

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held a public hearing on Wednesday, May 13, 2020 at 6:00 PM remotely.

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

Board members absent: Dr. Taylor.

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

Mr. Moore opened the public hearing at 6:00 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mr. Pietrasko noted that the instructions for the public hearing are posted on the RSD13 website and reviewed that callers should hit \*9 after calling, then state their name and address before their question.

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

Mr. Moore thanked everyone for sending in their comments and questions on the budget survey. He explained that it has been a challenging few months, especially students, teachers and their families. He felt that it will be particularly hard on students moving from one school to another with the most impact on the seniors who are graduating this year. The district will hold virtual awards programs and graduation ceremonies and an in-person graduation of some sort, if possible. All plans will be distributed in the near future.

Mr. Moore explained that the budget has no increase to the towns of Durham and Middlefield. It may be necessary to reallocate resources within the budget in order to meet the changing demands for shorter school hours and various other issues. He felt that the budget will need to be flexible as things will be complicated over the next few months. Mr. Moore explained that Dr. Serino will present a slideshow about the budget and slides will follow after that with many of the questions that had been submitted.

Dr. Serino thanked everyone for participating in tonight's public hearing. Mr. Yamartino and Mr. Moore will join Dr. Serino and Mrs. Neubig to review the survey questions. The phone lines will then be opened for any additional questions. When the budget was first presented in February, they had no idea of the challenges that were ahead.

The board goals and strategic plan identify outcomes and improvement strategies in student achievement, well-being and engagement as well as fiscal oversight. This budget supports those goals and strategic outcomes as well as the Portrait pledge and focuses on all children.

Dr. Serino reviewed that it is beyond the capacity of a single classroom teacher to be all things to all students. This budget looks at the support that teachers and staff need, the services and experiences needed for all students. The other area of focus in this budget is capital needs.

Looking at expenditures in salaries, there has been an increase of 2.0 FTEs from a total staff of 297.9 to 299.9. The overall staff headcount has decreased from 2015 until now, by 23.5 staff members. The salary line is funded at 95 percent. There has been a slight change in the salary line item from the original

budget in February with a slight increase due to a potential increase in summer school. Overall, there is an increase in the benefits line due to the 9.5 percent increase in the renewal rate as well as increases in workers' comp and the pension contribution. Purchased services include increases for professional development and learning for staff and also include some security measures.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that buildings and grounds include disposal services, snow removal, lawn care, district repairs and leases. There is an overall increase of \$274,000 (28.82 percent) due to a large increase in repairs. Substantial repairs are needed at the tennis courts at Cuginchaug, outdoor basketball court repairs at Cuginchaug, security blinds at Brewster, tennis court and playground repairs at Memorial and various other preventative maintenance and repairs. They did make the decision to remove the professional movers that were scheduled.

In the area of leases, there had been a total increase of \$47,000 which is the projected lease for the energy project (\$77,000). That will be offset by expiring leases in technology, auto and floor scrubber.

Operating services have an overall decrease of \$24,000 (.72 percent). This includes transportation, communications, insurance, travel and tuition. An adjustment was made to remove a used pick-up truck for buildings and grounds. There were some increases in transportation. There was an overall increase of \$8,000, primarily due to an increase in property insurance. There was an overall decrease in tuition (\$236,000) which is attributed to the proposed alternative education program.

Mrs. Neubig continued by reviewing supplies and explained that there is an overall decrease of \$166,000 (10.74 percent). Classroom supplies did increase by \$44,000 for K-8 and \$25,000 at the high school due to the district purchasing student supplies that were previously purchased by parents. Buildings and grounds supplies decreased by \$173,000 due to the energy saving measures. Textbooks have also decreased by \$25,000.

In the area of capital, there is an overall increase of \$36,000 (4.79 percent). They are looking to expand the Chromebook program for the sixth grade at Strong, iPads for grades K and 1 and an office computer. Software is \$35,000 due to cyber security software and other increases. Other equipment includes playground equipment at Lyman and Memorial (\$150,000). There is also a transfer to the capital reserve fund of \$254,000 and includes turf replacement which should be fully funded next year. They delayed the replacement of the Brewster gym floor to next year's budget, the repair of the softball fence, the purchase of a baseball cage and purchased the auditorium spotlight from this year's funds. There is a classroom furniture replacement cycle at \$40,000 and \$30,000 for unanticipated building maintenance, which has been reduced by \$20,000 from last year. Phase 2 of the sprinkler system (\$74,000) is included as well and is work being done at the vault level, not the building level.

Dr. Serino felt that capital is an example of an area that they will look like closely next year. Moving to dues and fees, Dr. Serino explained that there is a very slight increase of \$9,000 which is basically the funding for the robotics team that was previously funded by the Merwin Foundation.

Mrs. Neubig explained that there has been no increase in debt service and it is level-funded. It does include the \$6.9 million bonding package that was previously approved. The debt service will decline until the debt retirement in 2040. The debt prior to the \$6.9 million would have expired in 2025.

Moving to revenue, Dr. Serino noted that there was a slight increase in revenue in adult education. Dr. Serino explained that in-house tuition is from the Pre-K program and MTA. They are anticipating an increase in enrollment in MTA, with an increase in tuition of just over \$100,000. Activity fee and other

represents fees such as gate receipts for sporting events, student parking and STEAM camp. Pay-to-participate has been eliminated this year (\$70,000 decrease). Mrs. Neubig also noted that the 2019-2020 estimated surplus that has been applied to this budget is \$616,501. Normally, this surplus is applied to the next budget year out, but the board decided to apply it to this year's budget to keep the budget at a zero increase. The fund balance carryover is \$1.4 million, but does include some restrictions.

Dr. Serino explained that the revenue from special education excess cost is predicted to decrease because of the fact that they are proposing an in-house special education program. There is a slight increase in magnet school transportation with an overall proposed net operating budget that is the same as the current year budget. Dr. Serino explained that the next slide shows any additions or deletions that were made to the originally proposed budget.

Mrs. Neubig explained that the district anticipates a surplus in various areas due to the premature closing of buildings, such as supplies, athletics, fuel and electricity. It has been estimated to be about \$683,000 of which \$616,501 has been applied to the 2020-2021 budget. The only addition made to the proposed budget was for an increase in summer school staff. Deletions included the professional movers, music room carpet, leased truck, various supplies and the capital equipment that Mrs. Neubig had reviewed. Dues and fees for China travel have also been removed. Those deletions represented a \$168,000 decrease plus the revenue carryover at \$616,501, creating a net zero budget.

Dr. Serino explained that they worked to come in at a zero budget due to the potential challenges that the school district and the towns could be facing, but without taking away any services from students. Mrs. Neubig added that there was an enrollment change, with Durham having a reduction of 46 students and Middlefield having a reduction of 19 students. That switched the allocation rate to an increase of .18 percent to Middlefield. Both towns, however, will experience an increase due to the decrease in ECS funding.

Dr. Serino reviewed comparisons of the budget from year to year. There has been a negative change of .26 percent over the past six years. Capital and staffing are focus areas this year and have been discussed in great length at budget meetings. In certified staff, they are adding a grade 2 teacher, a coordinator of student affairs, an enrichment teacher, alternative education, literacy specialist as well as the BCBA. These additions are targeting the differentiation of support and services needed for various student populations. The systems technician is to fully staff the technology department. They also made a .5 change in the administrator HR specialist to a .5 non-certified administrator.

Mrs. Neubig once again reviewed the capital reserve transfer and the debt service. She also reviewed the equipment and repairs line items as well. Dr. Serino summarized by reviewing the per pupil expenditure for the district as well as the state average and averages for regional school districts. A question had been asked about keeping per pupil expenditures even and what reductions in the budget would need to be in order to keep it level. Mrs. Neubig explained that per pupil expenditure is the average daily membership plus some Connecticut State Department of Education adjustments and end-of-year financial submission to the state. With declining enrollment, when the denominator increases greater than the reduction in the numerator, there will be a large increase in the per pupil expenditure. The largest factor is the decreasing enrollment and the 2020-2021 budget would need to be cut by approximately \$1 million to keep the per pupil expenditure the same as the 2019-2020 budget. Mrs. Neubig did remind everyone that 2020 is an unusual year and after looking at the expenses and project surplus, she estimates a PPE of \$21,858 (a reduction of \$401 over what is on the slide). The original increase of \$22,259 was an increase of \$1,749 over 2018-2019 and recalculated number is an increase of \$1,348. Another factor will be if and when John Lyman closes at a savings of \$1 million a year.

Dr. Serino brought up the survey questions and Mr. Moore reported that several people had asked the question about the student population declining and at what point the budget will reflect that. Mr. Moore reviewed that the budget has decreased over the last six years and in 2016-2017, with a large reduction due to the closing of Korn School. Basically, the budget has remained flat while the costs to run the buildings have increased. Mr. Moore felt that the reduction in the student population is reflected by no growth in the budget.

**How can you reasonably support a budget with increased expenses by 1.5 percent to \$37.4 million when we are all very familiar with the state MBR rules?** She explained that the minimum budget requirement (MBR) is a state statute that a town may not budget less on education one year than it had in the previous year. There are exceptions to the statute, but the bulk of the MBR calculation is based on the town allocations, not the total expenditures. Expenditures can increase, but will not affect MBR in future years. The fund balance is carried over as revenue and thus reduces the towns' allocations. Mrs. Neubig explained how MBR is calculated and noted that it is not a budgeting strategy that the district typically looks at. She did explain that the MBR can potentially be reduced when Lyman closes because they can apply for a waiver.

**Why are you buying playground equipment for a school that is closing? How much will it cost to move the equipment after the school closes?** Mr. Yamartino explained that the board convened a Playground Committee to help address the capital needs of all of the recreational facilities in the district. There are very immediate needs at John Lyman and more intermediate needs at Memorial and the high school. They are looking at developing a 20-year plan. Most of the questions were regarding buying playground equipment for John Lyman School and he explained that the playscape had been built in 1994 and was constructed by volunteers. This wooden playscape served the district well for 25 years, but was inspected on December 13, 2019 and removed over the winter break, leaving the school with no equipment. The Board of Education does have a plan to close John Lyman School, but currently lacks the authority to do so, with no definitive date set. The earliest possible anticipated closing is at least two years out. Mr. Yamartino reminded everyone that the referendum failed that would have given them the authority to close the school. Recess and playground equipment are an integral part of an elementary school student's social and emotional development and the board is compelled to provide equipment for the students.

Mr. Yamartino explained that the playground committee consists of members from the Board of Education as well as community members, Middlefield's park and rec director and some teachers. They have made a recommendation for a modest playground at John Lyman. A full playscape, like what is at Brewster or Peckham Park, run in excess of \$150,000. They are proposing a \$50,000 playscape.

Regarding the question about moving the playground equipment if the school is closed, Mr. Yamartino explained that that is not usually done and when you attempt to relocate equipment, you run the risk of damage to the structural members. If it was to be relocated, it would cost \$15,000 to \$20,000.

**I urge the board to reconsider the decision to move sixth grade from Memorial to Strong next year.** Dr. Serino completely understands the concern, given the way that this school year ended, however the district's commitment is to continue the multi-year plan to reach the grade configuration that was voted on. This planning has been well underway for two to three years now and they continue to prepare the school for the sixth graders, whether in person or remotely. The room is also needed at Brewster School in the coming year, so the third graders will be moving to Memorial.

**Why did you hire more staff with declining enrollment?** Dr. Serino explained that they talked about that issue in the budget presentation. She reviewed the change in total pupil enrollment (-270 in 5 years) as well as the decreases in staffing (23.5 in 5 years).

**Why is the district planning on purchasing student supplies?** Dr. Serino noted that Mrs. Neubig had already reviewed the change that was made in terms of providing supplies for students.

**Why do you target sports as a pity party to get parents on board every time the budget is rejected? Why was pay-to-play removed from the budget? Why aren't you supporting the field storage building?** Mr. Moore explained that the athletic program budget has increased every year for the last three to four years, with an estimated cost of \$668,000 next year. The pay-to-participate fee was removed by a majority vote of the board to reduce the impact on individual families. That fee had been added in 2017 when cuts were proposed in competitive sports at the middle school. That revenue last year was about \$67,000. The board has discussed this every year since 2017 and decided that the district would run the programs and it was not necessary to further tax the families to participate. Regarding the field storage building, it was originally in the proposed budget but the majority of the board asked for it to be removed and voted on separately. This is because the referendum on the storage building, including restrooms, was around \$800,000 and was rejected by the voters. One of the things that the board did look at was using the contributions from the booster programs who had offered \$35,000 over five years and they asked the building committee to get an estimate. It was found that it would take \$300,000 to \$400,000 to add bathrooms to the storage building, but it was generally felt that that could be smaller. The estimator did give unit prices for everything included, but with the school closures, they have not yet developed an alternative cost. Mr. Moore did recommend that the board fund the actual building and let the booster clubs pay for any installation in the future.

**RSD's 13 renewal rate with ConnectiCare is 9.5 percent over this year due to the claims history. Has research been done about switching carriers to decrease the rate for benefits?** Mrs. Neubig explained that two years ago, RSD 13 went out to bid for an insurance broker and carrier.

The process resulted in a savings of over \$1.2 million in the 2019-2020 budget. The contract was a two-year commitment, with a cap of 9.5 percent. The district has an 84 to 90 percent loss ratio which would have resulted in a much larger renewal rate, had the cap not been in place. The district can go out to bid again for the 2021-2022 year.

**If you have no intended plans for Korn School and there has been talk about leveling the building, why would we spend money on the sprinkler system?** Mrs. Neubig again explained that Korn School is on the loop because it was on the original sprinkler system, but the upgrade will be done at the vault level, not at the individual buildings.

**How do you justify the extremely high administrative costs that the taxpayers have to foot?** Dr. Serino reviewed that school districts need administrators and District 13 has less than some with the same population. They have decreased administrative staff from 2016-2027 to 2021 by two, the athletic director and the transformation of the director of organization development to a non-administrator, non-union HR specialist.

Mr. Moore explained that that was all of the questions they received from the survey and Mr. Pietrasko will now accept any call-in questions.

Jeremy Renninghoff commented that he was just watching and had nothing to say, but did say hello to everyone.

There were no other callers.

Mr. Moore thanked everyone for their participation tonight and noted that the survey was still open and Mr. Moore will try to directly answer any questions emailed to him at RMoore@RSD13.org.

Mrs. Geraci was disappointed that Mr. Stengel and Mr. Stoup were not present at the meeting. Dr. Friedrich felt that they have paid their dues long in advance of tonight's public hearing.

### **Adjournment**

The public hearing was closed at 7:09 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First

### **Public Comment Received Via Email**

**From:** Robert Moore <rmoore@rsd13.org>  
**To:** Paul D Viola <>  
**Date:** May 18, 2020, 1:51 PM  
**Subject:** Re: Budget

Donia  
Your emails will all be included with the minutes of the public hearing as I have stated  
Bob

Sent from my iPhone

**From:** Paul D Viola <>  
**Date:** May 15, 2020 at 3:36:01 PM EDT  
**To:** Robert Moore <[rmoore@rsd13.org](mailto:rmoore@rsd13.org)>  
**Subject:** Re: Budget

Thank you, Bob.

Regarding Ms. Bottini, she was moved from Korn to Brewster where she had a position of a kindergarten teacher before this job placement as social worker. This should help with fact-checking - okay?. And please answer if this was a newly created position (believe so).

Do hope you have or will soon look at Middletown Press's article as well as governor's executive order referencing school budgets during this crisis before next week's scheduled BOE meeting and ask that you

share this information with the rest of the board before the next scheduled meeting of May 27 along with today's and my earlier correspondence dated May 13.

I think this submission is a reasonable request before a final decision is rendered on the proposal for next year's school budget.

Sincerely,

Donia Viola  
Durham

On Thursday, May 14, 2020, 5:20:17 PM EDT, Robert Moore <[rmoore@rsd13.org](mailto:rmoore@rsd13.org)> wrote:

Donia

Your mail will be included in the minutes of the hearing. Thanks for listening in, and note that your thoughts will be shared. I will have IT check for the call in code. I don't know anything about your last comment on Ms Bottini.

Bob

Sent from my iPhone

On May 14, 2020, at 3:08 PM, Paul D Viola <> wrote:

Bob,

Guess I glanced too quickly at the minutes for April 22nd. Thank you.

Although the governor did ask for schools to retain their budgets for the current year, he did say that his main concern was keeping on task the essential employees. The executive order did not suggest that it was to be addressed in any other way. He wanted mostly to make sure that teachers would be in place for student instruction and other personnel who are vital to continue academic learning for the entire school system.

As for our role in retaining bus drivers when there is no obvious use for them now, would you not think reasonably that the onus would be on the bus company - in this instance, DATTCO, for wages (I do not believe the district is charged or responsible for lay-offs here).

I request you insert my communication of yesterday, May 13th, into the Public Hearing held last evening. Also, I want to mention that I felt the virtual hearing was well-presented and answered several questions I had. However, I was unable to find a code which was apparently necessary for the format option to dial in on the BOE website in order to submit a question. Hopefully, this problem will not happen for any future meetings.

Please review the article on today's front page, A1, of The Middletown Press titled Debate begins over call for municipal salary freeze (East Hampton) by Jeff Mill. Thought it worth sharing when one can observe leadership in managing not only everyday affairs but like those we are experiencing since COVID-19 occurred.

Further, I recognized Ms. Bottini as a former teacher at Korn School when I read the piece on her in last Friday's issue of Town Times. Was creating the position of social worker for both Strong School and Cuginchaug High School to continue her employment since Korn School was closed?

I look forward to your response, and ask that you share this communication in its entirety with all the board members before the deciding vote on next year's RSD 13 Budget Proposal for 2020-2021.

Sincerely,

Donia Viola  
Durham

On Thursday, May 14, 2020, 10:58:05 AM EDT, Robert Moore <[rmoore@rsd13.org](mailto:rmoore@rsd13.org)> wrote:

Donia

Your comments are in the April 22 minutes.

The playscape at John Lyman was taken down in December because it had rotted and was no longer safe. The school will be open at least two years and the students need playground equipment. The playground committee determined the type of equipment needed.

With regard to your comments on employment of District staff, the Governor's executive orders required school districts to keep all employees on the payroll and further it required the maintenance of school bus contracts and the re-employment of bus drivers previously laid off by the bus company.

The surplus due to the closing of the schools is a result of savings of avoided events, sports, transportation, substitutes, etc. Normally surplus is added to the fund balance and applied to the year following the audit. This year the savings are clear because the events are not occurring so we are able to apply to next year's budget.

Thanks for continuing interest and concern with the District 13 budget.

Bob Moore

Sent from my iPhone

On May 13, 2020, at 5:41 PM, Paul D Viola <> wrote:

To Regional School District 13 Board of Education members:

I perused minutes from previous BOE meeting held on April 22, this year but did not see my written communication submitted via e-mail to the Chairman, Robert Moore, for that date which I expected to be included in the minutes for same nor did I receive any response(s) to my inquiry.

Why are you going ahead with plans for new playground equipment at Lyman School when this school was targeted for closure? It may be an emotional issue, but the fact remains that enrollment is down and continues to be trending as such which makes it difficult to understand a change in the direction of addressing this action. The reality exists that requires attention in managing this item so, if monies are in



this new budget for the above-mentioned equipment, I would suggest you remove it from consideration at this time.

As to keeping in employment nurses, psychiatrists, cafeteria workers and other non-essential employees when they are not actually working or engaged to full capacity, I would expect it is time to make lay-offs and deal with this as so many others have had to.

Phone 211 (available for any COVID-19 questions) would supplant nurses; schools being closed does not justify keeping all cafeteria workers on board. Librarians can prescribe, through teachers in place, reading material age appropriate without being on full-time.

Student Bus Company laid off 68 drivers; others learning institutions have given back funding to towns in consideration of the lesser activity(ies) taking place.

As to the \$600,000 plus in surplus funding, you need to remember that these funds are not even allowed for you to keep since it is the towns' responsibility (both Durham and Middlefield) to show evidence that they are the ones capable of funding our schools here.

I sincerely hope you give this budget proposal some more thought before accepting it as currently shown. Thank you.

Donia Viola  
Durham

**From:** Robert Moore <[rmoore@rsd13.org](mailto:rmoore@rsd13.org)>  
**Date:** May 13, 2020 at 9:55:32 PM EDT  
**To:** Carleton Stoup SR <>  
**Subject: Re: Meeting**

We miss you!  
Bob

Sent from my iPhone

On May 13, 2020, at 7:20 PM, Carleton Stoup SR <> wrote:

Hello to all,

I was watching the meeting.

A big "Thank You" to all the teachers, supporting staff and administrators!!!!!!!!!!!!

Also to the BOE.

Regards,  
Carl Stoup

**From:** Jim Irish < >

**Date:** May 13, 2020 at 7:27:19 PM EDT

**To:** "[kveronesi@rsd13.org](mailto:kveronesi@rsd13.org)" <[kveronesi@rsd13.org](mailto:kveronesi@rsd13.org)>, "[kneubig@rsd13.org](mailto:kneubig@rsd13.org)" <[kneubig@rsd13.org](mailto:kneubig@rsd13.org)>

**Cc:** "[rmoore@rsd13.org](mailto:rmoore@rsd13.org)" <[rmoore@rsd13.org](mailto:rmoore@rsd13.org)>

**Subject:** Tonight's Public Hearing

Kathryn and Kim,

You folks did an excellent job of presenting information and responding to the survey questions. And thank you again for the 0% increase. As you may have seen in both the Durham and Middlefield BOF public hearing budgets on the respective websites, it has enabled both towns to currently propose mill rates with no increases.

One question, looking forward to FY22. With the \$616K use/encumbrance of the FY20 \$683K est. surplus against the Fy21 budget, do you have an estimate of what your 6/30/20 remaining undesignated fund balance will be - and what might be reasonable expected to be applied against the FY22 budget? (We would anticipate a proposed increase in RSD13's budget for FY22 unless Covid really further confuses things) Since we've used significant amounts of the undesignated fund buying down the last several budgets (nearly \$1.5M against each of FY20 and FY21), I'm curious what's potential still left for FY22 and FY23.....

Thanks in advance for the estimate, and congratulations on what seemed like a quite successful public hearing - given these times....

Best regards,  
Jim Irish