

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, June 10, 2020 at 7:00 PM remotely.

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

Board members absent: None

Administration present: Dr. Serino, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance and Mr. Falcone, Cuginchaug Principal.

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

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

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: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

Recognition of BOE scholarship recipient

Mr. Falcone thanked the board for contributing to this scholarship that has been awarded to Thomas (T.J.) Isleib. Thomas is a member of the National Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society, plays both baseball and hockey and is a member of the Athletic Leadership Council. He is also the student that always helps other students and stops by Mr. Falcone's office to give him a heads-up about anything he sees. T.J. also helped with the China partnership. Mr. Falcone felt that T.J.'s work with Winnie is what really sets him apart. Winnie is a service dog that T.J. trained for 17 months.

T.J. stated that he and Winnie learned to understand each other over their time together. Winnie went to school with T.J. a lot of times and worked in the classes. They went for training sessions at Fidelco for about 17 months and were able to see her final test as she became a certified guide dog.

Mr. Falcone summarized that T.J. always goes above and beyond for others. Mr. Moore reviewed that the scholarship is meant for the student who best demonstrates the core ethical values. T.J. thanked everyone for the honor. Dr. Serino added a story about T.J. staying with a student from China who was upset about leaving and noted that it has been an honor to know him. T.J. will be attending UCONN next fall in their five-year integrated master's program, hoping to get his certification in education with his master's in educational psychology.

Mr. Falcone gave an update on graduation and explained that 119 out of 124 seniors picked up their caps and gowns on June 5th as well as the board's gift of a red cord and gifts from the district, including sweatshirts, masks and lawn signs. On June 16th (the originally scheduled graduation date) the Project Graduation committee is organizing a pick-up of a goodie bag for all of the seniors at 4:00 PM. The seniors will pull up in their cars and will be presented with their goodie bag. At 6:00 PM, the virtual high school graduation ceremony will be released.

On July 29th, parents can hang banners on the fence at the field and graduation is scheduled for July 31st for the 124 students only. The maximum number of people allowed to gather after July 6th will be 150 people. The ceremony will be live-streamed for parents and family members. There will also be a parade, with the faculty spaced 10 feet apart on the side of the road.

Mr. Falcone explained that they had sent a survey about graduation to all of the senior class and received 45 responses. Two priorities rose out of that survey, one being that they all wanted to be together as a class one last time and the second is they wanted to have the opportunity to walk through Cuginchaug to say goodbye to their teachers. They also wanted to have something traditional, on the school campus. Mr. Falcone has had about 100 people reach out to him with different ideas, but their focus remains on what the students want.

Mr. Falcone also reported that there was a Governor's conference call today and the Commissioner of Education shared that further guidance will be coming with regard to graduation and outdoor school activities.

Mrs. Petrella added that the lawn signs that the seniors received are awesome. Mr. Yamartino thanked Mr. Falcone for all of their work on this. Mr. Falcone added that the students are so appreciative of the district's efforts during this time.

Recognition of retirements and resignations

Dr. Serino announced that Maureen Johnson, Nancy Siedlicki, Colleen Dunn, Catherine Barra and Susan Francis are all retiring this year. She gave a brief overview of their service to the district.

Dr. Serino then noted the people who are moving on to different districts, including Sandra Milardo, Emily Sunderland, Kristina Fernandes, Heather Powers, Matt Tobias, Nancy Pakech, Theresa Levine, Robert Nemphos, Maryellen Manning and Donna Cashore.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education regular session meeting May 27, 2020

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the minutes from the May 27, 2020 meeting.

In favor of approving the minutes of the May 27, 2020 meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried, with Mrs. Geraci abstaining.

Next Board Meeting - June 24, 2020 at 7:00 PM

School Closure Update

Dr. Serino noted the death of George Floyd and the events following that impacted the district as well. They are re-examining the equity plan and how to address systemic racism. A team of superintendents have met to look at this as well. Parents have asked about the role of the Board of Education in supporting the district's action in addressing systemic racism.

She reported that materials and student belongings have been handed out to the students at both Cuginchaug and Strong, with Memorial, Brewster and Lyman to do that on Monday and Tuesday. Teachers are having end-of-year goodbyes and will work on special education and transition planning next week. They will also work on student placement for next year and curriculum writing and revision.

Dr. Serino and Mrs. Branciforte met with Dr. Brad Jubelirer about his advice on summer school. ESY (extended school year) is for students identified as needing special education services and there are currently 69 students enrolled, there are also 43 students who will get summer learning support and 10 students will receive specialized instruction for students with dyslexia. They are examining whether occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech services and ABA support can be provided in-person safely. They are hoping to have students begin transitioning back to the building in August, especially those needing ABA support and transitioning from one building to another.

Dr. Serino and Mrs. Neubig met with Blum Shapiro, the district's auditing firm, who offer consultant services in HR. They have developed a return-to-work template and will fine tune that to fit the district's needs. They anticipate a finished product by the middle of July.

The Governor's conference call today centered on graduation and child care. Rosa DeLauro has submitted a bill proposal for \$50 billion to coincide with a relief package for states. The Commissioner of Education hopes to get the return-to-school guidelines out in the next couple of weeks.

Dr. Serino then shared pictures from the parade that the teachers held, with close to 200 people participating.

Mrs. Booth asked if the students have been able to get PT, OT and speech online and Dr. Serino explained that they are. Mrs. Geraci stated that it has been done very creatively. She also thanked Alex Edwards for going above and beyond to accommodate her daughter in PE so that she always felt included.

Strategic Plan for Reopening and Recovery

Dr. Serino reviewed the six areas that were identified by the regional advisory groups and explained that they have customized them to the district. They have identified the goals, action steps, the resources, departments that will be responsible and timeline. They have developed a color coding system for communications.

Specifically, they have talked about protecting time for play and time outside for students of all ages. They have been doing surveys on distance learning and transportation. The before- and after-care survey will go out tomorrow along with questions on parents' intention to send their children to school in the fall. Dr. Serino will meet with all of the union presidents next week. Dr. Serino emphasized that the district is getting ready for the return to school in the best way they can.

Regarding the custodial staff, the total number of hours necessary may change as well as their responsibilities. Many people will clean and disinfect their own office areas.

Dr. Taylor asked what the board's involvement should be with the MOUs with the unions. He felt that there will be big challenges with staffing. Dr. Serino felt that the MOUs could be very different heading into the fall and agreed that the board should be involved. The current MOU's were fairly similar across all districts due to the framework in the executive orders.

New Business

A. Selection of search consultant process

Mr. Moore reported that they have received three proposals and would like to hold interviews during the next meeting on June 24, 2020. Mr. Moore has received quite a few recommendations and Dr. Taylor asked for him to send that information to the board members. Mr. Moore will try to get that information out. Dr. Serino added that if they ask the consultants to present, they will send a comprehensive packet beforehand. She felt that the presentations would be 30-45 minutes each, but Mr. Moore suggested 20 minutes with 10 minutes in between each presentation. Mr. Hicks agreed that it may need to be longer and suggested starting the meeting at 6:00 p.m. He also felt that it would be done during an Executive Session, but will check with Tom Hennick about that. Mrs. Geraci suggested narrowing it down to two firms to allow them more time. Mr. Hicks encouraged the board to stay with three proposals rather than two.

Mr. Yamartino stated that Mr. Hicks and Dr. Friedrich are the only members of the board who have experience with selecting a superintendent and the board will need to rely on them. He also asked if the person making the presentation will be the person the district will work with moving forward. Mr. Moore stated that he would hope the person at the interview will be the person working with the district. Dr. Friedrich suggested that they require that the person that will be working with the district is the person doing the presentation.

Mr. Moore also noted that the board may be able to meet in person on June 24th and they could have the consultants call in via Zoom. Dr. Taylor would be fine with meeting in person.

Mrs. Booth asked if the Student Achievement meeting will still be held on June 24th and Dr. Serino suggested moving that meeting to another day so the board can focus on the search consultant presentations.

Communications

Mr. Moore reported that nominations have been made for the three expiring board terms, Mr. Moore, Mr. Hicks and Mrs. Geraci. They were all nominated as were three others, Phil Augur, John Stone and Kirsten Olszewski. The election will be held as a drive-through at Korn School on June 30th, from 4:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. Absentee ballots will also be available.

Mr. Moore also announced that there will be a webinar on Friday on equity issues.

Mr. Hicks reported that he was unanimously elected the board chair at ACES once again.

Mr. Yamartino reported that the Middlefield Board of Finance approved the town's budget as presented, including the supplemental \$25,000 expenditure for the courts at Memorial Middle School.

Mrs. Geraci acknowledged Thomas Peters who organized the walk that was held last Saturday.

Director of Finance's Report

Mrs. Neubig reported that the district had placed an order for five or six foggers prior to school closure and have since received two. They were tried and found to leave a residue on surfaces, so another vendor was contacted and they have found a better product. The foggers will be used at the end of the day.

The district continues to work through ACES and CERC on PPE purchasing. The district will pay for the PPE with the hope of getting reimbursement from FEMA.

Mrs. Neubig added that they sent bus forms to parents and guardians via ParentSquare. They can then send the information to Dattco electronically. This year, they added questions about bus use and if the parents will transport their students due to COVID-19 concerns and what would need to happen for their children to ride the bus. They have received 501 responses so far and 415 of them will use the bus and 86 will not. There were various reasons for parents not having their children ride the bus. Mrs. Neubig felt that transportation will be a very big factor in what the return to school looks like and will be very costly as the state will require a monitor on each bus who will take temperatures. Dr. Taylor questioned why the bus drivers couldn't take the temperatures instead of hiring a monitor for every bus. Mrs. Neubig felt that it could be to enforce social distancing while the bus is in motion as well. She also noted that bus capacity will be decreased by three-quarters and therefore require more buses and more monitors. Dr. Taylor also asked if Mrs. Neubig had any idea how many buses will be required and she explained that they are looking at various different options at this point. They have also discussed using currently-employed staff to fill bus monitor positions. Mr. Yamartino reviewed that the state has mandated these monitors, but is not providing any funding for it. Mrs. Neubig explained that the state has recommended using the CARES act for that, but the district will be getting limited funds from that. She also mentioned that, at this time, this is a guidance that it will be mandated, but no official word has been received. Dr. Taylor summarized that these are exactly the types of issues that the board will have to deal with when thinking about bringing students back in the fall.

Dr. Serino stated that all of the decisions they have to make are multi-faceted like this and she wonders how the bigger school districts will handle it. Mr. Yamartino commented that they will get state funding. Dr. Serino felt that reasonableness will have to come into play and she believes that there will be some type of continuation of distance learning or a relaxation of the expectations such as 12 students on a school bus.

Mr. Yamartino asked if the district is mandated to bus every student or just those with special needs. Dr. Serino explained that the district is mandated to transport students. Mrs. Neubig explained that that was why they sent the survey and now the problem also becomes how to get extra bus drivers. Dr. Taylor asked if they had asked parents if they would be willing to drive their students to school to help with these extra expenditures.

Mr. Hicks asked what the rule was for the number of seats on a bus and Mrs. Neubig felt that parents are allowed to voluntarily opt out, but parents seemed to be reluctant to do that in the past. Mr. Hicks recalled that the mandate was that they had to have a seat available for every student. Dr. Serino noted that they are talking about a more widespread relaxation of that expectation. Mrs. Geraci thought that before- and after-care may help with the bus situation.

Mrs. Booth stated that she plans to probably drive her kids to school, but did say she would be using the bus just in case. She has talked to several other parents who will be driving their children when they can, but do not want to opt out of busing.

Regarding food service, meals will continue to be served until June 30th. Last week, the State of Connecticut applied to USDA for a waiver to allow sites that are not eligible to continue to serve during July and August. Mrs. Neubig reminded everyone that there is currently a shortfall in the cafeteria fund due to the absence of revenue though she is hoping for reimbursement from FEMA. Transfers have been made to keep food service running and total \$80,000 to date. Mrs. Neubig estimates the total deficit to be about \$115,000 by the end of June that will increase if they serve during July and August. She reviewed

that the food service staff was covered under the Governor's executive order and needed to continue to be paid. FEMA reimbursement will be 75 percent, leaving a deficit of about \$29,000.

Mrs. Neubig asked the board how they wanted to handle this deficit. She reviewed that the food service department runs very close to break-even every year and would probably not be able to pay back a loan. Another way to handle it would be to take it out of board expenses, paying that back with any reimbursement that is received. Mrs. Neubig hopes to know if the waiver for July and August will be granted by the June 24th meeting. Mr. Moore asked if the auditor would be amenable to either option and Mrs. Neubig explained that either one would be fine.

Mrs. Neubig went on to review the financials, explaining that the general fund is 84 percent expended and revenue is 98 percent received. Final teacher payments will be made this month. MTA is 74 percent expended and revenue is at 85 percent received. A compressor for the Pickett Lane water system needs to be replaced (\$15,000). She also reviewed that the 2019-2020 estimated surplus is about \$683,000 and \$616,000 of that will be applied to the 2020-2021 budget, with the remaining \$68,000 for the following year.

Public Comment

None.

Anticipated Executive Session

A. Discuss superintendent's evaluation

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Geraci, to move into Executive Session to discuss the superintendent's evaluation. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

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