

Revised

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, June 27, 2018 at 7:00 PM in the Library at Strong School, Durham, Connecticut.

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

Board members absent: Mr. Hicks and Dr. Taylor

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.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Augur, to approve the agenda, as presented.

Dr. Friedrich made a motion that item 10 be moved to item 5, before Communications, and to add possible approval of the China partnership. He also moved to remove item 9, the SRO MOU. Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Augur agreed to accept the amendments.

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

Public Comment

None.

Next Board Meeting - July 2, 2018 at 5:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School

Mr. Moore explained that this should be a very short meeting, primarily to elect officers. Dr. Veronesi confirmed that she thought it would last no more than a half hour.

Ningbo, China Partnership

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that she had given the Board members some material to review at the last meeting as well as a slideshow about the school in Ningbo. She also commented that they began these discussions just about a year ago and highlighted that much of what had been identified in the visioning process were many of the unique characteristics of this high school.

Jason Hiruo, from ACES International, was present to give the Board a brief review. Since September, he has gained a good understanding of the values and initiatives of District 13 to better understand which school would be fit the district. ACES is connected with 12 provinces in China and the Ministry of Education allows them to look for a best fit. The school in Ningbo is absolutely phenomenal. They have international staff and a lot of the same programs that District 13 has, including a music program and an athletic department. They have a lot of the same values and almost exactly the same vision.

Mr. Hiruo explained that Ningbo is quite large, located right below Shanghai. It is one of the largest port cities in China which also makes it a very affluent city. The educational system is extremely progressive and current in their professional development of teachers. They have a very healthy competition with Shanghai. Ningbo also has a very strong commitment to the arts.

In an exchange program, culture, arts, history and society are shared with the students. ACES would work with the district to make sure it is sustainable, successful and enjoyable.

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that the 2018-2019 school year would not have an actual exchange. She, Mr. Falcone, probably a teacher leader and at least one Board member will go to China in December to visit, create and sign an MOU and talk about what the partnership would look like. They would then need to spend time interviewing potential host families and preparing to welcome Chinese students in the 2019-2020 school year.

Mr. Hiruo felt that creating the partnership during the visit is a very important piece and the work afterwards is targeted to preparing the school, helping people understand that culture, helping families understand how to host an international student and developing a student ambassador program.

Mr. Moore asked about other schools participating in this program and Mr. Hiruo felt there were probably about 43-45 schools in Connecticut actively partnered with China. A lot of those schools have Chinese language programs. He thought that there were going to be 20-25 student delegations visiting Connecticut this summer, with about half visiting their sister schools. Mr. Moore thought that the Board could visit some of the schools in Connecticut. Mr. Hiruo invited the Board to visit ECA in New Haven. They have eight sister school partnerships in China, all with different specificities. Newtown also has a successful program.

Mr. Hiruo also explained that ACES has a cultural preparation program for host families where they come in and share some of the aspects of the culture. Dr. Veronesi explained that, when they were looking at schools in various countries to partner with, Mr. Hiruo had stated that if the district wants the partnership to succeed, they have to partner with a country that has the means to sustain it. That is why China was selected. Dr. Veronesi felt that this was just the beginning of opportunities for the district.

Dr. Friedrich felt it was a wonderful opportunity and asked how our students will cover the material they are responsible for learning during the time they are in China and vice versa. Mr. Hiruo explained that the exchange program would typically be between 10 and 14 days abroad which gives students an immersive experience, but it's not too much. Over time, there are a lot of opportunities that can grow, including teacher exchange and student exchange for a longer period of time. The 10- to 14-day trip would normally be in April, potentially over the break so that they don't miss time from school. Summer tours have also been suggested from time to time.

Mr. Augur asked what other countries participate and Mr. Hiruo explained that China, Japan, Australia, Spain and Germany are all included. Mr. Augur liked the idea of connecting virtually but pointed out the time zone issues. He felt that Spain or Germany might be a better fit for that. Mr. Hiruo also mentioned that some districts do film blogs because of the time difference.

Mrs. Boyle asked what the draw was for China, especially since the district doesn't even have a Chinese language department. She felt that the learning curve for Germany and Spain, or even Australia, would

have been much easier. Mr. Hiruo felt that the learning curve isn't as steep with China because all Chinese students begin learning English in kindergarten. The Chinese government and the Ministry of Education have prioritized international sister school partnerships, so they have invested a lot of money into the program and every school in China has an international faculty team to help coordinate these programs. China also has the ability to pay and support the sustainability of a project like this as do the parents. Some of the challenges that they have confronted in the European countries have been problems in sustaining partnerships or even getting them off the ground. The educational system in Spain specifically faces a lot of challenges with establishing partnerships with other countries. Partnerships in Spain are thematically based and Mr. Hiruo explained that his school has a dance partnership with a school in Madrid. Germany is actually harder than Spain and a German language program needs to be in the district and you have to prove you can sustain the program. He felt that partnerships in Europe would typically take about three years to establish, rather than one that it would take with China.

Dr. Veronesi also felt that the ability to pay and the range that was suggested for tuition was appealing to her and she felt that the program could become self-sustaining. Mr. Hiruo also explained that the average trip to China for 10 days is about \$2,500 to \$2,600. That is the same cost for going to Spain for about five days. Mrs. Boyle asked if the district or the students would pay those costs and it was explained that the students would pay. She then asked what the cost would be to the district and Dr. Veronesi explained that, this year, the cost would be working with Mr. Hiruo and there is money in the travel budget for those who would travel to China in December.

Mr. Yamartino asked how many students would participate per year and Mr. Hiruo explained that an exchange program is usually based on reciprocity and would typically start with 15 to 20 students, if that is a comfortable balance. The trips would be staggered, so that students going to China would already know students who came here. Mr. Hiruo also described some community-building events that help promote host families. Mr. Moore described the program his granddaughter participates in with England and that the two host families communicate throughout the year.

Mrs. Boyle was still concerned about the language difference. Mr. Hiruo felt that Ningbo would select the top English-speaking students to come here and described that one of the biggest bonding experiences is sitting down to understand each other. Mrs. Boyle was more concerned about our students going to China with that language gap. Mrs. Geraci has visited schools in China a number of times and believes that their educational system is phenomenal. Dr. Veronesi also commented that the district's students are asking for this as well.

Mr. Hiruo reported that they had eight students go for three years in a row now and the challenge has become how to enhance the itinerary. Dr. Veronesi also reported that East Hampton schools just brought 50 people to visit China. Dr. Friedrich also felt that a program like this might actually draw students to the high school.

Mr. Yamartino asked about the funding that will be needed and Mr. Hiruo reviewed that the school in China and the families are willing to pay tuition to participate. That tuition would cover some of the expenses that the district would incur, including services by ACES International, a scholarship and a stipend for a teacher. Mr. Hiruo felt that the tuition Ningbo would be willing to pay would be between \$1,200 and \$1,500 per student. The district would not be paying an equivalent amount for students to go to China.

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that \$20,000 was budgeted this year for the services of ACES International and there is also about \$4,000 that can be directed to the preparation, if necessary, in Professional Development. There is also money in the travel budget for at least four or five people to go to China.

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Augur, to approve the plan presented by Dr. Veronesi to pursue establishing a partnership with the Ningbo school system in China.

Dr. Friedrich felt that a year was a reasonable amount of time to figure it out and that this is an opportunity to pursue a point of excellence for the school system. Mr. Yamartino asked if this motion authorizes all of the funding or if there will be other opportunities to approve funding. Dr. Veronesi felt that the Board would vote on the funds that were appropriated in the budget to enlist the services of ACES International who will facilitate the district's travel to China, facilitate the conversations with Ningbo, the agreements and then the planning forward. Mr. Hiruo explained that it is a comprehensive, year-long process and that their team will be available throughout the entire process. They also work to ensure that traveling abroad is safe. They would pursue 10-year visas for students and faculty as well. Mr. Hiruo felt that it would be approximately \$2,500 per person to visit China.

Mrs. Boyle summarized that ACES International would charge a \$20,000 fee and the money needed for travel would come out of the travel budget. An affirmative vote on this would mean that approximately \$30,000 that was appropriated in the budget would be spent. Mr. Augur would also want to make sure that there are virtual opportunities for families in the district who can't afford the travel. Mr. Hiruo also encouraged fund-raising.

Mr. Yamartino commented that the district would also be committing to sustaining the program, after the \$30,000 is spent. Hopefully, the program will be self-sustaining and they would not be committing future resources. Dr. Veronesi also explained that they will not be going back every year to re-establish the partnership. As of now, the ongoing fee to ACES International would be approximately \$20,000 per year. Mrs. Boyle confirmed that the contract with ACES International will be renewable on a yearly basis and Dr. Veronesi explained that they would get a commitment from students before renewing the contract.

Mr. Yamartino asked what grades would be involved and Mr. Hiruo explained that they would start with high school, working their way down from there. Elementary level could be done in different ways, including virtual collaborative projects, sharing culture by sending artifacts, etc. Dr. Veronesi felt that the focus should stay on the high school for now. Mr. Augur would hope that the district would promote this to the students in eighth grade. Mr. Yamartino felt that having pen-pals at the elementary level would be relatively easy and Mr. Moore mentioned that they could be Skype pals now.

Mrs. Boyle worries about spending \$30,000 this year and \$20,000 per year thereafter and having some people question about them spending that on 10 to 15 kids. Mrs. Geraci argued that it would not just be benefiting those kids, but the whole school benefits from the students coming here. Mr. Hiruo did not feel there is an issue as everyone does benefit and it will grow larger and larger each year. Students, businesses, municipal leadership and faculty will all want to get involved. Dr. Friedrich reiterated that they would not be signing a 10-year contract and they will need to look at how to maximize the population of the students who benefit. Mrs. Boyle did feel that it will become self-sustaining in the future. Dr. Friedrich commented that \$20,000 will be in the budget every year for ACES and the Board will need to be sure that the community is benefitting as a whole and not just the participants.

Mr. Yamartino asked about liability and Mr. Hiruo explained that will be in the contracts and they talk with the families to be sure they are talking with physicians before the students go overseas. They also ask the families to look into travel insurance, which is usually between \$80 and \$100 for full coverage.

Mr. Yamartino asked if tonight's vote is also authorizing the administration to sign the contract or will the contract come back to the Board for final review. Dr. Friedrich stated that he intended to authorize pursuit of the partnership, but not closure. Mr. Hiruo explained that there is no actual binding legal agreement, but an MOU. That MOU would identify the key pieces of the partnership and allow Dr. Veronesi to sign an MOU agreeing to terms that are negotiated. Mr. Hiruo would share the MOU with Dr. Veronesi, who could then share it with the Board, and he then would share it with Ningbo, with versions in both English and Chinese. Mr. Yamartino would then want to understand what liability District 13 has in terms of a student getting hurt while in China. Dr. Veronesi explained that tonight is just an overview and she will get answers to any specific questions the Board may have. Dr. Friedrich wondered about health coverage for our students while in China and the Chinese students while they are here.

Dr. Veronesi will start a Google Classroom with the beginning documents as well as a running list of questions. Follow-up discussion can continue at the Board meeting on August 8th.

In favor of approving the plan presented by Dr. Veronesi to pursue establishing a partnership with the Ningbo school system in China: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Communications

Mr. Moore reported that he has received a lot of communication about the graduation ceremony and how everyone did a great job. Theresa Weimann sent several emails about the importance of arts in the schools. Mr. Moore also got a call from Lauren Takores who wanted to know if there were any graphics that could go along with the report on the survey. Dr. Veronesi felt that they may be able to include a small graphic in the community flyer they are working on.

Mr. Moore and Dr. Veronesi also met with the Chairman of the Board of Education of Mansfield and Isobel Stevenson, from the Center for School Change, who will help the district through the next phases of merging utilization and the programming. Mansfield had actually closed three elementary schools and built a new one. They had two community sessions and got feedback on specific issues. Mr. Moore and Dr. Veronesi feel that this would be a good model for the district to follow. Considering the timeline of submitting the EDO49 in January, they have targeted September 6th for the first community work session and the second on October 18th. This information will go out in the newsletter and people will be asked to RSVP. Dr. Stevenson will facilitate the workshops.

Mrs. Boyle asked if maybe Dr. Veronesi, Mr. Moore, Mr. Augur and Dr. Taylor would be willing to hold community conversations at Allyn Brook Park in the summer. Dr. Veronesi stated that the Board Chair from Mansfield suggested having information ambassadors. Mrs. Boyle also suggested each Board member have extra copies of the newsletter to give to people and Dr. Veronesi felt that it was all part of the district's communication plan.

Mr. Augur also asked if a mobile-specific website could be available because most people are accessing website information on their phones and it is difficult to read. Dr. Veronesi will check with IT on this.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that the district has received the SBAC scores, but they are still embargoed and will be shared soon. The support staff ratified the contract unanimously yesterday and a copy was available for the Board. This will be on the agenda for July 2nd for the Board's approval.

Dr. Veronesi also reported that they have screened 10 candidates for the Brewster principal position and have three people who were moved on to the second round. Two of those people have accepted positions somewhere else and the team decided to not move forward with the other candidate. They will put an interim principal in place to take the time to find the best candidate. Dr. Veronesi did feel that the press around what's happening in the district may have had an effect on the pool of candidates and they may consider waiting until after the Board has made their decision about programming.

Vote on Co-Op Football with East Hampton for the 2018-2019 School Year

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Boyle, to approve a co-op football agreement between East Hampton High School and Coginchaug Regional High School for the 2018-2019 school year.

In favor of approving a co-op football agreement between East Hampton High School and Coginchaug Regional High School for the 2018-2019 school year: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Vote to Correct Pay-to-Play Fee

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Boyle, to set a yearly limit of \$300 per family on student pay-to-participate fees.

In favor of approving the motion to set a yearly limit of \$300 per family on student pay-to-participate fees: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Theresa Weimann, of Durham, looked into how many schools across the State are dealing with declining enrollment issues and was shocked to see that it's about 150 schools. Only about 10 to 15 of those schools are addressing it through closing schools and moving children. She learned that there are so many schools that are expanding programs, joining together and pooling resources, but not necessarily regionalizing. Mrs. Weimann believes there are many opportunities for the district to do the same thing. With the extra land at Brewster, a nature observatory/research center could be built. She urged the Board to be sure that they are doing the right thing. She also felt that an explanation of why the timeline has been rushed again should be included in the newsletter. Mrs. Weimann also felt that a parents need to know what it will take for any consolidated program to become a HOT school again. She believes that that would take a minimum of three years. Mrs. Weimann feels that the distinction of a HOT school and choice is pretty much all this district has left at this point.

Anticipated Executive Session

- A. Discuss Superintendent's Evaluation**
- B. Discuss Superintendent's Contract**

Mrs. Boyle made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to move into Executive Session.

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

Mrs. Boyle made a motion, seconded by several others, to come out of Executive Session at 10:06 PM.

In favor of coming out of Executive Session: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Boyle made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to raise Dr. Veronesi's salary by 2.5 percent and raise her tax-sheltered annuity to \$15,000 for the year 2018-2019 with other components remaining the same.

This raise was in recognition of Dr. Veronesi's performance this year and her extensive efforts to control the budget, advance the vision of the district and her commitment to our students.

In favor of raising Dr. Veronesi's salary by 2.5 percent and raising her tax-sheltered annuity to \$15,000 for the year 2018-2019 with other components remaining the same: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, 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 and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:09 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First