

Utilization Study Committee

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Study Committee met on Thursday, January 25, 2018 at 6:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mr. Augur, Dr. Friedrich (arrived at 6:10 PM) and Dr. Taylor

Committee members absent: Mrs. Boyle and Mr. Hicks

Other board members present: Mrs. Geraci

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Business Manager and Mr. Sadinsky, Principal of Strong School

Mr. Augur called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Taylor made a motion, seconded by Mr. Augur, to approve the agenda as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Geraci and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes - November 30, 2017

Dr. Taylor made a motion, seconded by Mr. Augur, to approve the minutes of the November 30, 2017 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes as presented: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Geraci and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Silver Petrucelli Update

Dean Petrucelli and Michelle Miller were present at tonight's meeting and gave a brief background of their company. Mr. Petrucelli explained that they had started on this project about two years ago and are now revisiting the study a second time. They are now at the completion of the second round of the restacking study looking at Brewster, Memorial, Strong and Coginchaug.

They had submitted a draft with two options about three weeks ago. They were then asked to look at other possible options which contained about eight more configurations. There are now six basic options and each option contains four or five choices. He reviewed a quick summary of the configurations of each option, what is being proposed for each option and the relative cost of each option.

Ms. Miller pointed out that they had used the MMI projections for enrollment. Option A focused on Brewster becoming a PreK-2, Memorial 3-5, Strong 6-8 and Coginchaug 9-12. There were four different options for Brewster and six additional classrooms would be necessary (or four with portables). Option 1 is a six classroom addition at \$2.1 million, including reimbursement. Option 2 would be similar, but the classrooms would be a little bit bigger at a cost of \$2.1 million. Option 3 would include new portables, but the State says new portables can only be used for up to five years and will only be reimbursed for that time. The State would, in fact, ask for return of the funds if the portables are kept for more than five years. This option would cost about \$1.4 million with reimbursement. Option 4 would be to relocate existing portables, with a cost of about \$1.6 million.

Option A at Memorial would be to do nothing or demo the portables and renovate the old locker room into a classroom, at a cost of \$345,000.

Option A at Strong would be to leave it as is, with just a small renovation to the Family Consumer Science room turning it into a Life Skills room.

Option A at Coginchaug suggests expanding some programs and enlarging some classrooms at a cost of \$1.5 million. Option 2 would be to offer the 3,500 square feet in extra space for different uses such as town use. Option 3 would be to renovate the Tech Ed wing at a cost of \$2.5 million. Demolishing the portables and installing a parking area, along with converting the northeast wing over would be a cost of \$1.4 million.

There is room to move eighth grade to Coginchaug and if that were to happen, each grade would move up. This would be Option B and Brewster would become a PreK-1, Memorial 2-4, Strong 5-7 and Coginchaug would be 8-12. At Brewster, nothing would have to be done or the portables can be removed and interior modifications could be done at a cost of \$427,000. Memorial would be to do nothing or demolish the portables, the interior classroom renovation of the locker room and convert the large special ed room into two rooms as well as take over one of the other special ed rooms for a classroom.

Option B leaves Coginchaug and Strong the same in every scheme.

Option C1 would maintain both the Contemporary and ID programs, but the schools become Brewster PreK-4 and Memorial K-4. Brewster would still need six classrooms and to add those and demo the portables would cost approximately \$2.2 million (with not as much reimbursement as Option A due to the population size).

Option C1 at Memorial would be to demo the portables and create three kindergarten classrooms which would include the addition of toilets (at approximately \$50,000 each). Those classrooms are undersized and would also lose 75 square feet for a bathroom which isn't ideal.

Option C2 is for a 50/50 split with no program difference. PreK would still be at Brewster and six classrooms would still be needed. This would cost \$3.1 million as there would be no reimbursement. The portables could be kept in place, adding only three classrooms and that would cost \$1.5 million. Existing portables could also be relocated, with interior modifications, at a cost of \$1.1 million.

Option C2 at Memorial would include demolishing the portables and creating toilets in the kindergarten rooms.

Dr. Taylor asked why there are differences in cost between options C1 and C2. Ms. Miller explained that the split programs are 55 percent for contemporary and 45 percent for ID. Option C2 is a pure 50/50 split. Option C2 includes between 292 and 309 students at Brewster and 261 to 278 at Memorial. The state reimbursement is based on the total population.

Option C3 has Brewster being K-4 and moving the PreK to Memorial which will swing more students to Memorial. This is still a 50/50 split with no program difference. Dr. Taylor would like to be sure there is an option to include both programs within the C3 option. Brewster would include adding three classrooms and demolishing the portables for \$1.58 million or just do the interior modifications to net a one-classroom increase for \$627,000.

Option C3 at Memorial would include the locker room being renovated and six K and PreK toilets being added. If the portables are removed and add two PreK classrooms, the locker room would need to be renovated, add four toilet rooms for kindergarten at a cost of almost \$9 million.

Option C4 moves all of fourth grade to Memorial, leaving Brewster a PreK-3 school, Memorial K-4, Strong 5-7 and Coginchaug 8-12. At Brewster, it would be beneficial to add one classroom with interior modifications or do nothing. At Memorial, one classroom would need to be added and the toilets would need to be added, at a cost of \$441,000.

Dr. Taylor asked if the draft report is a final draft and Ms. Miller explained that they left it a draft so they can incorporate the Board's feedback. Mr. Petrucelli explained that they are 95 percent done and are now looking for the Board's input. Dr. Taylor was concerned about some of the language in the draft. He asked if the option presented to the teachers and administrators was only the PreK-2 and 3-5 option or were the other options included. He wondered if the teachers and administrators had commented on moving eighth grade up and all the changes that accompany that change. Dr. Taylor felt that some comments should be removed from the report because of that. Dr. Taylor felt that this should be an informational report that does not promote one option over another and that this report was strongly in favor of one option.

Ms. Miller explained that all the choices in Option C were added after the request was made but without staff input. The only administrative meetings that were held included decision making around option A. Mr. Petrucelli explained that they had been given a clear directive of how deep to go with discussions and explorations. Ms. Miller did agree that the report needs to be massaged a bit to include all of the options and Mr. Petrucelli agreed to neutralize the statements.

Mr. Petrucelli reviewed the State's process for seeking reimbursement and that the deadline is the last day of June each year. The State then takes a year to give a funding commitment.

Mr. Augur confirmed that the numbers discussed in the report are all net of what the expected reimbursement would be and Ms. Miller and Mr. Petrucelli agreed. Mr. Petrucelli explained some of the idiosyncrasies of reimbursement and stated that every option would have some type of reimbursement unless portables are installed with the intention of keeping them for more than five years. Mr. Petrucelli also explained that the District could push for reimbursement on some options, but it would probably not be worth the effort.

Dr. Veronesi reported that Mr. Moore had asked Silver Petrucelli to look at items that have been identified as capital improvements and Mr. Petrucelli explained that that was not included in this report. Most of the capital improvement items will not be eligible for reimbursement as they are maintenance-deferred items, with just a few exceptions.

Dr. Veronesi also reminded everyone that if the District still owns Korn School, there is a potential that none of the options would be reimbursed because the State could say that the District has room. Mr. Petrucelli explained that the State will want to meet once the report is finalized to see the plan and will ask if other space is available in town. If the find that there is space available, they will likely not want to fund any renovations. Dr. Taylor asked if there was any idea of timing for the transfer of Korn School and Dr. Veronesi explained that there is no real time line from Durham. Dr. Taylor wondered if closing Korn School saved the District roughly \$500,000 a year and if that savings would be the same with closing another school. Dr. Veronesi felt that that was industry standard and Ms. Miller confirmed that. Dr. Taylor commented that if the District misses the June deadline because of Korn School, they should be aware that that is another \$500,000 for every year it is delayed and capital improvements may have to be made. Dr. Veronesi reminded everyone that improvements have already been postponed in several schools.

Mr. Petrucelli explained that filing with the State locks in the reimbursement rate and you then have multiple years to act on the approval. Dr. Veronesi stated that there are still questions for the State about the transfer of Korn School. Mr. Petrucelli explained that the prep meeting is for the State to become a part of the discussion and he felt it is worth having the meeting with them sooner rather than later. He did explain that the District would need to be committed to one project with one dollar amount and that the State would allow one modification to the estimate.

Dr. Veronesi explained that it has been suggested to file by June 30th, with encouragement to do so by May 15th, and then have a referendum by December. Mr. Petrucelli commented that the State will require a signature from the Board of Education on the filing. Silver Petrucelli typically produces the Ed Specs and can do that within a few weeks. Mr. Petrucelli stated that the Ed Specs need to align with the project, but they try to be as generic as possible when preparing them. Once an option is selected, Mr. Petrucelli and Ms. Miller will be sure the numbers are as accurate as possible.

Dr. Veronesi felt that having the options available to review was very helpful and that the District is very concerned about the investment/burden. She also appreciates the tempered urgency with which the Board is working on this. Dr. Veronesi felt that a very important consideration is the existence of a school that is both an ID school and a HOT school. She gets a very strong sense from both parents and teachers that it is very important and they do not want to lose it. She reiterated that the decision is less about choice and more about maintaining a program, approach and philosophy that has been a part of the District for a long time. Dr. Veronesi does feel that there is merit to discussing an approach/philosophy at the elementary level that has characteristics of an integration of curriculum, an arts integration, student voice, student choice and maintaining a school as a HOT school. She would like to see all the District's schools be HOT schools, regardless of the grade configuration.

Dr. Veronesi asked if the District is looking to completely rebuild a program or to look at what they love and what they dream for the schools to look like. What people really love about the District are the people, the level of commitment, the existence of core ethical values and the programming. People love the bigger spaces in the District where people can meet and work together, where there's natural light and opportunities for multi-aged interaction. Through her meetings with the high school communications

class, she found that the students have a strong sense of connection to each other and pride in the community. The high school students are saying that they wish there weren't two programs because of the competition that exists.

Dr. Veronesi finds some things about all one grade level a building appealing as far as enrollment predictability and the opportunity to have a more focused specialty. The 8-12 option hasn't been widely discussed in district, but it is not widely popular in the state. Dr. Taylor asked if that means it isn't popular because it is his understanding that it is just not used that often. Mr. Petrucelli explained that they have dealt with a few schools that are 8-12 and a lot have converted back to the 9-12 model. Traditionally, the typical model is 9-12. Dr. Taylor felt that the District needs to look at all of the consequences of the 8-12 model throughout the entire district.

Dr. Taylor expressed that he is strongly in favor of keeping the K-4 configurations from the standpoint of politics and he is very worried about asking for \$5 million and changing the programmatic components at the same time. He felt that people will vote no for one reason or another and the Board will not get the money. He did not feel that the District will be able to close another school without spending any money.

Dr. Taylor stated that having K-4 configurations is cheaper, reduces the transitions for the kids across the District and will promote a better sense of school family. He also felt that this did not dictate making a choice about program choice and that can be pushed down the line. Dr. Taylor felt that Brewster families would be happy because they get a K-4 school and Lyman families will be more likely not to erupt in protest against the closing of the school if they are just moving to a new building space.

Dr. Taylor also felt there were programmatic options that will become possible with 8-12 and 5-7, including dedicated math classes. He also felt it may be possible to consolidate some busing with these choices. Dr. Taylor also mentioned that there are high schools that are 7-12 and that 8-12 should not be a problem.

Mr. Augur felt that there are choices that end up being mutually exclusive and need to be discussed in totality.

Dr. Friedrich felt that thinking about all of this begins with what happens with eighth grade and he was concerned about drugs. He would be curious to know why other school districts chose to go back to a 9-12 format. Dr. Veronesi commented that the 8-12 discussion began some time ago as well as the discussion of how space influences learning and the way people interact with each other. They felt it made more sense to have a separate space for the eighth grade. Some parents have expressed concern over the amount of stress that is placed on high school students. Mr. Petrucelli stated that the majority of the 8-12 models have an eighth grade wing.

In response to a question from Dr. Veronesi, Ms. Miller explained that Pre-K or K rooms are anywhere from 1,000 to 1,200 square feet. The largest rooms in the west wing at Memorial are 830 square feet. She felt that this would be the biggest drawback for kindergarten going to Memorial. Mr. Petrucelli felt that it would be workable, but not ideal. The kindergarten rooms at Brewster are around 920 square feet. Mrs. Geraci reminded everyone that those room sizes were before any toilets are added.

Dr. Taylor reiterated that he doesn't feel it will pass if money is being asked for at the same time that program changes are being made. He felt that the K-4 choices need to be resolved first as those parents will drive the voting.

Dr. Veronesi would not want to make the decisions primarily based on what they perceive people will vote for. Mr. Augur reiterated that the purpose is to balance programmatic needs and visions for the future with the reality of fiscal constraints. Looking at the issues here, Dr. Veronesi wonders if the time has come to have a redesign that holds to the tenets of the workshop model, working to build a strong democracy and a strong society.

Dr. Taylor felt that having a K-4 doesn't box the District into making a programmatic decision that they would have to do if they did a PreK-2. He brought up several examples of how to handle the ID program and what the classrooms would look like. He has spoken to a lot of teachers and would love to hear their opinion about this. Dr. Friedrich wondered if that would be just one opinion and Dr. Taylor agreed that it would not but there could be a general sense.

Mrs. Geraci talked about eliminating some of the options first and getting it down to just a couple of options. Dr. Veronesi stated that she really likes the K-4 option, but she doesn't like 8-12. Mr. Augur felt that options B and C box in the 8-12 and asked what holds Strong School back from becoming a HOT school. Dr. Veronesi felt that nothing precludes Mr. Sadinsky from making Strong a HOT school. It would include an application, training and certification. Dr. Veronesi would love to have more schools in the District be HOT schools.

Several months ago, Dr. Veronesi talked with the teachers at Lyman and there had been rumors about what was happening with Lyman. There is a belief in the philosophy at Lyman and what the experience is like for the children. She felt that there would be deep sadness if that was diminished. Dr. Veronesi also commented that some people have privately stated that it would be hard, but changes could be made.

Mr. Augur asked about the drug use rate in eighth grade vs. ninth grade and Dr. Veronesi reported that they just got the results of a survey that was done. Mr. Sadinsky reported that there is anecdotally a difference between 7-8 vs. 9-12. Dr. Veronesi will share an electronic copy of the report. Dr. Taylor stated that that doesn't necessarily mean that moving eighth grade will increase drug use.

Dr. Friedrich stated that his concerns would be bullying and drug use. There will be eighth graders who will be swayed by older peers. Dr. Veronesi stated that there are issues with kids having a sense of connection to an adult relative to the percentage of students who are drinking, smoking pot and taking prescription drugs. Mr. Sadinsky stated that development appropriateness needs to be taken into consideration too. He has experience working in a 7-12 school that did work, but he never felt that 7-8 was a middle school there. He does feel that there are many factors that come into play with this. He did comment that the connection is already there as the kids all ride the buses together every day. Mr. Sadinsky also wondered if step-up will go away if that happens and Dr. Veronesi mentioned the move from junior high to middle school happened over 20 years ago.

Dr. Veronesi also mentioned that ages of kids that are together in private schools or the K-8 schools that exist. Dr. Taylor stated that the K-8 schools have been shown to be the most effective.

Dr. Friedrich commented that the District recognizes the special identity and culture of Lyman and stated that he would like to see the contemporary program shifted in that direction. He does believe that it may be best to keep the Lyman community together and morph the other community with a consideration to merge them when they are more similar. Dr. Veronesi likes the time frame that they have been working with so that transition can happen correctly and people can be heard. Dr. Veronesi also feels that there is

certain sadness for ID teachers who feel that the integrity of the program is being diminished by virtue of Common Core, SBAC, and other factors.

Dr. Taylor also felt that the District may lose less eighth grade students to other schools if they were already in the high school environment.

Dr. Friedrich summarized that there are two big decisions to be made: (1) where eighth grade lies and (2) one or two programs. Mr. Petrucelli felt that a third decision should include the floor plans and which are conducive to certain grade levels. He would say that Brewster is much more appropriately a PreK-2 or PreK-3 school just based on the floor plan and the size of the spaces. The classroom sizes at Memorial are well under the size of what they should be and that will compromise the quality of the space that the students are in for the next 30 years. Memorial is much better suited for the 3-5 age range. Mr. Petrucelli also feels that Coginchaug does not have a strong enough, dedicated eighth grade wing and they feel that eighth grade should be truly separated. The configuration at the high school, without major renovations, does not lend itself to an academic wing for eighth grade.

Dr. Veronesi stated that the Board has been having a conversation about furniture and space for a couple of years now and how they impact the way the students learn and interact. Mr. Petrucelli mentioned that some of that will be given up if Memorial goes to K-4 because the space would not allow for that flexibility. Mr. Petrucelli summarized that they feel that Brewster is best for PreK-2 or 3 and that Coginchaug will be a challenge for eighth grade because there is no defined wing.

Mr. Petrucelli stated that Coginchaug, Strong and Memorial do not have to be touched at this time. Option A could be done by concentrating all of the effort at Brewster and, in their opinion, it does not make sense to add portables because permanent structures could be built for virtually the same price.

Mr. Augur asked for total cost of ownership and Ms. Miller stated that these are the costs to put it in place. Mr. Augur suggested that, in future years, a portable can be sold but the permanent structure would remain in place. Mr. Petrucelli also clarified that Options A3 and A4 are almost the same cost is that most of the cost of portables is the rigging, trucking and setting along with the amenities and not the actual portable.

Dr. Veronesi suggested that this committee meet more frequently to get this to a decision and Mr. Augur asked if this could be put on the agenda for Saturday's retreat. Dr. Veronesi stated that the agenda could be redone and posted before 9:00 AM tomorrow morning. Dr. Taylor felt that a decision should be made within a month or two and Mr. Augur felt that that should be conveyed to the full Board on Saturday.

Dr. Friedrich would like to see the two configurations for 9-12 or 8-12 plotted out in the context of the other three schools being different grade ranges. There is nothing included in Option C that contains a 9-12 configuration. The other question is to keep the two programs separate. Mr. Augur felt that once Lyman School is pulled out, there is only so much jockeying that can go on. Dr. Taylor felt that the space is really in the high school. Dr. Friedrich asked where eighth grade would go if they wanted to keep the programs separate. Dr. Veronesi felt it would bump it back to Strong, but then it would be a 5-8 school. It was generally believed that 5-8 would not fit at Strong School.

Dr. Taylor also summarized that this has gone from about \$30 million down to about \$2 million. Dr. Friedrich felt then that it was not two choices, it would be an alternative. The District could either keep two programs and have eighth grade at the high school or go to Option A. Dr. Veronesi also felt that

there didn't need to be two programs just because there are two schools. Dr. Taylor felt that it allows the possibility to slowly move toward that, but not have to do it all at once.

Dr. Veronesi agreed to change the agenda for Saturday's meeting to include a review of the Utilization Committee discussion of the Silver Petrucelli study. Mr. Augur also asked Mr. Petrucelli to include the gross costs of each option and Dr. Taylor asked for a range on each option.

Building Usage and Academic Planning Approach

Mr. Augur explained that both this was covered in the prior discussion.

Korn School Building Status Update

Dr. Veronesi reported that there is no new information at this time but the district is anticipating a projected timeline from Durham soon.

Public Comment

Christine Davis, a Durham resident, a Lyman teacher and a grandparent of a child in the class of 2032, had four questions for the committee. One is have they thought about moving ID to Brewster and contemporary to Memorial and if that would require fewer renovations. She also asked if having Lyman would impact reimbursement. Mrs. Davis pointed out that kindergartners at Lyman share a bathroom between two classrooms and asked if that could be done in the future. She felt that all of the configurations impact the ID 5-6 grade levels and asked if ID would be stopping at grade 4 as this moves forward.

Elaine Diaz, a parent with two children at Lyman, asked why money wouldn't be used for renovations at Lyman rather than Memorial since it is not fit to be a K-4 school. She also felt that the ID community needs to be kept together and commented that her daughter is blossoming in that environment. Mrs. Diaz felt that the kids are empowered by interacting with the older kids in the school.

Sharon Berndt, who was raised in town, raised her family in town and is also a Lyman teacher, stated that she respects Dr. Veronesi's vision of both the HOT school and Integrated Day in the entire District, but felt that the District needs to be cautious about remembering that HOT schools was developed over 30 years and Integrated Day has been 47 years. Mrs. Berndt felt that combining the programs could be a disaster where there are now two successful programs. A new program needs to be thoughtfully put together and created and she doesn't believe that could happen in a year or two. She cautioned the Committee members to do it right and give it the time it deserves.

Maygan Morello, a parent of a daughter in the preschool program at Brewster and a son at Lyman, felt that she was in the minority because she did not know about the two programs when she moved to town and that making the choice was very difficult. Mrs. Morello toured both schools multiple times and picked Brewster for her son and then all of his friends went to Lyman, so she emailed Dr. Veronesi to ask if he could go to Lyman. She loved his experience in kindergarten, but explained that he didn't get the looping of the teacher between first and second grade. Mrs. Morello doesn't feel that the ID program should continue past fourth grade and that middle school should be where all the students come together because keeping them separate in middle school creates cliques in high school. She feels that the differences between the two programs are talked about a lot in town, but she feels that both schools are

awesome. Mrs. Morello feels that Option A is the option that makes the most sense, but not for the ID program. She does not see why Lyman has to close and that there must be other options. She would like to see K-4 at Lyman and 9-12 at Coginchaug. She doesn't see how Brewster can be K-4 as there doesn't seem to be enough space. Mrs. Morello doesn't see how it makes sense to save \$500,000 just to spend \$3 million.

Missy Booth, a parent of two children at John Lyman, stated that they moved to Durham before they had children because of the ID program. Mrs. Booth would hate to lose the program and she has a hard time believing that it will be the same. The kindergartners look up to the third and fourth graders. She would also have a hard time with her fifth grader being on the bus with a twelfth grader. She feels that there are drugs on the bus and other things are talked about on the bus. Mrs. Booth would be willing to pay more in taxes to keep what she moved here for.

Adjournment

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mr. Augur, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First