

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Committee met in Regular Session on Thursday, April 22, 2021 at 6:00 PM remotely.

Committee members present: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore and Dr. Taylor.

Committee members absent: Ms. Geraci and Mr. Yamartino

Community members present: Mr. Giammatteo and Mrs. Johansen

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance

Dr. Taylor called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Giammatteo, Mr. Hicks, Mrs. Johansen, Mr. Moore and Dr. Taylor. Motion approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes - March 25, 2021

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mr. Giammatteo, to approve the minutes of the March 25, 2021 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the March 25, 2021 meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Giammatteo, Mr. Hicks, Mrs. Johansen, Mr. Moore and Dr. Taylor. Motion approved unanimously.

Security

Mrs. Neubig updated the committee that funds have been released from the state for new security grant programs. These are matching grants, with a rate of around 50 to 53 percent reimbursement. That would coincide nicely with \$194,300 that the district had previously earmarked for the vestibules. She also felt that may need to be decided in Executive Session. The Central Office team has talked about having an emergency management system and a new phone system with emergency capabilities. The current system is over 50 years old and would fit under that grant as well. Other possibilities include additional buzz-in systems, a generator for Central Office and panic buttons at the schools.

Mrs. Neubig explained that the first half of the school security grant submission is due June 15th and the second half on June 30th.

Dr. Taylor suggested they discuss this in detail at the next Utilization Committee meeting in May. Dr. Schuch noted that the meeting is scheduled for May 27th which seems pretty tight to the deadline, but Mrs. Neubig stated she could make that work if decisions were made that night. She added that they may not get the full amount they submit. Mrs. Neubig will update the list of security items discussed by the board in the past and send out to the committee members. Mr. Moore felt it would be worth having a special Utilization Committee meeting to discuss security. Dr. Taylor asked for estimates on a new phone system as well.

Mrs. Booth asked if anyone has reached out to the SRO for his security recommendations and Mrs. Neubig plans to ask him for his input. In the past he did mention that panic buttons were a good idea in the main offices. Dr. Taylor felt it would be helpful to have the SRO attend their next meeting, with a bulleted list of potential ideas in advance.

Mr. Moore added that fencing might be appropriate since the kids are outside a lot more than in the past.

Lyman School update

Dr. Schuch reported that individuals from Meriden Hills Baptist Church visited Lyman School on April 10th and the pastor has stated that he heard nothing but positive comments from church members and parents who visited. He felt like the tour enhanced their interest in the property and they have a business meeting scheduled for next Wednesday where they hope to get the votes they need to authorize him to draft a letter expressing their intent to acquire the property. They do understand that the district has to go to referendum on this issue and they hope that these steps will help the towns make their decision. The pastor felt that the district would receive their letter in the first week or two of May.

Dr. Schuch also stated that they have met with Ann Baldwin, from a strategic communications firm, who has worked with CAPSS and CABE. The district will use her services through a CAPSS contract which will provide some cost savings. She would like to get started immediately, especially when she learned the church would supply the letter. Dr. Schuch liked that she will not only do the communication but will also try to get a sense for where the communities are on this issue, what the different factions and segments of the community are and the best way to reach those segments in order to send a clear, consistent message as often as possible. Ms. Baldwin is well aware of the legal limitations regarding factual information. She has worked on quite a few of these types of issues and believes that attorneys will have to review the information that is published.

Mr. Moore stated that Ms. Baldwin would like to meet with a few of the board members to get background. He has worked with her in the past and noted that she was a TV anchor years ago.

Mrs. Neubig also thanked Meg Maloney for putting together the history of this issue to share with Ms. Baldwin. Dr. Schuch added that she would like to know when the referendum will be held so she can backwards map her strategies to that. He felt that she preferred a November date simply to give her more time to communicate and the likelihood of getting more voters. It was agreed to bring that up at the next full board meeting.

Mrs. Johansen felt that one of the issues in Middlefield was losing an elementary school. She stated that North Haven had actually leased one of their elementary schools to ACES and wondered if that would be a possibility here. Dr. Schuch felt that it could certainly be a possibility, but discussions with Meriden

Baptist Church have been about an outright purchase to this point. Mrs. Johansen thought that that might be a possibility if it fails at referendum and could be a long-term lease.

Mrs. Neubig's concern would be that the district would be responsible for capital improvements to the building as needed unless the lease was specifically structured with this in mind. Mr. Hicks added that ACES has a variety of leases, some of which require them to do ongoing maintenance and capital improvements. Mr. Moore explained that there are a number of things that would need to be discussed about the purchase of the school.

Dr. Friedrich added that any negotiations would need to include full disclosure about the building's capital needs. Mrs. Booth asked if the church was aware of the work needed and Mrs. Neubig confirmed that they are. Mrs. Booth also asked if there was a time constraint on this purchase and Dr. Schuch stated that the pastor has stated that they have outgrown their current facility and he sensed that they would like to be in by the summer of 2022, if possible. He does believe they would still be interested beyond that, but they would want a firm commitment. He added that they may even want to construct another building in the future for their upper grades.

Mrs. Booth is happy that someone wants the property so it doesn't turn into another Korn School situation, but she does not want to rush moving all of the children if there is no space to move them into. She did not feel that any construction at Brewster could be done by the end of next school year.

Dr. Schuch stated that the way the referendum would be presented is to give permission to the board but not obligate them to close the school. He has not conveyed any information to the church about any certain date. He believes they have told them that the earliest would be June, 2022 but that it could be later. Dr. Schuch added that he has been part of a number of construction projects that have completed in the middle of a school year and have done a phased transition. Summer would obviously be his preference.

Dr. Taylor added that he would not want to heavily tie the referendum with the sale to a potential buyer. He would want to make sure the message is to help redirect resources to the right places for the students and not just to sell the building.

Korn School building update

Mr. Moore sent everyone the notice for the special town meeting to be held next Tuesday when they are going to discuss the acquisition of Korn School and funding of \$1 million to get started on opening it. There will be a referendum on May 4th, which will be held along with the budget that will have two questions: should they take the building and should they put \$1 million into it.

Mr. Hicks finds it interesting that this has come together so quickly and also notes that he is ineligible to vote because he will be out of the country on May 4th and can't get an absentee ballot until Wednesday, April 28th.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mr. Giammatteo, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Giammatteo, Mr. Hicks, Mrs. Johansen, Mr. Moore and Dr. Taylor. Motion approved unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First