

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 12, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in the media center at Strong Middle School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mr. Currllin, Ms. Gara, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons, Dr. Shoemaker. Member absent: Mrs. Flanagan. Also present: Mr. Melnik, Mrs. Viccaro.

Mr. Hennick called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

Public Comment: Mike Bisceglia, a Durham parent thanked the Building Committee and the Board of Education for the athletic complex proposal. He said the students have had chronic injuries over the years and haven't been able to host a track meet in two years. The citizens of the two towns have the opportunity to support this worthwhile project and he hopes they will.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held at Strong School on March 19, 2008.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Adams the agenda was unanimously approved.

On a motion by Dr. Shoemaker, second Dr. Ochterski the minutes to the meeting of March 5, 2008 were unanimously approved.

Communications: Mrs. Golschneider said she read at Brewster Loves to Read Night. It was a very enjoyable night. She also attended the Senior Arts Showcase held at Coginchaug last evening. The showcase of artwork and entertainment was amazing.

Superintendent's Report: Mrs. Viccaro reported that the budget presentation is now posted on the District website. Changes that are made will be added each week.

Mrs. Viccaro reported that the District has been awarded a multi-year grant from the United Way to establish an early childhood council to address school readiness. The grant is for \$65,000 over a four year period.

Mrs. Viccaro also attended the Senior Arts Showcase. She said it was terrific to see the work that the seniors have accomplished after their years in the District.

Mrs. Viccaro attended the Coginchaug Scholarship Ball this past weekend at its new location. The change of venue went very well and she heard they were quite successful. A silent auction was also held in conjunction with the ball.

Mrs. Viccaro said that because the budget is in a new format this year, she and Mr. Melnik have decided to hold two additional budget discussions for the public. The two dates are: March 18th, 6:00pm at Memorial School and March 24th, 6:00pm at the Superintendent's Office.

Superintendent's Award Students: Mrs. Viccaro introduced this year's Superintendent's Award winners, Devin Comen and Vanessa Ball and she presented each of the girls with a gift of appreciation from the District.

Regional District 13 Teacher of the Year: On behalf of the Board of Education, Mrs. Viccaro presented Betsy Bascom, 2008 Teacher of the Year with a gift of appreciation. Mrs. Viccaro said Mrs. Bascom mentored her when she came into the District as a special education teacher at Memorial School. Mrs. Bascom has been including special education students in classrooms long before inclusion was popular. She is the go to person at Lyman School for students and staff.

Mrs. Brimecombe said Mrs. Bascom is the heart and soul of Lyman School. She relies on her in many ways as a colleague and a friend.

Capital Fund: Mr. Melnik introduced Attorney Glen Rybacki of Shipman & Goodwin to discuss the process of establishing the capital fund.

Attorney Rybacki mapped out the procedure. By State statute the District is allowed to put 1% of the operating budget into a capital reserve account. This is money put aside for capital projects the District anticipates down the road. The District does not have to know the specifics on the projects, just a general idea of where the funds will be used, (i.e. roofs, security, etc.) Once the funding amount has been determined the Board must meet to approve a warning and resolution to send it to a District Meeting. The District Meeting must have a moderator and the matter will be brought to a vote at the meeting. It is important to verify the eligible voters at the meeting. This can be done by the Registrar of Voters from the Towns or by obtaining the voters list and the grand list from the towns and having the Board Clerk verify the voters as they come into the meeting. The resolution will be to transfer funds from the operating budget into the capital fund. In subsequent years the District will need to hold the District Meeting again to make the transfer to the capital fund. It can not just be a line item in the operating budget. The District Meeting can be held in conjunction with a Board of Education meeting as long as the meeting is noticed properly. Board of Education members are allowed to vote at the meeting. This money can not be used for other capital emergencies unless they fall into a category specified by the resolution. The Board can go back to the public to reallocate the money if necessary. The amount of money in the fund can be amended downward from the appropriated amount, but never up. The limit in the fund is 1% of the operating budget per year but there is no cap on the total in the fund.

2008-09 Budget: Mrs. Viccaro said there are twelve teachers retiring this school year. A replacement is needed for all the positions. She expects to see some savings by hiring teachers at a lower level on the salary scale but some of the positions may require hiring more experienced teachers.

Mrs. Viccaro said they have met with representatives from all of the unions to discuss the possible switch back to Anthem Blue Cross for the District health insurance provider. There will be significant savings by making the change back.

Mrs. Viccaro said she sent Board members the enrollment projections for next year by email. She distributed a new handout with updates to that information. She noted that one area of concern is the freshman class projections. At this time thirty-two 8th graders are planning on attending 9th grade elsewhere. Sixteen students are still undecided about whether they are attending Cuginchaug or are waiting for acceptances from other schools. If the enrollment figures stay the same she expects to be able to keep the staffing as it is at the high school. If it increases she may need to look at bringing back the .4 English position that was eliminated.

Each of the Board members were given the opportunity to ask questions that they had about the budget.

Mrs. Golschneider asked if the yearly automation fee for the libraries will continue in the future. Yes, it will. Are the tutors used by the District certified in Special Education? Mrs. Viccaro said yes. Mrs. Golschneider does not support the cost of the late activity bus that brings students from Memorial School to Strong School. She feels that if parents can pick up their students at Strong they can make the trip over to Memorial. The cost for this bus is \$6,474.37. Mr. Brough said this bus has been in place for many years. About 30-35 students use the bus. He doesn't believe it will harm the program if it is cancelled. Mrs. Golschneider questioned the \$17,000 cost of having someone cover the elementary schools after school. Mr. Melnik explained that coverage is in replacement to sending the children BASREP if their parents are not home when the bus drops them off. One person would be at each elementary school until the buses clear. Mrs. Golschneider asked if this responsibility could be shared between the schools and only hire one person to stay late. The principals felt that the students need to be returned to their own schools because they are familiar with their family situations and have the contact information there.

The Board took a break from the budget discussions to discuss the music trip after the arrival of the music department chair, Dean Coutsouridis.

CRHS Music Trip to Heritage Music Festival, Anaheim, CA: Dean Coutsouridis distributed a handout with more details of the trip and tried to answer some of the questions that have been asked by the Board. He said that the students do not want to attend trips that are close-by or to locations that they have already been to. They need to make the trip exciting enough for the students to want to attend. He feels the musical experience they receive once they are there is one they will always remember. If there is a true financial hardship for any family he will go to POPs to ask for support. Fundraising is available to students to help defray the cost of the trip. Some Board members were concerned that the focus seems to be on the vacation spot and not on the educational experience. Dr. Shoemaker asked what educational experience is going to take place in the school if 40% of the school population is on the trip. Dr. Wysowski said that he makes sure that the school is still running even though students are away and those students will have make-up work to do when they return.

The Board returned to the budget discussion.

Dr. Shoemaker questioned the cost of custodial overtime. Mr. Melnik explained that this is for covering for custodian vacation times and for sick time. Dr. Shoemaker asked if it would be possible to hire someone to rotate between buildings to cover for the vacation hours. He also asked if the uniforms for the track team are in the budget. There is \$2000 budgeted for each season for uniforms but it was his understanding that the team could not continue to participate if the uniforms are not replaced. Dr. Wysowski will ask the Athletic Director for an explanation on this. Dr. Shoemaker asked for an explanation of the cost of \$300 per day for hospitalization of students. Mrs. Emory explained that this is for the cost of educating the student while hospitalized, based on what the District has actually paid in years past. Dr. Shoemaker asked if the cost of the audit also included the expense for the new audit that will be required next year. Mr. Melnik said that he included money for subcontracting the audit work, not hiring an in-house accountant. Dr. Shoemaker asked for the administrators to make potential cuts in increments of \$100,000, \$200,000, and \$300,000. He also feels the cost of copying and postage remains very high. Mr. Melnik said the District will be going out to bid on copiers soon.

Mr. Hicks feels that there is a huge amount of money for dues and fees that appear to be for individual teachers. He believes it should be a teacher's obligation to pay their own fees. Mrs. Luckenbach explained that usually a membership is held by one person in a grade level or department in order to share the publications or professional resources. Cuginchaug does not usually purchase group memberships because the departments are larger. Mrs. Adams would like to know if this is being applied equally across the District. Mrs. Viccaro said she will get details of how the teachers are paying for memberships and how they are being utilized.

Ms. Gara asked for an explanation of the UNH interns in the budget. Mr. Melnik said he is looking to provide interns to each of the schools. It only costs the District \$55 per day as opposed to the cost of subs at \$70-\$100 per day. The interns provide continuity within the buildings and are potential employees down the road. This hopefully will decrease the substitute budget. The principals agreed that having the interns this year has worked out very well.

Mrs. Adams asked if buying new textbooks will cut down on the cost of copying. Mrs. Luckenbach said the textbooks are replacing other outdated textbooks and she does not think it will relate to the cost of copying.

Dr. Ochterski asked if the FM Systems in the Special Education budget were new or replacements. Mrs. Emory said they are new and are needed in more classrooms. Dr. Ochterski said he noticed a discrepancy in the amount listed for Vo-ag tuition and the total amount allocated. Mrs. Emory said there has been discussion with Middletown to resolve the tuition issue. Mrs. Emory also explained PMT training at Dr. Ochterski request. It is physical management training for staff in the proper handling of students who might be at risk of injuring themselves or someone else.

Mr. Currilin asked if the activity fees are still in the budget; they are. He asked if the savings in insurance is already reflected in the budget; it is. Mr. Currilin questioned the increase of the PE teacher at the high school. Mrs. Viccaro said this area is one of the only areas that still have large classes of 30 students or more. She would like to see this reduced for safety reasons. Mr. Currilin was told that the engineering services in the budget are to look at the DMIAAB site for the bus depot. The replacement van is for the van now used for the mail run that needs to be replaced. It will be a three year lease. He also asked how they came to the salary rate for the new IT Director. Mr. Melnik said he surveyed other schools districts.

The nursing coverage at IDS was of concern to many Board members. Mrs. Viccaro said the District has no choice in this. A meeting will be held this week with IDS to discuss the proportionate time that coverage will be needed.

Mrs. Golschneider would like information on the percentage of parents participating in receiving emails from their child's school. She would also like to know the number of students participating in groups that teachers are paid stipends for to see if the stipends are being applied fairly.

Mr. Hennick asked Mrs. Viccaro to talk about some of the justification for new staffing positions when enrollment is currently flat.

Mrs. Viccaro said the IT Director is a position that is needed for continuity. She hopes this person will be able to help the District plan for future IT needs and will be able to take over the website.

The Central Office staff is very much needed. The work load has increased tremendously over the years because of the number of State mandates. Mrs. Golschneider asked how the salary figure for this position was arrived at. Mr. Melnik said it is an average of the current staff and the union agreement. They are looking for a person with a specific background in accounting, preferably with a BA degree. He does not believe this position could be covered by someone on a part-time basis.

The elementary office support positions are positions that were cut from the budget several years ago and it has been problematic since then. The schools need the office support.

Police coverage is mostly for traffic control problems. It is based on the number of large events anticipated. Mrs. Viccaro said having a uniformed officer is the most important aspect of this item. People will not respond to the custodians when they try to control the parking. Mrs. Viccaro was asked to see what the cost of private security officers would be instead of police coverage.

In-school Suspension Monitor- Mrs. Viccaro said this is mandated but she has received an email that there is a possibility that this law may be repealed.

Mr. Hennick is concerned that there is no line item in the budget for the capital fund. If the Board establishes this account he would like to make a commitment to add to it every year. He asked members to think about where the money for this would come from. Mrs. Viccaro said her 1st priority for the capital fund is security. In order to apply for a grant from the State the District needs to show that the money for security is either in their operating budget or in a capital fund. Mrs. Viccaro will find out what the approximate cost of the security items will be in order to better plan for the capital fund transfer.

The Board returned to the discussion on the music trip.

Mr. Currilin, second Ms. Gara returned the motion to approve the CRHS Trip to Heritage Music Festival, Anaheim, CA – April 16-20, 2009 to the floor.

Mr. Hicks said he is still not happy with the cost of the trip or the arguments he has heard. They are losing sight that this is a music trip, not a vacation. Mrs. Golschneider was in agreement.

Mrs. Adams has mixed emotions, she wants the students to have the experience, but she doesn't want to have to trick them into having it.

On the motion to approve the CRHS Trip to Heritage Music Festival, Anaheim, CA- April 16-20, 2009, Mr. Currin, Mr. Hennick, Ms. Gara, Ms. Parsons and Dr. Ochterski voted yes. Mrs. Golschneider and Mr. Hicks voted no, Dr. Shoemaker and Mrs. Adams abstained.

Healthy Food Certification Statement: Each year the Board needs to make a decision as to whether the District wants to participate in this State reimbursement program.

Ms. Parsons asked whether the new food service director has been implementing healthier food initiatives in the schools. Mr. Melnik said we are close to meeting the recommendations. All of our meal choices meet the qualifications.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Adams the Board of Education unanimously voted to not comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published pursuant to section 10-215e of the Connecticut General Statutes for the period of July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009.

Personnel Policy Committee: Mr. Hennick said the committee met this evening to begin to discuss the nurses' contract.

Finance Committee: Ms. Parson said the Finance Committee met this evening. The committee would like the Board to vote at the next meeting to put the bonding issue on the referendum with the school operating budget.

On a motion by Mrs. Golschneider, second Mr. Hicks the Board of Education unanimously approved to adjourn.