

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, September 13, 2017 at 7:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Board members present: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino.

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Neubig, Business Manager.

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **CRHS Reporters - Colleen Coogan, Demarie Del Vecchio, Daniel Turecek**

Colleen Coogan reported on freshman orientation and Daniel Turecek reported that the first two weeks have been great. Sports and clubs have started up and everyone is ready to get back in the swing of things. Demarie Del Vecchio reported on the college night that was held last week by the guidance counselors. She also reported that freshmen and junior athletes are taking a baseline impact test. If a student feels they may have a concussion, they go to the trainer, fill out a survey and will not be able to return back to practice until five days with no symptoms.

Colleen Coogan also reported that Emily Dell'Orfano got accepted into the National Choir and will go to Walt Disney World in November to perform. This is the first time in Coginchaug's history that someone got into the National Choir.

Daniel Turecek reported that Adrianna Wimler created a model cow that will be at the Durham Fair. Adrianna spent 100 hours on the project over the summer with the art teacher. She will also be an instructor in the Art Department at the Fair.

Dr. Veronesi asked for the CRHS reporters to re-introduce themselves to the board. Danny Turecek is a senior who has been in the district all his life. He was class president last year and captain of the cross country and baseball teams. He is also a member of NHS and the Spanish Honor Society.

Colleen Coogan was vice-president of her class last year, is in both councils and captain of soccer and indoor track. She is the president of the Spanish Honor Society and a member of NHS.

Demarie Del Vecchio is also in class council and is running for secretary again this year. She is in the French Honor Society and is the captain of the volleyball team. She is also a member of the captains' council and school council.

### **Public Comment**

Carl Stoup, from Durham, stated that he has looked at a lot of schools with similar enrollment and can't find one that offers the dual program that we have in the elementary schools. Mr. Stoup feels it's time to take a look at that and review the expenses. He feels it's time to put the two programs together.

Donia Viola, from Durham, stressed the importance of the economic situation and the crisis that exists in the State of Connecticut. Ms. Viola specifically mentioned the bidding process for the school buses, the bus routes, class sizes and the fact that the budget goes up even though enrollment goes down. She felt that the budget has gone up every year for two decades, with just a year or two when it did not. She also felt that the number of staff members has increased substantially. Ms. Viola felt that the limit has been reached and the board needs to consider affordable education, not just delivering whatever comes down the pike.

### **Next Board Meeting - October 11, 2017 at 7:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School**

#### **Approval of Agenda**

*Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the agenda, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the agenda as presented: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed.*

#### **Approval of Minutes - August 9, 2017**

*Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Boyle, to approve the minutes of August 9, 2017, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of August 9, 2017 as presented: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.*

#### **State Budget Implications and Potential District Action Discussion with Attorney Matt Ritter**

Attorney Ritter, from Shipman & Goodwin, explained his background in municipal finance and compliance. He began with general questions that the board had asked, the first being what happens if there is no State budget. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, the executive order would control ECS funding in the State of Connecticut and would result in a 25 percent reduction in the first payment of funding. Attorney Ritter felt that, if no budget was passed, there may be a lot of lawsuits coming.

Attorney Ritter gave a scenario of a sample town where they had adopted a budget and appropriated \$20 million of ECS funding. Once that appropriation goes to the board of education, they are then in charge of that money for the fiscal year. In the case of a regional school district, the district charges the host communities. The governor feels that the ECS formula has expired, but some (like CCM and COST) are now arguing that, with no budget in place, there is also no MBR (minimum budget requirement). CCM would argue that with no MBR, the towns can go back and reduce the education funding. Attorney Ritter does not believe that the host communities can go back and cut the funding under the argument that is no MBR. They would take the position that 10-222 is controlling and that the voters of the towns have voted on the district's budget and that money is due and payable.

He went on to explain that there is an Attorney General opinion from the late 1980s about the timing of the bills from regional school districts. Attorney Ritter would use that to make the argument that the regional school districts are entitled to the money from the host communities, no matter what cuts are made. He did also mention though that towns that do not have regional school districts would be a different situation.

Attorney Ritter also stated that the statutory authority to re-open budgets expired on June 30, 2017 and there is nothing in state law that would allow a town to redo their budget process.

Mr. Yamartino commented that part of the budget is the revenue that is received from the state and explained that the referendum vote was only on the expenditures of the budget, not the revenue. Dr. Friedrich explained that the school district's budget has revenue and expenditures. Mr. Yamartino stated that the referendum asks if the towns approve the expenditures of the budget, not the net budget. Attorney Ritter reviewed that the payments to cover the budget are a mixture of town revenues and ECS payments and the towns would be legally obligated to pay.

Mr. Augur summarized Mr. Yamartino's question to be if expenditures would need to be cut to keep the total charged to the towns at the same number when revenue is reduced. Mr. Yamartino estimated that it costs \$35 million to run the schools and the towns each expect to receive several million dollars. The referendum vote was for the expenditure side only. Attorney Ritter stated that the towns would be responsible for the full \$35 million.

Attorney Ritter went on to address the question of what can the towns do if they can't afford this budget. He offered possibilities of levying some new tax bills, make local cuts and work with the school district to voluntarily make reductions. Dr. Taylor asked how the board can make cuts in expenditures when the townspeople have voted on a particular number. Attorney Ritter felt that the board could not just decimate the budget when parameters were already laid out to the voters, but adjustments could be made. Dr. Taylor estimated about a \$1.5 million deficit for the two towns and stated that that would be drastic cuts to the school budget. He would find that hard to do without input from the townspeople.

Attorney Ritter explained that there is language in 10-51 that talks about a supplementary budget and that would follow close to the same budget process. The board could go back to a district meeting and make changes. Attorney Ritter agreed with Dr. Taylor that that would be a far better way to make overwhelming changes.

Mr. Yamartino asked exactly which proposal from the Governor would go into effect on October 1<sup>st</sup> and Attorney Ritter stated that it would be the executive order from July. He did point out that the Governor could change that executive order, but he has not yet done that.

Mr. Moore mentioned that the board does acquire some savings throughout the year that shows up as surplus and Attorney Ritter explained that 10-51 states that surplus and deficits are taken into account each year and they would be hesitant to allow that. He suggested that if changes are made, the board goes to a district meeting. Mr. Yamartino mentioned the example of the union contracts which produced cost savings and asked if the district should forgive town payments in that amount. Attorney Ritter stated that the statute says that those savings should be blended into the next year's payment and, because of that specific language, they would be uncomfortable with that approach.

Attorney Ritter also mentioned that, under 10-60, regional school districts have the ability to borrow up to a half million dollars for district needs. That would not have to go to referendum.

Dr. Taylor asked if the town would declare insolvency by not making a payment and Attorney Ritter believes that, under the current law, the towns are required to pay. Mrs. Boyle mentioned that if the district takes out a loan, both towns would have to pay the interest whether both towns needed the money or not. Attorney Ritter stated that a lot of towns are looking at a tax anticipation note which would basically float a loan for four to five months until the January tax payments are made. He also mentioned that this would be a way for towns to avoid utilizing their reserve funds and hurt their credit

rating. Attorney Ritter would recommend that towns make cuts in their budget or issue short-term borrowing to create cash flow.

Dr. Friedrich asked if the ECS payments were made directly to the district and Attorney Ritter explained that those are made to the towns. Dr. Friedrich asked if the towns are automatically obligated to send less money if the district doesn't spend all of the money that was budgeted. Attorney Ritter explained that any surplus would be built into next year's rate. Dr. Taylor summarized that the only way to save the towns money would be to go back to referendum. Attorney Ritter confirmed that the only way to make substantial changes to the budget would be to go back to a meeting and a referendum.

Mr. Yamartino asked if the district could find \$1 million in savings and then lend that savings to the towns, payable on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Dr. Friedrich stated that the \$1 million would still be owed in this year's assessment. Attorney Ritter had never thought about the district doing that and offered to research that on the board's behalf.

Attorney Ritter reminded the board that the ECS cuts will be 25 percent in October, not the entire amount, and it may be best to wait and see. The most severe problems will probably occur in March.

Mrs. Boyle asked what would happen if the board went back to referendum and the townspeople vote no. Dr. Taylor stated that the towns would then still be under obligation to make the payments. Attorney Ritter explained that the towns have unilateral authority to issue supplemental tax bills, if necessary. There are no conditions as to when those tax bills can be issued unless there is a town charter provision.

### **Communications**

Mr. Moore suggested that board members watch the video of Adrianna Wimler making the cow.

Mr. Moore also reported that he received a phone call from Nick Faiella, from the Football Boosters, asking if a lighted football game could be held on a Friday night with temporary lighting and he has asked Dr. Veronesi to look into that. Dr. Veronesi spoke with the athletic director who also talked to the football coach. She also looked into the legal agreement and reached out to Karen Cheyney and she stated that she would be open to having a conversation about that if the board were to seriously consider it. Mrs. Boyle stated that she would only be interested in pursuing donation of lights for the game and not paying for them. Mr. Moore stated that that was Mr. Faiella's intention. Mr. Moore also congratulated Eric Becker on his first win for the football team.

Mr. Moore heard from two different parents that the Memorial School open house went very well.

### **Strategic Coherence Plan Update**

Dr. Veronesi reported that they are finalizing the goals for the district. The purpose of this plan is to write strategic goals for the next three to five years with an eye on how most appropriately to help prepare students for the world. She felt that one of the best ways to do that is to have school look more like the world and that means being very cognizant in terms of digital literacy and STEAM planning. The committee consisted of board members, administrators, parents, certified staff and noncertified staff.

They looked at the mission statement and concentrated on engaging kids, having them become empowered and having them thrive as global citizens. The suggested mission statement is "Through engagement in authentic learning, all Regional School District 13 students are empowered to thrive and contribute as global citizens." This will give the district something to measure against. The mission

statement has four foundational beliefs: (1) that the core ethical values are the foundation of what we do in Regional School District 13; (2) the four Cs, communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking are the foundation of learning; (3) that we all contribute to the well-being of each other; and (4) learning and growth require risk-taking.

They then looked at how teachers need to teach in order for students to reach the goals that are set and then develop measurements or assessments for learning. The last area looks at alignment and coherence. The strategic planning process agreed to define the role of the board in communicating with their stakeholders and in supporting the work of the district. The administrative team is working to identify the specific learning goals based on most recent assessment data and has shifted to using the growth model to identify student achievement and student growth overall.

The plan should be updated soon and hopefully can be condensed to one page for everyone to understand the mission, the beliefs, the goals and the strategies. Dr. Veronesi hopes to present it to the board at the next meeting.

Mr. Moore also suggested that the board may form a committee to really look at the issue of communication. Dr. Veronesi also mentioned that having the board do a self-assessment provides great information as a starting place. Mrs. Boyle asked if this was something the board would vote on and Dr. Taylor felt that this plan is something that the board should vote on and even possibly edit.

### **Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Veronesi reported that the start to the school year has been great. The convocation, with a focus on well-being, was very well-received. Enrollment is at 1,647 and the Milone & MacBroom prediction for this year was 1,649. Dr. Taylor asked about the two students in pre-K that are going to magnet schools. Dr. Veronesi explained that students have the right to elect to go to a magnet school. Dr. Taylor wanted to know if the two students had received a place in the pre-K through the lottery system or went into the magnet system when they did not get a place in our pre-K. Dr. Veronesi was wary about discussing specific student circumstances but will follow-up with the board with more information.

Dr. Taylor then asked if the district is obligated to pay for a magnet school if a family requested their child to go to pre-K and did not get in through the lottery system. Mr. Hicks stated that if a child wasn't admitted to the program, the district would be obligated to pay for the magnet school but had never thought about it the other way.

Dr. Veronesi updated the board that a decrease of 20 students is projected for next year and a decrease of 59 and 46 for the following two years. Enrollment at the high school will drop to just over 500 next year and then to 450 in three years, with a projection of just under 400 students in 2025. There were somewhere between 30 and 40 eighth-grade students who chose alternate schools rather than going on to Cuginchaug. Surveys are sent out to families of students who do not go on to Cuginchaug. Dr. Veronesi stated that generally students who have had a long-term plan or are legacy students go to private schools, not necessarily due to dissatisfaction with our school. Athletics also plays a role. Mrs. Boyle asked for a five-year overview and felt that 30 to 40 students was high.

Dr. Veronesi went on to review the communication plan, with an emphasis on the sixth grade move from Memorial to Strong and how that communication is being done. They are also looking at how they will communicate examining the two program construct and the goals. Dr. Veronesi feels that it would be worth investing in a comprehensive communication plan. She has met with a communications specialist from ACES and received a proposal. They are also continuing with the redesign of the district's

website. In addition to the comprehensive communication plan, they will be looking at branding, logo, color, messaging and being consistent.

Dr. Veronesi also reported that the Strong School gym floor was slated to be painted during Thanksgiving week and the Benchwarmer logo will be put on at that time. The ribbon cutting and reception is scheduled for December 9<sup>th</sup>.

Negotiations for the administrators' union will begin on October 11, 2017 and Dr. Veronesi invited board members to participate.

Dr. Veronesi had also shared a draft budget calendar with the board. She asked the board to consider a joint meeting with the boards of selectmen and boards of finance before the budget process to discuss the "state of the union." Board members generally felt that was a good idea and would like to have a board of education meeting prior to the joint meeting.

Dr. Veronesi also reported that the Concussion Management Team will be meeting at the end of the fall season and will provide the date as soon as it is available.

Dr. Veronesi also mentioned that she had received a letter forwarded from the First Selectman in Durham about the Recreation Department possibly using the Korn School gym from about January through March. They feel that their offerings have been limited without the use of the gym. Last year, the board had decided that that building would be put to sleep, meaning the temperature is kept at 58°, the water is shut off except for the boiler and one bathroom, security equipment is taken out and custodians are not present. Dr. Veronesi mentioned that both the district and other organizations also miss using Korn School. She mentioned that adjustments to the budget would need to be made to allow use of the school. Mr. Yamartino reminded the board that that decision resulted in an \$80,000 savings.

Mr. Yamartino asked if any other gyms might be available for use by the Recreation Department. Dr. Veronesi explained that it is limited and feedback from the recreation director was that the Korn School gym was preferable.

Mr. Moore asked for the Utilization Committee to review this issue. Dr. Taylor felt that it did not need to be reviewed as the decision has already been made to keep the school shut down. Board members generally agreed.

*Mr. Augur made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Boyle, to reaffirm the board's decision to mothball Korn School.*

Mr. Roraback noted that he had attended the open house at Korn School and noticed that there were numerous expensive pieces of equipment in the kitchen that did not have asset tags. Dr. Veronesi explained that the equipment is still there.

*In favor of reaffirming the board's decision to mothball Korn School: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed.*

### **Business Manager's Report**

Mrs. Neubig followed up on the difference in the budget for the generator at Strong School vs. the actual bid. She explained that the generator was over 40 years old and had been donated to Strong School by CL&P. That generator serviced Strong School, but not the fire suppression system which is serviced by a

tank at Coginchaug. Three options were priced, ranging from \$111,000 to \$54,000 and the final recommendation from Silver Petrucelli was to install the diesel fire pump and the size of the generator could be reduced. This item was budgeted for \$76,000 and will ultimately come in at \$54,000. This work will begin in the next two weeks.

Revenue and expenditure reports were included in the board's electronic meeting packet. Mrs. Neubig noted that some savings in staff salaries have been realized. Dr. Veronesi has asked that she approve any new vacancies before posting. Benefits are up because Anthem was late getting the bills out and the district had to pay both July and August at the same time. Purchased services include cleaning of oil tanks, septic tanks and service on a hot water tank. Purchased property services include yearly and monthly lease payments. Transportation and Tuition includes \$193,000 in outplaced students' tuition. Supplies purchases were scrutinized and were expenses that could not be delayed. Software renewal expenditures are included in this month's report. Debt service is the interest payment on the bonds from the 1990s and the last payment for the Brewster renovations was made in July.

Mrs. Neubig continued with revenue and reported that there is nothing unusual to report. MTA is on track. The Capital Fund has been updated. Some projects were done over the summer.

Mrs. Boyle asked that these reports be printed and included in the board packets in the future.

Mrs. Neubig also reported that two new members are being appointed to the Pension Committee and she would need a resolution from the board to do that and will then schedule a meeting.

*Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Boyle, to adopt the following resolution that effective, as of September 13, 2017, in accordance with section 8.5 of the Defined Benefit Pension Plan for Employees of Regional School District 13, "Pension Plan," and the governing guidelines in effect for the Pension Committee, the board hereby appoints the following persons to serve on the Pension Committee for the new terms that are set forth below with such new terms commencing on September 13, 2017: James Irish, term of two years, and April Votto, for a term of two years.*

Mrs. Boyle thanked the two volunteers.

*In favor of adopting the above resolution: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed.*

## **Committee Reports**

### **A. Educational Resources Committee**

Mrs. Boyle reported that there had been a healthy discussion that resulted in inviting Attorney Ritter to attend tonight's meeting. The ERC felt it was important for the board to be as educated as possible.

### **Public Comment**

A member of the public explained that he had spoken to Attorney Ritter outside and was curious to know if everyone understood what MBR is. Attorney Ritter felt that MBR did not pertain since there was no State budget. The member of the public felt this could be the year to drop the budget down.

**Anticipated Executive Session**

**A. Discuss a student matter**

Dr. Veronesi suggested that the board go into the back room for a quick discussion while the room is set up for the next meeting.

*A motion was made and seconded to move into Executive Session.*

*In favor of moving into Executive Session: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed.*

**Adjournment**

*Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Boyle, to adjourn the regular meeting of the board of education.*

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

Meeting was adjourned at 8:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First