

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held a public hearing on April 10, 2019 at 8:00 PM in the Julian Thayer Auditorium at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

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

Board members absent: Dr. Taylor

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

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Hearing

Mr. Hicks read the Warning of Public Hearing and the Return of the Call into the record.

Dr. Veronesi welcomed everyone to the public hearing and thanked everyone who has been present throughout the budget process. This year's theme for the budget is Regional School District 13 United. She explained that the district's efforts to provide the highest quality educational experience to all students was the priority identified by the Board of Education and the administration. With moving towards a single educational approach, the closing of John Lyman School is also being proposed. That caused the district to look at the physical plant needs and capital planning that has been underway for several years, ultimately resulting in a \$6.9 million capital planning project that will be part of the referendum vote.

Dr. Veronesi explained that the district's budgeting always focuses on the three strategic coherence areas: student achievement, well-being and engagement. A few areas that significantly impacted the budget this year were the request to reduce the budget by the proposed ECS cuts to Durham and Middlefield, keeping the staff level the same, the proposed TRB responsibility was taken on by the district and the good news of very significant savings for the district and for both towns in insurance. Dr. Veronesi noted that they just were just recently notified of another \$300,000 in savings and the proposed budget can be reduced further.

With regard to the strategic coherence goals, student achievement is the most important focus area. There are some staffing changes proposed for next year, in particular math interventionists at Memorial and Coginchaug, an increase of Spanish at Strong, a slight increase in the preK-3 program as well as a library media center specialist at the elementary school. Enhancements are proposed in curriculum instruction and assessment, programming in STEAM and additional high school classes, including AP computer science, introduction to engineering, design and build lab, coding and robotics and integrated wood shop. Work continues in data collection and analysis. Professional learning targets the areas for administrators and staff which the district feels will have the greatest impact on student learning. The work on Portrait of the Graduate will continue and backwards design will help determine what academic experiences students should be having to assure that the district will be able to guarantee on the pledge included in the Portrait of the Graduate. Dr. Veronesi also explained that they continue to work on the understanding and implementation of project-based learning that will be included in the curriculum work.

Moving into well-being, Dr. Veronesi explained that work will continue on social-emotional learning with support for staff and students. Mental health training and support will continue and the district

continues to work with outside agencies, including Central Connecticut State University. Safety and security processes and upgrades are underway, including funding for the school resource officer as well as work on the vestibules. Equity and diversity training and implementation continues into next year and the expansion of well-being efforts through the Board of Education's newly-created Well-Being Committee.

In the area of engagement, the Board of Education will continue their CAFE membership to work on board development and support. Communication plans will be further improved, at the school, district and board levels. They are also looking at ways to more systematically get feedback from teachers and the community. The district's collaboration with the towns will continue with regard to building disposition for Korn and Lyman schools. Local, state and international partnerships continue, with partners from China slated to arrive on the Monday after the Durham Fair and our students traveling to Ningbo in March.

Mr. Yamartino will present the district's outstanding plan for capital improvements, with the debt service falling off in 2022 and 2025 resulting in a favorable borrowing. Continuation of the school alteration plans at both Memorial and Brewster and the costs associated with that will continue next year. They also intend to continue with the creation and communication of the budget processes, with the associated state and local influences.

Dr. Veronesi highlighted that they are proposing a change to the budget that was initially proposed on February 13th that had a 2.44 percent gross increase to tonight's budget that has a .52 percent increase. This incorporates the potential ECS cuts, the allowance for TRB, a slight increase in total staff of .3 full-time equivalency, class sizes maintained and a continued focus on the strategic coherence goals and visioning process for improvement strategies. Also included in next year's budget are the support steps to move toward a district-wide educational approach.

Mr. Moore reviewed historical information of the district's budgets over the last five years and the total gross budget now is over \$500,000 less than it was five years ago. The net budget is also down about \$900,000 from five years ago. He explained that the board has taken this direction to assure a stable budget and to accommodate the reductions in funding over the years. Mr. Moore stated that this year's budget shows a decrease of 1.93 percent.

Mr. Moore reviewed the individual budget items, with salaries being the first and largest item. Salaries represent approximately 295 staff members. There is a reduction in benefits, primarily from the health insurance changes. Purchased services has gone up a little bit. The net budget is \$191,000 more than it was in 2018-2019.

On the revenue side, in-house tuition has gone down, but activities and other funds are up slightly. The fund balance carried over from 2017-2018 was due to staffing, benefits changes and a variety of other things. Revenue from special education excess cost gives the district another \$416,000, resulting in a total revenue of \$2,217,000. The net budget total is \$34,793,467, or a reduction from last year of almost \$700,000. This is the budget on which the towns' taxes will be based.

Looking at the details, Mr. Moore reviewed that salaries, purchased services, operating and other equipment and capital have gone up, but the savings come in non-certified salaries, benefits, building and grounds and supplies as well as debt service. He reviewed a pie chart showing that salaries are 53 percent of the budget and benefits are 16 percent. He also pointed out that the debt service is at 4 percent.

Going back at salaries, Mr. Moore reviewed the proposed staffing changes that result in a .3 addition. Mr. Moore went on to review that certified salaries total \$16,677,000 based on contracts of 2 percent increases for teachers and 2.25 percent increases for administrators. In addition, non-certified salaries included increases of 2 percent for custodians and support staff at 2.25 percent and nurses at 1.5 percent, or about \$4,675,000.

Mr. Moore explained that the primary benefits are pensions, health insurance and teacher support. The primary savings, again, is in the health insurance. They have also added in \$114,963 to cover the anticipated bill for the TRB (Teachers' Retirement Benefit).

Purchased services is up by \$169,000, including primarily professional development, instructor services, some homebound tutors as well as legal, auditors, technology, security and the SRO.

Buildings and grounds includes waste disposal, lawn care, snow removal, repairs and leases. The bus lease has been moved out of this category. Operating services includes all of the bus transportation, insurance for the buildings, travel, tuition for magnet schools and outsourced special ed students as well as the Vo-Ag program.

Mr. Yamartino reviewed that there is capital in the operating budget as well as the \$6.9 million bond proposal which will be voted on at the referendum as well. Within the operating budget, there is \$439,000 for projects that nearing the end of their lives or items seen as yearly replacement. He reviewed that the turf and track need to be replaced and there has not been enough put aside. The turf replacement needs an additional \$225,000 and \$78,000 for track replacement. There is \$40,000 for classroom furniture which is on a regular replacement cycle. Unanticipated building equipment and maintenance reserve is \$50,000 which Mr. Yamartino feels is a rather modest number. Mr. Yamartino ran through other items, including IT power supply system in the central office, stage flooring and curtain in the auditorium and upgrades in the family and consumer science area.

Moving to the proposed bonding question, Mr. Yamartino explained that there had been a public hearing last week so he will review this quickly. For the district, Cuginchaug and Strong, they are proposing a total of \$1 million which includes Pickett Lane resurfacing and repair, potable water lines, a sprinkler system and replacing the Pickett Lane culvert.

Mr. Yamartino reviewed that the \$6.9 million is for projects that are at the end of their useful life. It should have been budgeted over years, but they weren't. If these projects are not done, the district risks shutting down a school. Other items include ADA upgrades to the auditorium and parking lot and conversion to natural gas.

Looking at Memorial School, the proposed bonding includes the combustion air system, the chilling systems and cooler on the roof, LED lighting, kitchen hood exhaust system, unit ventilators and rooftop units as well as the relief pressure exhaust fans. Memorial's heating system will also be converted from steam to hot water, heating mechanical piping will be upgraded.

Mr. Yamartino moved on to the proposed improvements at Brewster School, including replacement of two boilers, upgrading the heating distribution system and the combustible air system in the boiler room. He explained that many of the systems are no longer supported by the manufacturer. They propose to replace the relief pressure exhaust fans and upgrade the fire protection sprinkler system as well as exterior doors. The septic system will be surveyed and repaired due to the increased enrollment participated at Brewster with the closing of Lyman. They are also proposing to purchase an emergency

generator and wiring, replacing the cooling chiller system, chilled water piping, rooftop air handlers, the gym air handlers and the building automation systems. These systems are the systems that turn the lights and heat on and off.

Mr. Yamartino went on review the combined debt service which shows the 2018-2019 debt service at \$1,493,757. Next year, that debt drops down to \$1,293,000. When the \$6.9 million bond is submitted for approval, the district would pay interest only at \$292,275 in 2019-2020. By paying interest only, the new debt (represented by the blue line) will combine and equal what the debt service is this year. In 2020, the existing debt continues to decline to \$1.24 million and the new debt will be \$292,000, with a total of \$1,493,000. This means that there will be no increase in taxes due to this new bonding.

In 2021 and 2022, some of the debt service is retired which drops from \$1.2 million down to \$752,000. The district will also start paying principal and interest on the \$6.9 million and that would mean the total debt service would be \$1,420,038, for a decrease of \$70,000. Each successive year, the debt service will continue to decrease. Moving ahead to 2023-2024, another bond will be retired and the existing debt goes from \$723,000 to \$350,000, with the total debt service dropping to about \$1 million meaning that the debt service will be a half a million dollars less than it is today. In 2025-2026, the last existing debt drops off and all that would be left is the \$6.9 million bond, at a rate of about \$600,000 per year.

Mr. Yamartino then reviewed the debt service by community, explaining that it would be roughly \$100,000 to Middlefield and \$200,000 to Durham in the first two years. It then goes to \$443,000 for Durham and \$223,000 for Middlefield. This schedule is, of course, contingent upon the same ratio of students continuing in both communities.

Mr. Moore reminded everyone that the debt service is 4 percent of the total budget and has stayed at that level.

Mr. Moore went on to review the costs to each of the towns, based on the total budget of \$34,793,000. The total student population is 1,627, with 1,081 from Durham and 546 from Middlefield. The net cost, less the Governor's proposed ECS grant, is \$20 million to Durham and \$9.8 million to Middlefield. That results in a \$227,000 increase to Durham and a \$320,000 reduction to Middlefield.

Mr. Moore also talked about the minimum budget requirement (MBR) and explained that the district can reduce the MBR this year due to declining enrollment and the expected ECS grant reductions. Based on declining enrollment, the district can reduce the budget by \$592,652 from last year, resulting in a net budget of \$33,393,000. This budget, based on the MBR, is \$33,299,000 or \$93,000 below the MBR. The additional provision for the ECS grants is unknown at this point as the Governor's budget has not passed.

Mr. Moore went on to show that the district is projecting a decline of an additional 21 students next year, resulting in a cost per student of \$21,377. Last year, the cost per pupil was \$21,216. He explained that these are estimated numbers as they are not actually calculated until final expenses have occurred at the end of the following year.

Mr. Moore then went over the ECS funding and TRB contribution and explained that the district has assumed the ECS reductions and cost of the TRB contribution in the budget. He then reviewed that May 6th is the district meeting, with the referendum on May 7th. The referendum will have two questions, the total budget and the proposed capital bonding project. He explained that the total budget does include the debt service on the \$6.9 million.

Due to the additional \$300,000 savings that were realized on Friday, Mr. Moore will be recommending to the Board to reduce the gross budget by \$191,260. That will bring the total budget expenditure down to \$36,819,319 which is the same as last year. That will result in a 2.47 percent decrease in the net budget, from which the towns will receive additional savings. He then reviewed the historical data with these new numbers. The revised numbers will be published tomorrow, should the board take action tonight. The net impact would be that Durham would see an increase of \$100,000 and Middlefield would see a decrease of \$384,000 in their contributions. Making these further reductions would bring the district under the current reduction of the MBR down to \$284,000 below the MBR, without any provisions for the ECS cuts. It would also reduce the per pupil expense down to \$21,258 (about \$40 more than last year).

Mr. Moore summarized that, without the newly-proposed changes, the gross budget is proposed to increase by .5 percent, with an almost 2 percent reduction in the net budget. With the additional savings, the gross budget will have a 0 increase and 2.5 percent reduction in the net budget. Mr. Moore thanked Dr. Veronesi and Mrs. Neubig for their negotiations with the health insurers and explained that both towns are also receiving benefits from those as well.

Mr. Moore then opened up the hearing to the public.

Rick Parmelee thanked the board for bringing the budget to referendum and asked if the activity fees were still included. Mr. Moore stated that they were and Mr. Parmelee felt that they needed to go as there is no place in the public school system for activity fees. He stated that he may not like certain things that go in the school system, but he expects to fully fund whatever it is with his taxes and not have anybody excluded because they're not able to pay. Mr. Parmelee also doesn't understand why football continues when statistics show that we do not have enrollment to sustain the program. There is also information about cumulative head injuries, with NFL players being awarded damages for their injuries. He felt that Latin would do the students more good than football. Mr. Parmelee also felt that the insert that comes out in the paper should be labeled that it is, at least in part, being paid for by tax dollars. He also mentioned that the district had always had a part-time athletic director and now has a full-time athletic director, with declining enrollment. He stated that that reinforced his belief that the regional system is out to grab all the money they can and keep the budget as high as they can, for as long as they can. He recalls going to meetings and enrollment was up, so the budget had to go up. He does not see the same happening with declining enrollment. What happened last year with the state budget showed how vulnerable the district was, but he noted that the state has never had their budget in place when the towns vote on the education budget. Mr. Parmelee is not pleased that the state is looking to have more gambling and tax illegal drugs.

Mr. Moore asked Mr. Parmelee to please stick to the district's budget.

Mr. Parmelee summarized that the state has a spending problem and needs to learn to live within their means. Again, he suggested that the district get rid of the activity fees and felt there is room in the budget to absorb those costs. He also hopes that the district charges an appropriate fee for students from other districts to participate in football.

Donia Viola asked why the district is considering adding a library media specialist at the elementary school when they are thinking about closing Lyman. She also asked what the family consumer science upgrades are and Mr. Moore explained that that is a course on food preparation and the kitchen area needs upgrading. She also asked if the integrated wood shop would also be at Strong School and Mr. Moore stated that it would be just at the high school. Mrs. Viola also mentioned the hazards of wood shop and

didn't feel it would be appropriate as Vinal Tech could accommodate that. She also asked if exchange students would significantly impact any class sizes at the high school and Mr. Moore stated that they would all be accommodated in the classes and, in addition, their country has offered to pay a tuition for each of the students. Mrs. Viola asked if they would be paying the \$21,000 per student that the towns pay and it was explained that they are only here for a week. Mrs. Viola stated that she is not in favor of the China exchange and mentioned that they are a communist country, their values are not what we aspire to and she feels that we are more apt to have success and support if we dealt with a nation involved with peaceful approaches and democracies that constitute the freedoms that we enjoy. She felt that we cannot afford to breach our security.

Mrs. Viola stated that she has heard on the news that the Teachers' Retirement Benefit will probably not be touched at the state and she would like to see the \$114,000 taken out of the budget. She asked again about the library media specialist and Dr. Veronesi explained that there is a part-time library media specialist at the elementary schools so there are times when the library is not staffed. They would like to make sure that there is a full-time library media specialist in the elementary schools and in Memorial. They would like to get that started, even knowing that John Lyman School is slated to close in two years. Dr. Veronesi explained that they are working to use the staff across the district to fill the programming needs and this will allow a library media specialist to be housed at both Brewster and Lyman.

Mrs. Viola felt that the salaries and benefits make up almost a disproportionate amount of the budget. She felt it was kind of obnoxious that all those monies are directed for instruction but are taken away from supplies and programs over the years. She also felt that enrollment is declining because people have chosen to go to private schools because of what has been taken away. Again, she mentioned that woodshop does not need to be added, but felt that automotive should be. Mrs. Viola also asked about grants for the Pickett Lane culvert and Mr. Moore explained that he didn't say they were looking at grants for that, but are looking at the engineering costs now and replacing the culvert while the water was being put in and the road is paved. He did say there may be grants for some other projects and, if they are, the district will not bond for that. He explained that the townspeople would be voting on an authorization to borrow the \$6.9 million, but it will not be spent if other funds are available. Mrs. Viola explained that the Town of Durham had the Pickett Lane culvert done previously with grant monies. She also hoped that each project would go out for substantial bidding, with at least three quotes. Mrs. Viola also commented on the awful condition of Korn School and stated that she wasn't surprised by some of the maintenance items included in the proposal because it is evident with the neglect at Korn School. She hoped that that would not happen with any of the new systems being proposed. Though Mrs. Viola had stated all of this last week at the public hearing, she wanted to reiterate tonight so that everyone present could hear her. She is uncomfortable in knowing that people have failed the towns in regard to sustaining what was supposed to have been taken care of.

Hearing no further comments, Mr. Moore closed the public hearing at 9:12 PM. He thanked everyone for coming.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

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Alwaz First