

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 16, 2011 in the library media center at Strong Middle School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currlin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons. Also present: Mr. Melnik, Mrs. Viccaro.

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

Public Comment: Jeremy Renninghoff of Middlefield and a member of the Middlefield Board of Finance had three questions. He said the Board knew that the fund balance was going to be depleted this year. Knowing this was the case, he questioned why this wasn't considered more when this budget was put together. Mr. Renninghoff said last year it was claimed that the administrators received a pay freeze even though they still received an increase in their tax sheltered annuity. The administrators are scheduled to receive increases next year. He asked if they have been asked to take a hard freeze for next year. Mr. Renninghoff also questioned the travel stipends that are paid out to administrators all the way through the principal level. He feels this is a lot of money and asked if they are paid it regardless of whether they travel.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held on March 23, 2011 at Strong Middle School.

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

Mr. Currlin made a motion, second Ms. Gara, to approve the minutes to the meeting of March 9, 2011. Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currlin, Ms. Gara, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons voted yes. Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Flanagan and Mrs. Golschneider abstained.

Communications: Mr. Hicks said he attended the ACES Governing Board meeting last week. They are an entirely paperless board. Mr. Hicks would like to study this further and pursue it for District 13.

Mrs. Boyle attended the POP's Night Concert at Coginchaug last evening. The performances were wonderful and the Dancing Fools did a great job.

Superintendent's Report: Mrs. Viccaro said the Connecticut Valley Education Grant applications are available. Grants of up to \$1500.00 will be awarded. The grant application deadline is in July.

Mrs. Viccaro met with the parent groups at Strong, Memorial, Brewster and Korn Schools to discuss the budget. Meetings with the Coginchaug and Lyman parent groups have been scheduled.

Mrs. Viccaro attended a meeting of the Districtwide Common Formative Assessment Committee. She is very pleased with the progress being made throughout the District.

Mrs. Viccaro attended the board meeting of MCSACC, the local substance abuse council. The issue they are currently discussing is the potential decriminalization of marijuana and the implications it will have in dealing with student drug use.

Mrs. Viccaro encouraged everyone present to go on-line to vote for the Coginchaug Safe Driving Video and for the ECO video.

Mrs. Viccaro will be meeting with Mr. Brayshaw to share Mr. Brough's concerns about using Memorial School as the voting location for Middlefield.

Mrs. Viccaro said the Search Committee for the new Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment will be interviewing six candidates tomorrow. There were many very highly qualified candidates.

2011-12 School Budget: Mr. Melnik distributed a summary sheet and explained changes since the last meeting. The Salary line (100) has been reduced by \$1,659 for a correction to a coaching stipend at the high school. Operating Services (500) has been reduced by \$15,000 due to the reduction in the tuition for the magnet school. The capital fund (700) has been reduced by \$165,000. Some of the capital projects will be put off until next year. On the receipts side an additional \$354,044 is being added from the Education Jobs Fund. The District had this money awarded last year but is just now beginning to feel confident that we will be able to secure this money.

Mrs. Flanagan explained that the Long Range Planning Committee met this week to discuss the capital fund. Some of the projects can't physically get done until summertime anyway, so it made sense to push them off until next year's budget. The committee is realizing that they have more projects than the capital plan will be able to support. They are going to be looking at when we retire any District debt payments so if we have to bond additional projects we are careful not to increase our debt payments.

Mr. Hennick said the Education Jobs Fund money is still a gamble. We knew it was there but there were still some concerns about using the money.

Mrs. Viccaro said we received the award for the money last year, but made the decision to hold it for next year's budget. There are stipulations on how this money can be spent; it may be used for salaries.

Mrs. Adams asked about the DATTCO proposal. Mr. Currllin said the Transportation Committee met last evening. They are reviewing our current bus routes and how they relate to the current policies. The District has over 2000 bus stops daily. DATTCO conducted a routing review, but Mr. Melnik said it was suggested that we conduct our own independent review. The Committee has to establish parameters for stops before the rerouting can be done. The District policies have not been adhered to over time, our implementation does not match our policy. No decisions have been made about whether we would go to a two-tiered system or stay with three tiers.

Mrs. Flanagan asked what is happening to the 1.5 people that were added in 09-10 SY with the ARRA money. Mrs. Viccaro said they are literacy tutors at the elementary schools and they are not in this budget. All three elementary principals included them in their school budgets, but Mrs. Viccaro eliminated them.

Mrs. Flanagan would like to see a reconciliation of the staffing full-time equivalents (FTEs) from year to year. Mrs. Viccaro said she will do what she can but shifts happen from year to year between buildings in order to meet the needs of the changing student population.

Ms. Gara asked if the Board has any power over the cost of stipends or if they are done through collective bargaining. Stipends are determined in collective bargaining. Mrs. Gara asked if the start date for any of the new hires could be delayed to save money. Mrs. Viccaro said it is not possible for teaching positions. She is reluctant to do it because of the NEASC accreditation process.

Mrs. Boyle asked about the percentage that the budget is required to increase by law. Mr. Melnik explained that the minimum budget requirement is based on the ESC funding provided by the state in prior years. He did not have a figure, but it is not a percentage, it is a total of expenses. He will report back to the Board.

Mrs. Flanagan told members that the Long Range Planning Committee also went through the Buildings and Grounds budget with Rob Francis. She feels very confident that there is not a lot of discretionary spending. A great deal of the money goes towards maintenance contracts for all of the mechanical systems in the schools.

Mrs. Golschneider asked if the list of unfunded mandates will be updated and available again. It is important to remind the Board and the public about all of the expenses that the District has no control over.

Mrs. Parsons asked for information about the early retirement package and whether the District is able to fully fund the defined benefit portion of the pension this year. Mr. Melnik said the defined benefit portion will be fully funded.

Mr. Melnik distributed a handout on a potential retirement package for teachers. He explained that based on these parameters, 38 teachers would be eligible for the early retirement option. He does not expect that all would choose to select it. Mr. Melnik explained the financial summary and the potential cost savings for the District. The Board would have to set a minimum and maximum number of participants that they feel comfortable with.

Mrs. Viccaro said a few years ago when 14 teachers left in the same year it was a great drain on the District. She does not believe that many would leave, but she wants to be mindful of the number if it is offered. Mrs. Viccaro said there are many other early retirement options out there. It needs to work for the retirees and as a cost savings for the District. She suggested meeting with the teachers union and working together to develop a plan.

Mrs. Flanagan said we have a lot of longevity in some of our other staffing areas as well. Are we thinking about offering something to them? Mrs. Viccaro has never heard of an early retirement plan for any of the other groups, but she will inquire.

Mr. Hennick asked that the Personnel Policies Committee take up the task of investigating more options for an early retirement plan. It is not likely that it will be implemented for this year's budget, but planning can begin for next year.

Mrs. Golschneider said custodial overtime is still very high. She asked why we have not been able to alleviate any of the overtime by hiring part-timers. She is also concerned about the continued high cost of dues and fees, especially at the upper level. Mr. Melnik said we ran an ad for part-timers this year and hired a couple of people but we still have not been able to alleviate most of the overtime. It is hard to fill the shifts at the last minute. He explained the custodial overtime sheet from the supplemental budget book. Mr. Melnik said we would run another ad.

Dr. Ochterski suggested asking the consortium to see if any other Districts would like to share custodial help. Members thought that was a great idea and Mrs. Viccaro will follow-up on it.

Mrs. Viccaro said the cost of dues and fees at the high school is the most expensive, but every building has them. We do not pay individual membership fees for any teachers.

Mr. Currilin asked for an answer to the question asked by Mr. Renninghoff regarding travel reimbursement. Mr. Melnik said there is an account for travel reimbursement. Some of the money is paid to staff for travel to things such as out of district workshops where they submit travel vouchers and are reimbursed. The rest is direct reimbursement and is a contractual obligation.

Ms. Gara appreciates the work done to keep the expense side of the budget so low, but she does not think that a budget increase of 4.58% will win approval.

Mrs. Boyle said Middlefield used 3.1% as an estimate in their budget as what they believed the district budget would be. Using that amount, Middlefield will see a mil rate increase of 1. She hopes that we do not go above that.

Mrs. Viccaro reminded members that the only way to achieve significant cuts is to cut staffing or programming.

Board members agreed that they would like to see the final budget number be below 4%. They asked Mrs. Viccaro and Mr. Melnik to come back next week with cuts to represent that.

Teacher Non-Renewals: Mrs. Viccaro explained that by State statute the District is required to notify teachers by April 1st about the possibility of non-renewal of their contract. In the past several years this District has only chosen to notify teachers whose job could potentially be cut based on the budget. Some districts choose to notify all non-tenured teachers every year. Mrs. Viccaro feels that this may be the year to employ that practice. The District has 35 to 45 teachers who currently do not have tenure.

Mrs. Flanagan feels that we have to do it this year. If the budget doesn't pass on the first round it will already be after the April 1st deadline. It will be teaching positions that have to be cut; there is nowhere else to go.

Dr. Ochterski said it is important to provide support to the teachers who receive the letter. He asked if people in known shortage areas would also be getting the letter. Members agreed that that might be a concern as those teachers may leave and easily find work elsewhere. Mrs. Viccaro decided that she would contact legal council before proceeding.

2011-12 Washington, D.C. Trip: On a motion by Mr. Currin, second Mrs. Golschneider, the Board of Education unanimously approved the Senior Class trip to Washington, D.C. from November 16, 2011 to November 19, 2011.

Budget Survey: Mrs. Boyle thanked Ms. Gara for her work on the survey. She distributed a draft copy to the Board members for their review. She would like members to email any suggested changes to her within 24 hrs so that the survey can be posted on the District website by Friday. A mass email will go home through the schools to parents asking for their input and the towns will be asked to put links on their website to the District home page.

Mr. Currin thanked them for their work. He asked what they want to do with this information. He said the Board needs to think about what it wants to achieve with this survey.

Mrs. Boyle said it is a tool to get information from the public. The Communications Committee would like to be able to use the survey monkey format to get information on many topics in the future.

Achievement Committee: Mrs. Adams said the Achievement Committee met this evening. They are studying data of student achievement and are also asking parents how the District can tell if we are doing a good job.

Finance Committee: Ms. Parsons said the committee met briefly on Monday to review this year's expenditures. The expense for snow removal from the roofs has created a reduction in the fund balance towards the end of the year, but the committee is sticking with their original estimates for final numbers.

Long Range Planning: Mrs. Flanagan said she has already talked about what was discussed during the budget discussion, but the Committee will be meeting again before the end of the year.

Building Committee: Mr. Currin said the Building Committee has not met, but the contractor has been talking with the service companies for the completion of the track and tennis court work. There is no schedule yet, as we will need consistent warm weather before the final surface can be applied.

On a motion by Mrs. Adams, second Mrs. Golschneider, the Board of Education unanimously approved to go into executive session for the purpose of discussing a teacher termination.

The Board moved back into regular session.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mr. Currin, the Board unanimously approved to adjourn at 9:45p.m.