

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, December 9, 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, and Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance

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

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Taylor made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, 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, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Public Comment

Donia Viola asked why a special meeting is being scheduled for December 16th and asked if the board was still in the process of hiring a position for Human Resources and their reasoning behind that.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education regular session meeting - November 11, 2020

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education regular session meeting of November 11, 2020, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the November 11, 2020 regular session 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 - December 16, 2020 at 7:00 PM (special meeting)

Mr. Moore explained that this meeting will be held to recognize Dr. Serino's years of service.

COVID-19 Response Update

Dr. Serino recognized the efforts of everyone in their district for their continued diligence. Since the last board meeting on November 11th, the district has had 17 more cases and of those, three have resulted in quarantining more people than just the positive case. Two cases after the Thanksgiving holiday prompted the district to move to fully remote in the high school due to the numbers of students and staff that were quarantined.

The cases reported on Sunday, November 29th, resulted in three staff members and 30 students at Strong and 18 staff members and 103 students at the high school that had to quarantine. That was the basis for the decision to have all students learn remotely. Since that time, the district has been notified of more cases but none have required quarantining other than the case.

Dr. Serino also updated the board that Cohort C has increased by 11 students and now has 249 students. They have noticed that some high school students that have been out on quarantine have chosen to remain remote learners. They have also heard from some parents with concerns about the number of cases in the communities and in preparation for visitors over the holidays.

Dr. Serino also mentioned the hope of a vaccine and possible modifications from the CDC about quarantining. They met with the State Department of Education and the Department of Public Health on Tuesday and they anticipate a recommendation from DPH on quarantining.

Dr. Serino stated that the district is feeling the heaviness of the virus and all the restrictions, but people are taking the opportunity to reach out and support each other.

Mrs. Booth asked if they are still requiring a two-week notice in order to switch to Cohort C and Dr. Serino felt that it was grade-specific and in some cases, the student needs to remote in with the classroom teacher because Cohort C is at the limit of total number of students. Mrs. Booth thanked everyone for all of their hard work and appreciates keeping the students in school. Dr. Serino acknowledged the support of the community.

Strategic Coherence Plan Update

Dr. Serino reviewed that they continually monitor the goals and outcomes and associated strategies. She felt that this year has been of significant reaction in terms of decision-making relative to COVID. The Strategic Coherence Plan reminds them that they are not just in a reactionary mode and that there is a long term vision and plan that they are working towards.

Dr. Serino then went on to review the leading and lagging indicators in student achievement and mentioned the focus on academic stamina. They continue to look at authentic learning and the instructional rounds process. SRBI work continues as well. Mrs. DiMaggio is working with the high school in terms of a blended learning academy and is looking for grant opportunities. Portrait of the Citizen work continues.

Dr. Serino is proud of the way the district has considered well-being and they will hold some focus groups with staff and students, readminister the climate survey and develop action steps. The partnership with CCSU will continue and health and safety work continues as well. Equity and race work is being done in both the Policy and Well-Being Committees.

In the area of engagement, the Portrait of the Citizen work continues and they are working to expand MTA marketing and programming. Dr. Serino also hopes that the Utilization committee continues work on the district-wide grade reconfiguration and plans for the buildings.

Dr. Serino reported that they have begun the budget process internally and she will pass that baton to Dr. Schuch. She does believe it is an important time to redesign the budget engagement process as well as the communication framework.

Committee Reports**A. Policy Committee Meeting - November 18, 2020
First Read: Policy Regarding Retention of Electronic Records and Information**

Mr. Hicks summarized that the policy is a rather lengthy one, but is necessary. He hopes to have a conversation about the policy at the January board meeting.

Dr. Friedrich asked Dr. Serino if she felt this policy will mean that changes will need to be made in IT and information handling. Dr. Serino reported that Mr. Pietrasko was present at the meeting and has reviewed the policy. Mr. Pietrasko explained that the policy declares that the email server is not a proper records retention or storage device and records will need to be saved in another manner.

B. Human Resource Committee Meeting - November 23, 2020

Mrs. Petrella explained that they reviewed both student enrollment and the number of teachers which have remained about the same, with some repurposing of staff. Dr. Serino explained that they are going to propose a change in the title from STEAM Coordinator to Technology Specialist based on the changes in responsibilities. Dr. Taylor asked if there was a reason for the district to move toward that in the long-term and that he felt that a Technology Specialist would be a help for teachers whereas the STEAM coordinator was more for the students. Dr. Serino felt that the most appropriate way to discuss the title change proposal would be in the budget discussions.

Mrs. Petrella also reported that they also discussed how the role of the Director of Curriculum has really expanded and may be discussed in the future as well. They talked about the possible blended academy in the high school. They also discussed that there are six certified teachers working remotely at the moment and four non-certified staff as well. They had a discussion about virtual learning proctors who monitor the students who are in school and being taught by a remote teacher at the high school level.

There was also discussion about coordinating the schedules between the middle school and high school so teachers can go back and forth between the two buildings as enrollment changes. Mrs. Petrella mentioned that they did not discuss the HR position in the future and felt that Mr. Brough is doing a phenomenal job. Dr. Serino explained that the HR position continues to be a non-certified position, non-union position and is currently being held by Mr. Brough. Dr. Serino felt that the position should remain a 1.0 for the foreseeable future. Mr. Moore reminded everyone that they had eliminated an administrator position who was doing some HR work.

C. Well-Being Committee Meeting - December 8, 2020

Mr. Moore reported that the committee met yesterday and reviewed the draft of a diversity and equity policy. He hopes to have that draft sent out to everybody fairly soon.

They also discussed student well-being and the students reported on what's going on with the students. They noted that the majority of students are pleased with the decision to have no homework on Wednesdays. Some students have expressed concern about missing the connection with other students when learning remote. They have also given feedback to the teachers on what has been working. The students are happy to be in school and understand that it changes every day.

The teachers talked about their needs, with one being able to reach out to and assist each other as much as possible as well as with the students. Both students and teachers like the group meets and being able to see each other. Mr. Hicks found it refreshing to hear from both the teachers and students. Dr. Friedrich felt it was clear that the tools that are available for teachers create a really different environment and the sharing of ideas is more important than ever. He also felt it was important for the board to do as much as possible to assist them with that.

Dr. Serino reiterated that it is very unique to the district to have staff and student representation to talk very openly and honestly about how they are doing. This is a very emotionally challenging time for staff and students alike. As the days get colder and the potential of an increase in cases is on the horizon, with the peak of virus anticipated at the end of January, many people are struggling. One of the students wished for a mechanism for them to give teachers feedback, to thank them and let them know what's working and for the teachers to let them know how they are doing as well.

D. Educational Resources Committee Meeting - December 9, 2020

Mrs. Geraci explained that Blum Shapiro presented the audit to the ERC and it was a clean report. They also had an overview from Morgan Stanley, but they will meet again next week to go over some last minute questions.

Communications

Mr. Moore received a letter from Donia Viola which has been answered. Todd Petronio held a remote fall sports banquet and each coach did a very nice presentation. Mr. Moore hoped that everyone had a chance to look at the recent video from CVEF that highlighted graduates from Coginchaug.

Mr. Hicks mentioned the five-part presentation he attended about sexual harassment, FOIA, special education obligations, free speech and school mascots.

Mr. Roraback noted that Rod Storey, a former CRHS principal, had passed on October 13, 2020.

Mr. Hicks mentioned that Thomas Edison Middle School will not exist next year as ACES is pulling out and Meriden is taking over the building. ACES is currently in the process of negotiating the purchase of the Chase Collegiate School in Waterbury that includes around 42 acres and comes fully furnished.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Serino was on the call from the library at Coginchaug and noted that she has attended around 500 board and committee meetings over the past seven years and reflected on the level of dedication and commitment of the district. At her last official board meeting, she is truly grateful for the opportunity to lead the district.

Dr. Serino reported that the Community Drop-Off was held last Saturday in place of the Community Round-Up and they were able to collect 10,863 pounds of food and \$4,600 in donations.

Dr. Serino then went on to review the budget priorities and parameters for next year's budget and explained that the district will be going into the 2021-2022 school year with the lowest fund balance that she can recall (\$384,000). The fund balance has fluctuated from over \$3 million to this new balance. They are looking forward to a year of recovery. She reviewed that the team is committed to maintaining

transparency and to collaborate with the communities. They commit to adhere to a zero-based budget approach and align budget resources to strategic priorities. They will always maintain class sizes per the Board of Education guidelines and maintain sufficient funding to meet negotiated agreements. Dr. Serino noted that they finalized negotiations with the Support Staff union on Monday night and explained that the district has not had to go to mediation or arbitration in the past seven years. They will look to maintain capital improvements and continue the energy efficiency upgrades as well as use critical prioritization throughout the budget process.

Mr. Yamartino stated that he reminds everyone that the Board of Education depleted the fund balance in order to present a zero increase budget, at the towns' request, and that next year will present a challenge and they should anticipate an increase.

Director of Finance's Report

Mrs. Neubig reported that she provided the allocations to each town at the end of October and Durham did decrease by 84 students and Middlefield decreased by 53 students, down a total of 137 students from October 1, 2019. With that, Durham had an increase of .48 percent in their allocation and Middlefield realized a decrease of .48 percent. Durham's allocation rate is 66.74 percent (up from 66.26 last year) and Middlefield's allocation rate is 33.26 percent (down from 33.74 last year).

MTA is at 17 percent expended and revenue is at 23 percent received. The general fund is at 36 percent expended and 41 percent revenue received. Comparing that to last year, the district is on track. She does, however, expect that to go off track in the next several months. Some of the larger expenditures this month included fall sports stipends, tuition bills and transportation and robotics competition fee.

Blum Shapiro presented the 2019-2020 audit report at the ERC meeting tonight. The fiscal year ended with a surplus of \$838,000 unexpended funds, due to the unanticipated school closure. Revenue was down due to preschool not being held, some parking fees were refunded and the buildings were not rented out. Salaries finished out the year very close to budget with just \$105,000 surplus and Mrs. Neubig noted that spring sports stipends were not paid. Salaries were paid in full, per executive order. Purchased services had an unexpended balance of \$136,000, primarily because there was not a lot of snow removal needed. The SRO had a shortened year and was not paid for the time the district was in remote learning.

Operational services saw a surplus, primarily due to the 80 percent payment of the transportation contract and the lack of field trips and athletic events. Supplies had a surplus, with a reduction in consumable supplies and reductions in heating oil and electricity.

The fund balance ended the 2019-2020 year at \$2.4 million which is a decrease of \$509,000. That decrease was a budgeting strategy to use funds to balance the budget. The fund balance carryover is \$384,000 to be used to balance the 2021-2022 budget. If there is a surplus at the end of this year, the board can decide to allocate some of that surplus to the budget.

The audit report showed \$558,000 committed and that is basically accounts payable. There were also some ongoing budgeted items in that number, such as the culvert expenses and security vestibules.

The cafeteria fund lost \$126,000, due to the executive order that required the district to pay the staff even when lunches were not being sold. Mrs. Neubig did submit an application to FEMA for a 75 percent reimbursement and is waiting to hear. The general fund has been transferring funds to the cafeteria fund on a loan basis and have transferred \$80,000 through June 30th. A total of \$36,000 was transferred to the

general fund, after board approval, and if the FEMA reimbursement comes through, the cafeteria deficit will come down to \$6,532.

MTA finished the year with an \$84,000 surplus, of which \$60,000 was used to balance the general fund balance for 2020-2021, leaving a net income of \$24,000. Revenue was down due to lower than anticipated enrollment as well as the unanticipated closure. Expenses were under-expended by \$306,000 and there was a surplus in salaries due to not having summer school or extended school year.

Mrs. Neubig explained that the schools have submitted their budget proposals and Ms. Popp has created a list of the new proposals. They will meet with the principals next week to begin priority discussions.

Morgan Stanley presented the pension fund performance to the ERC committee and suggested a few manager fund changes. The committee will reconvene next Wednesday to answer any questions and vote on the motion.

Mr. Yamartino reiterated that the audit was clean and there were no adverse findings. They did have a couple of IT recommendations.

New Business

A. Possible vote to accept Merwin Fund donation

Mr. Moore explained that the Merwin Fund has negotiated with Dr. Serino and Mrs. DiMaggio to start funding the learning academy, but the grant has not yet been received and no action is necessary.

B. Possible vote to accept audit report

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to accept the 2019-2020 audited financial statements from Blum Shapiro.

In favor of accepting the 2019-2020 audited financial statements from Blum Shapiro: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Public Comment

Donia Viola felt that, because of the low fund balance, constraint should be used in the upcoming budget and she would like to know if someone will get back to her with information about the administrative position that was eliminated in order to have the HR position. She also asked if the new superintendent will be coming on at a salary level that has been established for the outgoing superintendent. Mrs. Viola also asked what the terms of the Support Staff contract. Mr. Moore explained that someone will contact her.

Anticipated Executive Session

- A. Discussion and possible action regarding amending superintendent-elect's contract to modify his start date**
- B. Discussion and possible action regarding amending incumbent superintendent's contract to modify compensation**

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hicks, to enter into executive session for discussion and possible action regarding amending superintendent-elect's contract to modify his start date and amending the incumbent superintendent's contract to modify compensation.

In favor of entering into executive session for discussion and possible action regarding amending superintendent-elect's contract to modify his start date and amending the incumbent superintendent's contract to modify compensation: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Upon return from the executive session, the following motions were made.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to authorize the board chair to execute an amendment to Dr. Doug Schuch's employment contract to modify the date that the contract term begins from January 28, 2021 to January 4, 2021.

In favor of authorizing the board chair to execute an amendment to Dr. Doug Schuch's employment contract to modify the date that the contract term begins from January 28, 2021 to January 4, 2021: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to authorize the board chair to execute an amendment to Dr. Kathryn Serino's employment contract to pay her 100 percent of the remainder of her 2020-2021 annuity payments upon her retirement on December 31, 2020.

In favor of authorizing the board chair to execute an amendment to Dr. Kathryn Serino's employment contract to pay her 100 percent of the remainder of her 2020-2021 annuity payments upon her retirement on December 31, 2020: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Mr. Moore will bring interim language to the special meeting that will be held next week.

Adjournment

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

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

Meeting was adjourned at 8:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First