent throughout school reopening. Dr. Dionisio failed to provide staff with the medical accommodations form until several inquiries from the Association. He waited weeks to respond, blanketly denying all medical accommodation and work-from-home requests three business days prior to the first day for teachers, relying on the advice of a sports medicine physician. These denials included teachers with serious and potentially fatal medical conditions like cancer. This forced last-minute changes in teacher and student schedules, making a difficult time more hectic. These and other aggressive actions toward teachers and the Association have resulted in the district incurring significant legal expenses that could have been put toward instruction.

Dr. Dionisio has not effectively managed the financial affairs of the district. He attempted to conduct a reduction-in-force of paraprofessionals, only negotiating when the Association brought forth the idea. While he represented to the public that student extracurricular activities were in progress, Dr. Dionisio did not put forth resolutions for approval until the October 13, 2020 Board of Education meeting due to budget concerns. He chose to keep student activities on hold, while paying administrators up to \$624 per day to distribute textbooks. He attempted to manage a major referendum without a full-time school business administrator or director of facilities. He spent thousands of dollars to hire Nisivoccia, LLP, to conduct a forensic audit of the district's finances without disclosing to the staff or community its purpose or intent.

Dr. Dionisio has failed to act in the best interests of students, staff, and the community when provided ample opportunities to succeed. He has failed to model his own actions after those of collaborative and proactive districts who have been experiencing success and buy-in from all stakeholders.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the general membership of the Verona Education Association, confirmed by balloting conducted using the one-person-one-vote principle as outlined in the organization's constitution and bylaws, has lost all confidence in the ability of Dr. Rui Dionisio, Superintendent of Schools, to effectively lead the Verona Public Schools.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of the Verona Education Association have not supported the arbitrary, unsafe, dismissive, and educationally unsound decisions of Dr. Dionisio, and will not support actions of the Superintendent should such practices continue.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of the Verona Education Association request that the Superintendent prioritize the best interests of the Verona Public Schools by coming to the table and genuinely collaborating with the Association with the objective of listening to and deliberately acting upon staff feedback.

This resolution was adopted on this 8th day of October by unanimous vote at the general membership meeting of the Association and remains in effect until reversed by a vote of the same body.