

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 26, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in the library media center at Strong School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mr. Currilin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons, Dr. Shoemaker. Member absent: Mrs. Golschneider. Also present: Mr. Melnik, Mrs. Viccaro.

Mr. Hennick called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

Public Comment: Tina Gossner of Durham thanked the Board for the plans for the athletic complex. She said there are students and parents behind the Board to help get this passed.

Susan Michael, a parent and teacher at Coginchaug said she hoped that staffing will be preserved as much as possible. Having options for students at the high school is very important. She doesn't want to go back to the students having multiple study halls. As a parent she spoke on behalf of the Track Supporters Group and said they will work hard to get public support.

Mr. Hennick thanked Mrs. Michael for the work of the Track Supporters Group and told her the Board is really counting on their help to pass the project.

Lissa Eade, a teacher at Strong School is present to speak in support of the creative writing class at Coginchaug. She has students at Strong who have worked with a high school student on creative writing and she has never had so many students excited about going to the high school so they can take this class. She doesn't want the kids to lose this enthusiasm or the opportunity.

Karen Meiman of Durham said the improvements to the high school staffing are necessary. She would like to see the .4 English position kept. There are not a lot of writing classes offered at the high school.

Debbie Proctor of Durham also asked to keep the English position. She would rather have larger PE classes; they can accomplish the same thing with high numbers of students. She also asked if the District has ever surveyed the 8<sup>th</sup> graders at Strong that are choosing to go to another high school to see why they are not coming to Coginchaug. Mrs. Viccaro said they are going to be doing a survey.

Rick Handley of Durham had questions regarding the IT Director position. He said last year the District spent \$116,000 in consulting fees on technology. This position is for \$75,000 plus benefits and the director still won't be expected to manage the systems. He asked if this person can be expected to contribute to the maintenance so the consulting fees can be reduced. He also asked if it would be possible to have the IT Director teach a class in systems management. He would like a better scope of the duties for the Director presented.

Teresa Opalacz of Durham would like an answer to her question from last week regarding the cost of the subs vs. interns and whether there can be reduction in the sub line. She also agreed with Mr. Handley that the goal should be to take some money out of the consulting fees if an IT Director is hired. She would like further discussion about the benefits of a reading consultant and she supports the relationship with BASREP and feels that the Board should be able to cut the \$17,000 budgeted to cover the elementary schools after school hours. She does not want to see staffing cuts at Coginchaug. The Board worked hard to put them back in last year and it will be difficult to get them back.

Cathy DeBrum supports the relationship with BASREP. They have had the same director for 16 years. She doesn't see the point of adding \$17,000 to cover the costs of not sending students to BASREP. She wants the Board to work this out with them. She also supports the after school bus that drops Memorial students off at Korn School. She said students use this bus for extra help, club participation, and intramurals. If it is not available many kids may not be able to participate. She also supports the software to upgrade the libraries. Mrs. DeBrum wanted to publicly thank Vanessa Schafer, Oahn Stephan, Melissa Bates and Melissa Moore, the parents who worked on acquiring a \$25,000 grant for an upgrade of the Reading Counts program for the elementary schools.

Karen Buckley Bates of Durham spoke in support of the BASREP program. She reminded the Board that past Board members supported BASREP, singing their praises to parent organizations. They provide a service and the relationship is mutually beneficial to the District and parents. She is also concerned about the elimination of the after school bus from Memorial to Korn. She volunteers her time to schedule the after school activities at Memorial and her children would not be able to participate if this bus is eliminated. She also supports the math curriculum at the elementary schools and the automation of the libraries.

Mr. Hennick thanked the public and said all the issues raised are areas they have discussed at length. He said the BASREP issue has been difficult. The Board is trying to find a fair balance. For everyone here who is asking to support them there are members of the public who say they are a separate entity and the District should treat them that way.

Mrs. Viccaro discussed the .4 English position. She said she looked at class sizes in every department at the high school. There are four classes of English that have ten or fewer students. She has not made the decision to eliminate a creative writing class. The decision on what classes run at the high school is made by the department chair based on what students pick. It was Mrs. Viccaro's decision that two classes could be absorbed into the others based on enrollment. The increase in PE is also based on enrollment. Often times 2 PE classes are running at the same time. Seven classes have over 30 students in them and 9 classes have between 25-30 students.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held on April 9, 2008 at Coginchaug High School. The Board meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the library. The Board will adjourn to attend the Public Hearing at 8:00 p.m. in the auditorium and reconvene in the library after the public hearing.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Flanagan the minutes to the Board of Education meeting of March 19, 2008 were unanimously approved as corrected.

Communications: Mrs. Flanagan said she received a call suggesting cuts to dues and subscriptions. She was also asked if it was necessary to have the track equipment in the budget if the track won't be ready for a while. Mrs. Viccaro said she did not want to have the equipment in the building project because she did not want to bond it. The track may be ready for the spring season so it needs to be in the budget.

Mr. Hennick said he received calls regarding BASREP.

Other members received calls regarding budget issues but it was decided that they would be discussed during the budget deliberations.

Superintendent's Report: Mrs. Viccaro said Deven Comen of Coginchaug will be representing the State of Connecticut at the National Youth Science Camp.

The New England Music Festival was held in Bennington, Vermont in March. Coginchaug was represented in the chorus by Charlie Abbott, Bobby Ober, Lindsey Ryan, Erin Bisceglia and Emily Ide, in the band by David Swerling, and in the orchestra by Aaron Plude. Mrs. Larsen reported that the concerts were fabulous.

Mrs. Viccaro found out today that the District is the recipient of a \$2,500 grant from the National Organization on Disabilities to allow students with disabilities or at risk students to have paid work internships.

The District received their first installment of \$20,000 from the United Way Grant for kindergarten readiness.

Mrs. Viccaro distributed copies of a draft of the District 2008-09 Goals. She asked board members to review the draft. It will be discussed at a future board meeting.

Budget Book Format: Mr. Melnik said he would like the Board's opinion on whether to mail the budget booklets to every home or if the book could be put on the website with copies available in the schools, libraries, and town halls. Last year's cost to print and mail the booklet was approximately \$4,730. Mr. Hennick feels that something still needs to be mailed to all homes. Mr. Hicks suggested the possibility of putting a mailer in the Town Times instead of through the mail. Mr. Melnik will explore the options further.

2008-09 Budget: Mr. Hennick believes everyone is in agreement that the bottom line needs to be brought down. He feels it is important to include a line item for capital funds in the budget. He suggested taking \$150,000 out of the teacher salary line item for this purpose. Because there are twelve teachers retiring this year he is hopeful that there will be able to be savings in this account. Mrs. Viccaro said she thought this was possible, but she will have to be sure to hire teachers at the lower end of the salary scale. Other Board members agreed that it is important to set up the capital account and that the salary account is the logical place to take the funds from. Mrs. Viccaro does not feel comfortable taking an amount higher than \$150,000.

Ms. Parsons questioned whether this amount will be enough to cover the security grant that the District would like to apply for. Mrs. Viccaro responded that the District would be able to do some of the items, but possibly not everything in the first year. There may be additional years the grant money is available.

The role of a reading consultant was discussed. Mrs. Viccaro explained that a consultant works primarily with the classroom teachers who can then work with all students. Mrs. Luckenbach said the new state guidelines are going to require giving teachers much more support in reading. The consultant will coach and model for the teachers. The consultant is to work with teachers in grades K-4. Eventually the mandate from the State will extend to the upper grades. The consultant will also be able to show teachers how to work with students who are above grade level.

Mrs. Adams was questioned about the cost of the IT director. Mr. Melnik said the budget for consulting fees has been reduced by \$40,000, but the District will still need some outside services.

Mr. Melnik responded to the question regarding the cost of interns vs. substitutes. He said he expects a 4% savings by using more interns.

Ms. Gara asked for an explanation of the Capturing Kids Hearts professional development program that is in the budget for Coginchaug. There are currently five teachers already trained, slots for five more to be trained in the budget and six more will be trained out of a grant.

Mr. Currin suggested cutting the reading consultant, the .5 PE teacher at Coginchaug and the IT Director. He doesn't think the budget can afford them.

Mrs. Viccaro said the IT Director was a critical position for the administrators and has not appeared on anyone's cut list.

Mr. Melnik was questioned on whether the Central Office position could be a ten-month position instead of a twelve-month position, if it could be a ½ time position or if they could stagger the hiring date. With the added responsibilities coming to the office Mr. Melnik believes it should be a full-time position starting in July.

Mr. Hennick asked Board members if they felt comfortable coming up with a bottom line and then leaving the details up to the administrators to decide. Board members did not feel comfortable not weighing in on the decisions. They still want to give guidance on the areas they feel are important.

Dr. Shoemaker suggested a possible cut of 10% of the computer hardware budget, it would amount to \$20,000.

Mrs. Flanagan suggested a 10% cut to dues & subscriptions, amounting to \$7,500.

Mrs. Gara suggested cutting the money for the Capturing Kids Hearts program, \$2,700.

Mrs. Flanagan asked if there would be any savings in the Athletics Travel account once the track is being used again. Mr. Melnik said the track won't be ready until the spring and there is only one home meet scheduled at this time.

Ms. Parsons suggested keeping tight controls on the budget during the first part of the school year and then loosening up the budget when you see where people really need items later during the school year. Mrs. Heckler responded that it would be very difficult to start the school year without being able to purchase supplies. The elementary schools are just about out of supplies for this year because of the budget freeze this year. A cut of 10% of the increase in the supplies budget was suggested, totaling \$16,000. There would still be a \$142,000 increase in the supplies budget.

Mrs. Adams said she has no problem with having 30 students in a PE class and feels it could be eliminated. Dr. Wysowski said some courses require more supervision; many of the electives require individualized instruction. Dr. Shoemaker agreed with Mrs. Adams, this cut would amount to \$30,000.

Board members suggested cutting CAFE in the amount of \$4,300. Mr. Hicks disagreed with this cut.

Additional cuts that were also discussed last week were a reduction in the IDS nurse for \$14,900, a duplicate item found in the travel account at Strong School \$5,900, custodial uniforms \$4,500 and media at Lyman (a SMART board and accessories) \$6,800.

Mrs. Viccaro said a way to delay the cost of the library automation has been found. Mrs. Luckenbach said they have found a free open source for one year. They will be able to get the elementary schools on-line card catalogs up and running but they will not be able to link with the other schools. When they are ready to link next year all of the information will be ready to be imported. The saving in the budget will be \$15,000.

The in-school suspension monitor was discussed. There is a possibility that the State may delay implementation of this, but it has not been decided so the District has to be ready to implement it at the beginning of the year.

At this point the suggested cuts by the Board totaled \$127,800. The Board needed an additional \$50,000 in cuts to get below a 5% increase in the net budget. Mr. Hennick suggested letting Mrs. Viccaro and Mr. Melnik and the administrative team make the decisions on where the rest of the cuts will come from. The Board agreed to Mr. Hennick's suggestion. The cuts to the budget will total \$187,800.

The reductions will bring the percentage increase in the net budget to 4.99% and the percentage increase in the gross budget to 6.29%.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mr. Currin the Board of Education unanimously approved to go to the Public Hearing on the 2008-09 education budget with a total gross Regional District 13 budget of \$33,565,175.

Mr. Currin commended Mrs. Viccaro, Mr. Melnik and the administrative team for coming in with a low budget to start with.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mr. Currin the Board of Education unanimously approved to hold a referendum on May 6, 2008 on the proposed Regional District 13 education budget to be preceded by a District Meeting to be held on May 5, 2008.

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