

The Regional District 13 Board of Education held a District Meeting on Monday, May 4, 2009 at 8:00 p.m. in the auditorium at Coginchaug High School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currin, 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 8:02 p.m. and led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Hicks read the call of the meeting.

A motion was made and seconded to elect Jim Finley as moderator. No other nominations were made. Mr. Parmelee questioned how moderators are selected and if they are called ahead of time and given any instructions. Mr. Hennick said they are contacted but given no instructions. Jim Finley was unanimously elected as moderator.

Mr. Melnik gave a short presentation on the budget and showed that the overall budget increase is 2.42%. He pointed out that there was an error in the budget book on page 8; substitutes should read \$184,000, not \$246,000.

Mr. Finley opened the floor for questions.

Lisa Davenport of Durham said she is having a hard time with the salary and benefit increases. She doesn't understand why we can't ask for givebacks when concessions are being seen for workers all around the state. She also doesn't agree with the hiring of the additional teacher for Memorial School.

Mr. Hennick explained that the teachers' contract settlement was reached through binding arbitration when it was settled last year. The Board can not ask the teachers for concessions or it will be opening up their contract to new negotiation. The Board gave it serious consideration but decided it was too big a risk at this time.

Mrs. Davenport asked what the next step will be if the budget does not pass. Mr. Hennick does not know yet. The Board will relook at the options.

Mrs. Davenport asked what happens if the towns cannot support the tax burden. If the revenue is not there to pay the District's bills what happens? The towns would have to borrow to meet the obligation.

Josh Stockdale of Durham asked what the average increase in taxes will be. Mr. Melnik did not know because the ESC numbers from the state are still unknown. Mr. Stockdale said from information given to him at town hall he was told that a house with an assessed value of \$200,000 will increase \$106.00 per year. He does not feel that is an unreasonable amount and he will support this budget.

Dan Lehet of Durham believes in a good school system but he has many family members and friends that are losing jobs. He asked what specifically has been given back by teachers. Mr. Hennick said there have been no direct concessions. They are contributing more to their health benefits.

Rick Parmelee of Durham thanked the Board for calling for a referendum. He does not support the budget. He said if the ECS numbers change from the state the cost to taxpayers will be more than 2 ½ %. He is against charging an activity fee to students; it is an obligation to fund the programs that are supported. Property values are down 18%. He would like to see an

administrator position eliminated and he would like to see the value of the total administrative packages with all of their benefits shown. He doesn't like that transfers between accounts can be done at the end of the year with no input from constituents.

Ken Kindschi of Middlefield said that it appears that the cost per student is \$16,142 including preschool students. He feels that is very expensive for preschool; we could hire a babysitter. Mrs. Viccaro explained that we are obligated to provide the preschool program. For every special needs child in the program a typical peer must also be enrolled. The special needs children are identified through the Birth to Three program and the District must pick the children up at age three. Mrs. Adams explained that the District is also required to provide for some special needs children through age 21 at the Wesleyan Transition program.

Nick Vamvakis of Durham asked what the normal class size per teacher is. Dr. Wysowski said at the high school the average number of students per teacher is 100-120. Mr. Vamvakis said he didn't understand the need for the Integrated Day Program and feels the method can be integrated into the classroom. Mrs. Viccaro explained that the program has been in effect for a very long time. The District completed a study recently that showed that the only real cost of having two programs is some additional transportation. Mrs. Brimecombe briefly explained the program and invited Mr. Vamvakis to visit the school. A copy of the program study is available at the Superintendent's Office.

John Corona of Durham asked how much money is in this budget for upkeep of the new athletic facilities and how much it is projected to cost to keep up the facilities once they are built. Mr. Corona also questioned why the town had to pave Pickett Lane for the District. Mr. Melnik said there is nothing in the budget for next year as the complex will still be under construction. No projections have been done of the upkeep costs yet, those discussions are just starting.

Mr. Corona asked if the District has considered stopping the projects given the economic times. Mr. Currin said he anticipates that the project costs will be less than anticipated. The fields have been maintained but sometimes it has been cut out of the budget. These facilities can't be repaired any longer.

Mr. Corona said that academic choices in the District have eroded while the District has chosen to spend money on this project. Mr. Hennick said the Board worked hard to be sure that debt service remains steady while paying for these projects. We are going to get good prices on these projects. He does not think the academic programs have been compromised.

Stephanie Evert of Middlefield asked what will happen to the teacher that is being hired for Memorial School when the enrollment problem passes. Mrs. Viccaro said it is a two-year problem; it is hard to predict after that but the teacher could lose their job or replace someone retiring.

Dan Lehet asked for the average costs of educating a child in the District over the last several years. The information was given and is available in the budget handout. The District has run under the State average most years.

Rich Parmelee asked what the cost will be for running the football program on our own. Mrs. Viccaro said the District will be responsible for all of the coaches and the cost of the program is estimated at \$60,000. At this point the cost is still being shared with Vinal.

Mr. Parmelee said the District voted on establishing a capital fund but the public does not have any say about how the money is spent when the money is taken out. Mr. Parmelee is upset that the District took away his right to vote a second time on the athletic complex.

Mr. Corona asked if any effort has been made to ask teachers and administrators to voluntarily give back. Mrs. Viccaro said that she met with all of the bargaining groups in October and again in February and shared information with them about the anticipated difficult budget season. She did not ask them for give backs.

Margaret Neri of Middlefield asked when the District expects to know what the ESC grant money will be. It will not be known until the legislature makes a decision and that could be as late as the fall.

Joe Neri of Middlefield said a relative of his was denied vacation benefits by the District. The District spent a lot of money on attorney fees fighting against one guy and they can't even ask the teachers for any give backs. Mr. Hennick said it is a personnel issue so he can't really discuss it but the contract was not being honored. Binding arbitration is very difficult, it looks at State averages and the Board did not want to risk opening up the teacher contract. Mrs. Flanagan said no concessions were made by any other union at the state level. They did not feel it was appropriate to open discussions.

Mr. Neri said if we ask the teachers may understand. At this point everything being cut is going against the kids. If the teachers can't accept concessions, let them go to work someplace else. Someone else will be glad to take their place. He thinks it is time to take a stand.

Theresa Opalacz supports the budget. She asked for an update on insurance and bussing costs. Mr. Melnik said the insurance increase has come in where they anticipated. The bus contract is still being finalized. For the first year there is a 2% increase and that is what has been budgeted.

Marge Vamvakis of Durham asked when the meetings are held where the budget is developed. She also asked if the District has considered a high deductible savings plan for insurance. Other Districts have come in with a 0% increase. The budget in this District has gotten inflated over the years because it has passed on the first attempt. If it fails it will get trimmed back to a more realistic increase. Mrs. Viccaro said the budget meetings are held every week during the month of March. She presents her budget on the first week of the month and then the Board makes changes and hears presentations on specific items throughout the month. The District does offer a health savings account as an option to the teachers and will continue to offer it to more groups starting next year. Mrs. Adams told Mrs. Vamvakis that the District budget has failed before, it does not always pass on the first attempt.

Josh Stockdale said he is not a fan of unions but the teachers don't go through up cycles like they do in business. Where he might get a large raise if his company is doing well, their raises don't change much from year to year.

Ken Kindschi asked why the money from the fund balance carryover can't be given back to the towns. He feels it is unnecessary and asked why it is kept in the budget. Mr. Melnik said although this year's is close to \$1,000,000 it is not always that high. The money is rolled over into the next year's budget. This year's budget was frozen very early in the year.

Bill Lintz said he lived through the depression and he is still surviving on the savings he accumulated through the years. He commended the Board and supports the budget because he feels it is his turn to repay those who were willing to support the budget when his children were in school.

Mr. Lintz made a motion to adjourn the meeting, it was seconded and passed.