

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Study Committee met on Thursday, February 22, 2018 at 6:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Petrella and Dr. Taylor

Committee members absent: Mr. Hicks

Other board members present: Mrs. Geraci and Mr. Moore

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. DiMaggio, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment, Mrs. Neubig, Business Manager, and Mr. Sadinsky, Principal of Strong School

Mr. Augur called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Approval of Minutes - January 25, 2018

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the minutes of the January 25, 2018 meeting, as presented.

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

Re-Stacking Options

Dr. Veronesi suggested that the committee start with the draft document as they work through this subject. She reviewed that the hope is to get the document to one page with an historical overview, the intention and to share three options. One option is to leave things as they are, option A is the preK-2, 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12 and option B is two K-4s, a 5-7 and an 8-12.

For the one-page document, Mr. Augur suggested using graphics and condensing some of the text. Dr. Taylor thought it may be tough to fit it all on one page. The time line section could be laid out as a single line. Discussion continued about ways to include all of the information on one page and Dr. Friedrich offered several possible edits. Dr. Veronesi asked about the importance of explaining why Lyman was the school building chosen to be closed and Dr. Taylor felt that that should be up-front. Mr. Augur agreed and felt that that would condense the descriptions of the options.

Mr. Augur asked for thoughts about what the title should be on the one-page document and several committee members offered options. It was then decided to be Utilization Options, with a subtitle of Building/Grade Reconfigurations.

Dr. Taylor asked about the time line and stated that he thought that the time line would be a year. Mrs. Neubig stated that the funding would not be available until July of 2019. Dr. Veronesi commented that Silver Petrucelli had said that moving the portables was probably a three- to four-month process. New portables would be six to nine months.

Dr. Veronesi asked how the committee wanted to portray the cost avoidance at Lyman, including capital projects, maintenance and utilities as well as staffing. Mr. Augur suggested listing the items in the beginning and not in the options. Dr. Veronesi mentioned costs for razing the building or costs associated with selling the building. Dr. Friedrich felt that the razing cost would be appropriate since they have no ideas about selling the property and that would show the worst case. It was suggested that the legal fees spent for Korn School could be used as a place holder and Dr. Friedrich felt that legal fees aren't necessary unless someone is buying the building.

Mr. Moore also suggested adding an earliest start date to the time line. Mrs. Petrella felt that people wanted to know when the last class will be coming into the building.

The committee then went on to discuss the layout of option A. The architects stressed that, in option A, they see that the buildings are well-suited for the designated age and grade level. Mr. Augur thought that best-suited is more what they meant. They also discussed what to put at the top of the option. It was also mentioned that the percentage of reimbursement that new construction would qualify for should be identified as an approximate number.

Mrs. Boyle felt that it was important to have this be as concise, yet clear, as possible. Dr. Veronesi felt it was critically important to highlight that decisions are being made separate from the costs. Dr. Friedrich also mentioned that no students will move until the construction is complete and Mr. Augur felt that the actual school year should be mentioned. Mrs. Boyle felt that parents are more interested in how this will affect their child.

Dr. Veronesi asked if anyone wanted to add anything to the "maintain existing" option. Other than the \$4 million in capital expenditures, Dr. Taylor suggested that there would be potential cuts in the budget to meet the decrease in state funding. Mrs. Boyle pointed out that it would be more than the \$4 million if people want the District to maintain the status quo. Mr. Augur suggested adding a pro forma per student cost.

Mr. Moore stated that the eighth grade move is one of the most significant parts of option B and it doesn't stand out very well. Dr. Taylor felt it should be the second bullet item and Mrs. Boyle felt that that should be moved up to the number one bullet item.

Dr. Veronesi stated that they will re-do the document on Monday and send it out to everyone for review. She also asked if the committee is still in discussion or may perhaps make a decision tonight.

Strategic Visioning

Dr. Veronesi explained that there will be a third meeting next Tuesday from 3:15 to 4:15 in the library at Coginchaug that will include public participation. They have tried to have discussions about looking into the future and where we'd like to see the District move. Some of the very early discussions have had to do with the collegiality and comradery of staff and children having options, including working together in multi-graded options. Dr. Veronesi is not sure that these discussions will really influence the decisions that are being made by this committee and feels that they are more simultaneous tracks. Mrs. Boyle felt that classroom size would impact these kinds of decisions.

Dr. Veronesi also wondered how the District moves about the buildings that exist without any new construction. Should we re-conceptualize the classroom space across the District?

Mrs. Boyle felt that 3:15 is too early for the public to attend a meeting and Dr. Veronesi explained that is a teacher-attended meeting and in order to have as many people participate twice a month, this time worked best. They can have another open meeting at a later time.

Going back to the options, Mr. Moore asked if the committee was going to make a recommendation to the full Board. Dr. Taylor was not ready to make a recommendation until he hears a response from the public, but he is comfortable with the three options being proposed.

Dr. Friedrich felt that putting the eighth grade in the high school without substantial reconstruction to create a separate space is "paramountly" bad. None of the options that put the eighth grade in Coginchaug are desirable to him. He also feels that the good things about the John Lyman program should be available to all students and would like to see reorganization of the academic programs of the first four grades to reflect those goals. Dr. Friedrich would choose option A, with the understanding that it is implemented in a way that most preserves the best of Lyman that hopefully becomes two HOT buildings. He feels that that would serve the community the best. Dr. Friedrich explained that that is not in stone and he is still receptive to what other people have to say.

Mrs. Boyle felt that the Lyman program is amazing, but the Brewster/Korn teachers are amazing as well. She believes that the District needs to allow the teachers the opportunity to make the adjustment and go through that change. She would not like to rush into a decision that will have implications to both the students, staff and administrators. She also wondered if two years is enough time to make that transition or should they hit the pause button for another year.

Dr. Veronesi related that a teacher had told her that this could be done, but they would need time. She did feel it would be irresponsible to let this decision phase go on longer than it needs to as the anticipation of a decision is exhausting to teachers and parents. Dr. Veronesi does feel that two or three years is an adequate amount of time to plan and implement the agreed upon changes.

Mrs. Boyle reminded everyone how tough it was to close Korn School and encouraged everyone to take a deep breath and go slowly. Dr. Veronesi also hoped that the decision time line could be shorter so that the planning and implementation time line could be longer.

Dr. Taylor wanted to be sure that everyone speaks about the ID component as well as the HOT component when talking about the Lyman program. He could be in favor of moving to one system that

had both ID and HOT throughout the entire system. He cautioned them that the K-2 configuration for that type of system might not be the best. Dr. Taylor would need assurances that that would be the path that the District would follow from a programmatic standpoint. He feels that a K-2 system would destroy the Lyman culture. Dr. Taylor would like to see a programmatic decision made at the same that the building optimization/utilization decision comes through.

Dr. Veronesi explained that part of the work in Strategic Visioning is to imagine the experience that the District wants for all children, K-12, with a focus on a possible change in configuration and programs. Mrs. Boyle stated that she looks at RSD13 as one culture, and Dr. Veronesi explained that not everyone does.

Mr. Augur felt that the purpose of option C was to provide the context of not taking a step will require \$4 million in capital improvements and does have associated costs. He feels it is there for information only and not one that should be chosen. Mrs. Boyle would like to push it out to school year 2021/2022. Dr. Taylor felt that the decision could be made, the money could be applied for and then delay the implementation for another year. Dr. Taylor agrees that option C is informational and that it would be the default option only.

Dr. Veronesi commented that sixth grade could be accommodated at Strong School in the 2019/2020 school year and then what would be necessary at Memorial.

Dr. Veronesi also commented that this would be the best time to apply for the funding based on the current enrollment. Dr. Friedrich asked if it was possible to move forward quickly for that, but plan for implementation to be further down the road. Mrs. Neubig explained that the District would have a year after the funds are received to actually begin construction.

Dr. Veronesi also felt that the community would need some education about what it means to be an ID school and a HOT school and could you perhaps have multi-graded classrooms as well as single-graded classrooms. Dr. Veronesi would not be in favor of both types of classrooms although it is done now at Memorial and Strong. Dr. Taylor felt that would promote a two-program philosophy.

Dr. Friedrich would feel more comfortable having more time to implement after making a decision. Dr. Veronesi explained that she included money in the budget to have someone work with the District to help plan for these kinds of things. She'd like to see a year of planning. Dr. Taylor felt that if a building decision is made and then it goes to planning but doesn't come out with an ID/HOT program, he and other parents would be enraged. He does not like the uncertainty of going into that situation without knowing what the program will be.

Mr. Augur would rather pinpoint the single-most important characteristic of the program and the second-most and go from there. He doesn't feel that it has to necessarily be an ID/HOT program. Mr. Moore brought up that the majority of the District's students are in the contemporary program and wondered how they would react. He felt that the next step would be to get the information out and start to gather some feedback.

Mr. Augur asked if there could be a summary sheet about the different programs and Dr. Veronesi agreed and thought that should also be part of an information session. Mrs. Petrella felt that instruction in the District is already shifting to an integrated philosophy, including STEAM. Dr. Veronesi also commented

that they have not yet heard from parents who might be adamantly opposed to eighth graders in the high school. Dr. Veronesi felt that they have an obligation, as a school district, to put the resources into programs and not into old buildings.

Mr. Augur asked Dr. Veronesi to draft a document explaining the various programs and all of them coming into one. Mrs. Boyle also asked for information about the HOT school program in general.

Communication and Future Planning Dates

Mr. Augur felt that the committee is clear around what the communication will be and the issue is now the timing. He believes that a single program is better, so delaying the decision to make the implementation is not a good idea. Dr. Friedrich explained that any implementation planning cannot start until a decision is made. Mrs. Boyle felt that delaying the decision will help the teachers with the philosophical programmatic changes.

Dr. Veronesi reminded everyone that they are part of a public school system and there will be feedback and planning as well as direction.

Dr. Moore stated that there are Board meetings the next three Wednesdays to deal with the budget. He would like to see the draft available for the committee by February 28th with the idea that it will be mailed as soon as possible after that. Mr. Moore would expect that to be in the March 16-20 time frame to get responses. Dr. Taylor felt that a week should be allowed for the information to get out and then send a survey out to get feedback. He felt that it needs to be sent to all townspeople, with about two weeks for people to respond to the survey.

Dr. Veronesi would like to include on the information sheet that a feedback survey is available online as it is difficult to compile paper copies of surveys. Mr. Augur felt that it should also be available in paper copy.

Dr. Veronesi also suggested that there will be a community information session after the survey feedback is received. The EdSpecs should be ready to go in May to get maximum reimbursement if the District decides to go with option A. Dr. Veronesi believes that the very beginning of April is when this all has to start happening, though Board meetings are already scheduled for April 4 and 11. It was suggested to have the community information session on April 11th along with the public hearing. Mrs. Boyle did believe that they could get a better turnout on a Saturday, but it was brought up that April 14th is the beginning of spring vacation.

Mr. Augur and Dr. Taylor will draft a survey for the committee to review.

Korn School Building Status Update

Dr. Veronesi reported that the RFPs for the adaptive reuse study for Korn School are due on March 12th with a two-month turnaround time. Laura Francis will firm up the dates, so that they can get into the MOU and it can be signed.

Mrs. Boyle asked if the dollar amount from these RFPs will be made public and it was explained that they would. Mr. Moore stated that he has been authorized by the Board to sign the MOU contingent upon the

dates that were put in. Mrs. Boyle asked how the RFPs impact the District's budget for Korn School and the Town budget for next year. Mr. Moore thought that there would be a referendum in November for the funding. Mrs. Boyle is concerned about what happens if the referendum in November is voted down and the District still owns Korn School and that may be an option to have Korn School included in the options. This could also impact any available funding. Mrs. Boyle does not want to make any decisions with all of the unknown variables.

Dr. Friedrich asked when an MOU would be signed and Mr. Moore explained that the Board had authorized it to be signed prior to November with conditions. Dr. Veronesi reiterated that if the District still owns Korn School that may mean no reimbursement.

Building Security

Mr. Augur explained that this is on the agenda because revisions of entryways were included in the options, but he did feel this is a separate issue. He asked Dr. Veronesi to have Silver Petrucelli pull those pieces out of the information. He reviewed that it is being proposed that people will be buzzed into a vestibule and not into the whole building. Dr. Veronesi did ask for that information and will bring it to the next meeting.

Public Comment

Kate Finch, who has a child at Brewster and at Memorial and has been a middle school educator for 20 years, stated that she has never heard of an 8-12 school. She asked if there was an example of that in another public school district. She finds it terrifying at that grade level.

Mr. Augur did not feel that the committee should interact during public comment and encouraged anyone to approach the committee members after the meeting.

Jenna Driscoll, who has children in three schools, had a list of questions. She respected that the committee is trying to improve communications and felt that it was important to get the information out as soon as possible because there are so many rumors. She asked how portables would be moved or any new construction done without impacting the students' academic year. She also asked if any of these options require a vote by referendum or if the Board makes the ultimate decision. She stated that two of the three options reflect one less school and asked if that would mean one less administrator and possibly cuts to teachers. She has heard that kindergarten is actually bigger next year than this year. She commented that she liked that the District is going with the asset model and would love to see the assets that the ID program holds maintained, whether it's called ID or something else. She believes that there are probably strengths of the other program that need to be maintained as well. She also questioned what it takes to maintain the HOT school designation as well as to obtain the designation for other schools. Mrs. Driscoll also felt that the program discussion does need to happen at the same time as the building discussion and the decisions made simultaneously. Regarding the \$4 million capital improvements that need to be done at John Lyman, she is curious about the time line for those. Mrs. Driscoll also encouraged the committee to think about what they will do with two defunct properties on their hands if the sale of Korn School doesn't go through.

Christine Girardi, who has a child at Memorial and Lyman, agreed with Dr. Veronesi that building off of what works would be best. She also reminded the committee that the children affected by Brewster will be the same children here as well.

Amy Schaefer has a child at Lyman, one at Strong and one at the high school. She concurred with everything that Mrs. Driscoll said. She commented that she thought the Utilization Committee was formed to address declining enrollment and asked if they were certain that enrollment is declining. Mrs. Schaefer is concerned that the District might lose a building and then be scrambling to place children. She asked how portables came to be and stated that she would prefer to not have her children be in portables. She feels that this may be pushing the process too quickly. Mrs. Schaefer came to this school district because of the school system and has been thrilled with the ID program, but felt that everyone that had their children go through Brewster are equally as happy. She believes the townspeople are very lucky to have a choice. Mrs. Schaefer's biggest concern is that changes are made because they are necessary.

Melissa Booth commented that her husband went to a 7-12 school in rural upstate New York and moved to Durham for a small school. She believes that closing another building would also displace more extracurricular activities and encouraged the committee to look at those types of things as well. Mrs. Booth also asked how owning Lyman would impact reimbursement. She likes the ID program and one of the reasons she chose that was for fewer transitions for her kids. She believes the communication is important, but also believes that there will be less sense of a community being in a school for only three years. Mrs. Booth would like all schools to be HOT schools, but many things need to be considered first. She believes that the assembly is absolutely 100 percent the most important thing.

Carl Stout appreciates the committee's efforts on this and would encourage the Board to fully support Dr. Veronesi's plan for the Strategic Plan.

Adjournment

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First