

The Regional District 13 Board of Education held a public hearing on Tuesday, April 7, 2009 at 8:00 p.m. in the auditorium at Coginchaug High School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Curren, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons. Also present: Mrs. Viccaro, Mr. Melnik.

Mr. Hennick called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m. and led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Hicks read the call of the meeting.

Mr. Hennick introduced himself and explained that the meeting is an informational session and that the Board will try to answer questions if they have the answers with them.

Mrs. Viccaro read the Mission Statement of the District and explained that the budget was built on the needs of six buildings within the District and that these buildings need to be maintained each year. She also shared information on some of the colleges that recent graduates have attended. She said District students are being accepted at great schools. Mrs. Viccaro discussed the staffing for the District for next year. She said although 4 ½ positions have been eliminated the total reduction to the budget is greater than that because they were able to move some positions into grants.

Ms. Parsons discussed a pie chart showing the percentages by department. She also showed the enrollment projections for the next five years and said enrollment is projected to be going down during that time period. She discussed the debt service and said it has been relatively flat. The assessment calculations for the two towns show a shift to Durham because the percentage of Durham's student population has increased. The estimates for the ESC money are the same as last year because at this time there is no updated information from the State. Ms. Parsons concluded with a slide of the budget overview.

Questions and Comments

Lynn Stanwood of Durham asked why it was not mentioned that a teacher was added back into the budget and if the impact of students coming back from private schools was considered. Mr. Hennick said the budget presented is what was finalized at the last Board meeting and that includes the added teacher. Mrs. Viccaro said a large number of students are going to Vinal next year and 15 freshmen have still not committed to coming to Coginchaug.

Donia Viola of Durham asked what the per student cost is for the magnet school and if we have seen an increase or a decrease in enrollment. Mrs. Viccaro said initially there was an increase in enrollment and then for the last three years it has decreased. Fourteen students are currently enrolled and the District is paying for 22 slots. The tuition per student is \$4,516.

Mrs. Viola asked if the positions that were moved into grants will be cut when the grant money runs out. Mrs. Viccaro said no, these are grants that the District receives year after year.

Mrs. Viola asked if the District has considered joining with the two towns to share services. Mrs. Viccaro said she is in discussion with the selectman about projects that they can share.

Mr. Hicks commented that although the District is paying for twenty-two slots at the magnet school, thirty are allowed. We are paying for the ones that we had filled at one time. Even if the District decided to get out of the contract with the magnet school we need to give them one year's notice. The contract will get renegotiated to reflect the new numbers.

Dr. Ochterski said that even though the cost to transport students to the magnet school is higher, the total cost per student is substantially lower than if they stay in District 13.

Rick Parmelee of Durham said no one has acknowledged that the bonding is in the budget. When the bond council found a problem he was upset that the public was not given a chance to have a say. They were denied the right to vote. He is also upset about the money in the capital reserve fund. Even though a vote was taken to establish this fund the public will have no say as to how the money is spent down the road. Mr. Parmelee would also like to see BOE members elected through a general election. Mr. Parmelee will not support the budget. He is also against charging the students activity fees, he thinks it is inappropriate.

Brad Jubilier of Durham commended the Board for using discretion in their cuts. He feels they did a good job of protecting the students by adding back the teacher. We have a quality school system and we should be proud of it. He will support the budget.

Roger Kleeman asked for the total actual expenditures for 07-08 school year as they were not in the budget. Mr. Melnik will get him that information.

Donia Viola said in a Hartford Courant article she read that Simsbury, Westbook and Region 4 are presenting budgets with increases of less than 1%. She said once staff gets hired we never seem to loose them even though our enrollment numbers are going down. She would like to see the administrators give something back and asked Mrs. Viccaro if they had been asked to do so. Mrs. Viola said Mrs. Viccaro said she had spoken with the unions about giving back and she wanted to know if she has heard anything from any of them. Mrs. Viola does not like the idea of permanent subs in all of the buildings.

Jack Grenier of Durham thanked the people who sit on all of the boards in our communities. He thinks the Board did a nice job with the budget. Most people move into these two towns for the school system; it's what sets us apart from other towns in the state. Regarding the bonding for the athletic fields, Mr. Grenier feels that if the towns didn't fight so hard against it in the first place the project would already be done by now.

Theresa Opalacz supports the budget. She asked if the health insurance costs have been finalized and if the broker went out to bid. She also questioned the total number of teachers listed in regular ed and special ed and in instructional aides. Mr. Melnik said the insurance is still not finalized and they did not go out to bid. They have been negotiating because the District has had a negative claims experience this past year and we are trying to work with our current carrier. Mrs. Viccaro said there are three teachers cut from the elementary level and one was moved into grants. One additional teacher was added at Memorial. The additional special ed assistants were added during this school year based on student needs. The 1 ½ positions cut from instructional assistants is due to not replacing an office person who is retiring and a part-time library assistant.

Josh Stockdale of Durham thanked the Board; he appreciates their time and effort. He thinks the budget is reasonable and he supports it.

Michele Rulnick thinks the Board did a great job on the budget and applauds them for putting the position back in. Class size is part of the value of our educational process and it needs to be maintained. She asked if the positions added for special education were mandated positions. Mrs. Viccaro said they were based on student needs and mandated by IEPs.

Mrs. Flanagan explained that when the Capital Reserve Fund was established it was determined what the money can be spent on. If the Board wants to spend the money on anything else they will have to go back to the public for approval. Mrs. Flanagan said the Personnel Policy Committee of the Board has worked very hard this year in the negotiation

process to manage costs. They have gone to mediation or arbitration on all of the contracts in trying to balance the needs of the District and the community. She said the Long Range Planning Committee has worked hard to come up with a plan to manage long term costs. The impact of the bonding is flat as the District retires old debt. Mrs. Flanagan is proud of the work the Board has done. There are many initiatives that do not impact programs but save taxpayers money.

Mr. Currilin thanked everyone for coming out to this meeting and going through the process with the Board. He also thanked Mr. Melnik and Mrs. Viccaro for the work they did in bringing in this low budget.

Bill Lintz of Durham has appreciated living here. His children all went through the school system. He thanked the Board. As a retiree he knows it is his turn to support the kids as payback for what his kids received.

Lisa Onofrio asked if a nurse has been cut in this budget. Mrs. Viccaro said a nurse has not been cut.

Rick Parmelee said the town balances their budget and the District should be able to. He supports education but he doesn't always support the budget. He feels a responsibility to attend meetings; he needs to know where the money is going. He feels the Board hides behind the students; the selectman can not do that.

Donia Viola feels that merging the two programs could save money. She asked why the magnet school students can't participate in our programs if they are District 13 students. She said there was money left from the last building project and it wasn't given back but is being used as a wish list for the high school. She doesn't believe anything will be given back from this project either even if there are savings found. The Board was elected to represent the public and she wants them to give more effort. She would like the public comment period at Board meeting to be extended to 5 minutes and to have a chance for discussion.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.