

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session on Wednesday, July 15, 2020 at 6:00 PM remotely.

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

Board members absent: Mr. Roraback

Administration present: Dr. Serino, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance and Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Information Technology

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 6:00 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. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education regular session meeting - July 1, 2020

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the minutes from the July 1, 2020 regular session meeting.

In favor of approving the minutes of the July 1, 2020 regular meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.

A. Board of Education special session meeting - July 8, 2020

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the minutes from the July 8, 2020 special meeting.

In favor of approving the minutes of the July 8, 2020 special meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.

Next Board Meeting - July 22, 2020 at 6:00 PM

Strategic Plan for Reopening and Recovery Process

Dr. Serino reminded everyone that the district created the Strategic Plan for Reopening and Recovery prior to getting a plan from the state and they are basically taking that plan and putting into the format from the state. She reported that she received a memorandum today from Shipman and Goodwin with a list of policy amendments that they are suggesting and that will be forwarded to the board tomorrow. They are suggesting that there be a policy section specifically for COVID-19 that would include modifications to policies that are made due to the pandemic as well as new policies. She gave several examples of policy revisions that may be necessary.

Dr. Serino also reported that they learned yesterday that they can decrease the length of the school year from 180 days to 177 days. Those three days must be used before the start of the school year for staff professional development and topics should include adapting to the new school environment, health and safety and instructional considerations, social and emotional learning and development and meetings with staff and families on new safety protocols. Fortunately, the district already has three days scheduled before the school year. They discussed adding more days before school starts as well as moving the first day for students from September 1st to September 2nd or 3rd. If that decision is made, they will let parents know right away.

CEA published a document for its teachers' unions with provisions for absences, including being able to file for worker's comp if contact tracing leads back to the district setting. It also gave information on health screening and COVID testing.

Mr. Pietrasko explained that they have been looking toward using Parent Square as the district's self-certified platform which will be free. It will provide an easy checklist for both parents and staff. Depending on the answers provided, the system will then suggest the child or staff member come into school or stay home. The data can be restricted to just administrators. So far, the deadline for this software is the end of July or early August and no customization is being offered at this time.

Dr. Serino mentioned that it is their obligation to plan for a full-time reentry into the school buildings, per the state guidance. The district is currently not able to make any change to that and therefore must have three plans to be submitted to the state next Friday.

Dr. Serino reviewed that the school day is being very carefully choreographed to minimize contact that children have with each other and other adults. The administrative team talked at length today about the concept of stable cohorting and she felt that there will ultimately be a primary, secondary, tertiary cohort and then a transportation cohort. There will also be additional cohorts for special education services. They will use one cohorting model from K-5 and another in the middle school, with no cohorting done in the high school. They will try to focus on other methods to reduce student-to-student contact at the high school.

Dr. Serino explained that certain programs that have existed in the schools in the past will have to be paused. Students will not change classrooms and teachers will go into their classrooms instead as they try to maximize safety and health by minimizing movement. However, kids need to move so they are developing as many movement breaks as possible, with opportunities for students and teachers to go outside.

School-based work groups began meeting today to take the strategic plan and talk about implementing it at the individual schools. The district plan will have links to the specific school plans.

Dr. Serino will present a comprehensive overview of the plan to the board next Wednesday. The plan will be submitted to the State Department of Education on Friday and any changes and updates will be submitted as needed. Dr. Serino did receive information from the Health Director today about Florida. The teachers' union there is very adamant that they believe their lives are being put at risk by going back to school.

Dr. Serino thanked Jeff Siena, the head custodian, who came up with a color-coded protocol for the specific cloth that is used with a specific cleaner. She also acknowledged the entire custodial crew for all of their hard work. She also thanked Mark Basil, the food service director, for his hard work and Mrs. Gaudreau and Mr. Croteau for taking initiative, creating plans and being ready to do whatever it takes. The superintendent group also continues their racism and equity work.

Mrs. Neubig has run some scenarios with an increased rate for substitutes. She explained that the district currently pays \$90 per day, for either certified or support staff subs. The average around the state is about \$115, however the Connecticut technical schools pay \$155 per day. The district has historically underspent the sub line, most likely due to the fill rate of 76 percent. She used the 2018-2019 year for her analysis which did have a \$66,000 surplus in the sub line. Going to \$120 per day, the budget would increase by about \$58,000 based on absences and \$44,000 based on the current fill rate. Long-term subs are daily subs until the 40th day when they go up to \$145 per day but must be certified in the area. Those 40 days must be continuous, in one assignment. Full-year subs start out at teachers' bachelor's 1 rate which is \$265 per day.

The administrators had asked what tutors make and Mrs. Neubig explained that they are on a step grid. A beginning tutor starts at about \$106 per day and the most senior tutor is at \$116 per day, for a six-and-a-half hour day.

If the district went to \$110 per day, at the current 76 percent fill rate, the budget would increase by about \$30,000. If they were to go to \$150, the budget would increase by about \$88,000. Mrs. Neubig mentioned that if every absence was filled, the district would certainly overspend the sub line. Going back to the 2018-2019 budget surplus of \$66,000, if they were paying \$120 per day, they would have still been within the budget line.

Dr. Serino suggested putting a vote to increase the daily sub rate on the agenda for an upcoming meeting. She felt it was hard to say what the substitute situation would look like at this point. They are hoping to assign particular subs to specific buildings to diminish the number of people going into any given building. They will also run some numbers on having an additional person in each kindergarten, first and second grade class to support the teachers and the district's youngest learners in this time of transition. These same people may be able to serve as building subs as well. Dr. Serino also mentioned that teachers can elect to sub for each other, during prep time or their lunch period, and there is compensation for that.

Mrs. Geraci asked that they look at benefits plans and cost sharing of those benefit plans for substitutes. She would like for our district to look like the most attractive district in the state. Mrs. Neubig agreed to do that and also mentioned that they were looking at having subs work on a 1099 temporary basis.

Dr. Taylor asked about the timing of the surveys sent to families and staff. Dr. Serino stated that the results from the staff survey were due back by Monday and she has about 280 responses right now. She explained that she will share the plan with teachers and parents next Friday and then send a survey out the following week to see who intends to come back. People generally felt that they needed to know what the plan was before making a commitment. Dr. Taylor asked if that was contingent upon signing a MOU and

Dr. Serino felt that it was all happening simultaneously but it could be August before that is finalized. Dr. Taylor also agreed that subs will be a huge component and he would advocate to make it very competitive for subs to be in this district.

Mrs. Petrella asked about the status of before- and after-school with Dolphin Days. Dr. Serino stated that Dolphin Days has already submitted their application to the state to expand to a site on the school campus and a walk-through has been scheduled for July 20th. They will also look at expanding childcare for staff who could potentially be there all day long. Mrs. Booth asked about what ages would be cared for in the staff daycare and Dr. Serino explained that they have not gotten that far yet.

Mrs. Booth also asked if there would be a certain date that parents would have to decide by about whether they will send their child back to school. Dr. Serino felt that there would be a specific date as kids need to be assigned to classes. They hope to not have every single teacher be responsible for both distance learning and in-person learning. They are also looking into using live recordings so that kids can participate, however there are student privacy issues that need to be looked at and potential union agreements that would have to be in place. Dr. Serino also noted that students can elect to come in and go out at any time.

Dr. Serino did not have enough information to share what art and music would look like at this point. They do plan to have those teachers go into the classrooms at the elementary level, rather than having the students come out. That would not be the case at the middle school.

Mr. Yamartino asked if a Policy committee meeting can be scheduled for Monday evening so that they can address the policy issues. Dr. Serino will have Ms. Maloney send something out to everyone on the Policy committee. Mrs. Booth stated that Student Achievement is meeting on Monday. Mr. Moore was concerned that the policies should wait until after the plan is finalized. Dr. Serino thought maybe the Policy committee could meet next Wednesday before the board meeting.

Mrs. Caramanello wanted to confirm that there would be no cohorting happening at the high school and Dr. Serino explained that that is correct. She felt it would be impossible to do that at the high school and they are looking at trying to keep as little contact as possible and keeping records of who goes into each room. For lunch, they are trying to increase the lunch waves so that there are fewer students that can be spread out more. They will also try to use outside space, when possible. Mrs. Caramanello asked about air circulation in buildings and Dr. Serino explained that the system is controlled and they have been discussing the best way to do that.

Mrs. Caramanello also asked what the protocol would be if the district does get a case of COVID in one of the schools. Dr. Serino explained that the state plan talks about having a class that doesn't come back for two to five days so that a deep cleaning can be done. Dr. Serino believes that the Health Director will shut the district down if a case is identified. They are working on the protocol and what communication will be involved. Dr. Taylor did not see how the district would be able to disclose information about a case. He wondered what types of protection the state will provide for that. Dr. Friedrich wondered about how they handle the other students in a class and whether they would stay home for two weeks and/or be tested. Dr. Serino explained that the CDC does not recommend universal testing of all students and staff, as of now. Mrs. Booth added that she is told to monitor for symptoms, but not get tested if they are following protocols.

Mrs. Petrella felt that guidelines for this protocol should be provided by either the CDC or the state. Mr. Yamartino reminded her that she was asking for guidance from the same people who are mandating that students go back to school. Mrs. Geraci noted that there are strict protocols in place in her company.

Mrs. Geraci asked if the district would be notified by DPH if a child is infected. Dr. Serino explained that DPH can only release information of an address of an infected person in the community to emergency response teams. Mrs. Geraci also thought that one of Shipman's policies would be that a staff member would have to provide a positive test result in order to get the 50 hours. Dr. Serino explained that DPH would be providing a template to assist leaders to help make decisions about closing schools.

Dr. Taylor asked if there would be a way to allow high school students to eat in their home rooms rather than the cafeteria. He felt that it was probably the only time of the day when the students will be allowed to have their mask off and therefore would be the highest risk period. Dr. Serino reiterated that they talked about small lunch waves in the cafeteria and also having lunch outside as well as some other locations in the building. Mrs. Caramanello discussed how they will disinfect between lunch waves and Dr. Taylor explained that it would be extremely unlikely that you could say that any lunch wave would be safe from another as they have now found that the virus is airborne. Dr. Serino noted that they would always err on the side of extreme caution.

Committee Reports

A. Utilization Committee Meeting - July 9, 2020

Dr. Taylor reported that they talked about the amendment to the Regional Plan and they all agreed that this wasn't the time to pursue this any further. They felt it should be delayed until May of next year. There was a lot of discussion about Korn School and Mrs. Neubig provided the costs of maintaining it in a mothball situation and utilizing it over the next 15 years. The discussion centered around moving forward with demolition, recognizing the costs of that. Unfortunately, they had not given the town a time line on acquisition vs. demolition.

Mr. Yamartino felt that they were going to provide a letter to the town to inform them that the district intends to move forward in the budget process of putting a bonding item on the referendum in May to demolish Korn School. They were asked to include the costs to get the building usable in that letter as issues have come up with regard to mold, flooring, ventilation systems, etc.

Dr. Taylor asked if the board felt that they needed to vote on that again or just agree that that would be the plan. Mrs. Geraci felt that they should send the letter. Mr. Hicks felt that this conversation was out of order and Dr. Taylor stated he was just trying to figure out what to put on the next agenda and not to have a vote tonight. Mr. Hicks felt that the conversation was not on the agenda, but Dr. Taylor stated that it was communication from the Utilization committee.

Mr. Moore will draft a letter to the Town of Durham. Dr. Friedrich felt that the chairman of the board can put items on the agenda and perhaps he would put that vote on the agenda and they no longer need to discuss it.

Dr. Taylor also reported that the projected numbers in two or three years are for about half of the maximum number of students at the high school, with numbers between 320 and 340 with the maximum in the 640 range. They will need to look at how to utilize that space in the next few years.

Mr. Yamartino explained that, while they decided not to go to the communities about a change to the regional plan until May, they were very clear that they will continue on the path of the development of a single program.

B. Educational Resources Committee Meeting - July 15, 2020

Mrs. Geraci reported that Mrs. Neubig reviewed the unbudgeted items that have been spent to date and they are looking for ways to redirect budgeted items. They also reviewed ongoing FEMA expenses. The committee will begin meeting every other week.

Communications

Mr. Moore stated that Marianne Zieminski has sent a letter about using alternate days for classes. They also received a letter from Glenn Hutter with a large series of questions. Heidi Johnson sent a general letter of support. Mr. Moore and Dr. Serino will be meeting with Brewster, Lyman and Memorial parents tomorrow at 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM, with 30 in each session. Mr. Moore explained that board members are welcome to join, as long as they don't have a quorum. They will meet again on Monday at 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM with middle school and high school parents.

Mr. Moore has sent guidance from the CIAC and a policy on masks from CAFE out to everyone. He also sent a letter to the Town Times on a review of budget issues. The newsletter has been finished and should be mailed out soon.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Geraci, 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, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First