

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, July 7, 2021 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug High School.

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

Board members absent: Ms. Geraci, Mr. Hicks and Dr. Taylor

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology

Dr. Schuch called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Election of Officers

Dr. Friedrich made a motion to nominate Mr. Moore as Chairman. Hearing no other nominations, motion to elect Mr. Moore as chair carried unanimously.

Mr. Moore asked for a nomination for Secretary. *Dr. Friedrich made a motion to nominate Mr. Hicks as Secretary. Hearing no other nominations, motion to elect Mr. Hicks as secretary carried unanimously.*

Mr. Moore then asked for a nomination for Treasurer. *Dr. Friedrich made a motion to nominate Ms. Geraci as Treasurer. Hearing no other nominations, motion to elect Ms. Geraci as treasurer carried unanimously.*

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Yamartino 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, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education regular meeting - June 9, 2021

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2021 Board of Education regular meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the June 9, 2021 Board of Education regular meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Next Board Meeting - August 11, 2021 at 7:00 PM

Recognition - CRHS Baseball and Softball State Champions

The Board then moved to the cafeteria for the recognition.

Mr. Moore acknowledged the efforts of both teams and noted how rare it is to have two state champions.

Dr. Schuch introduced himself to everyone and explained that while he appreciates excellence in athletics, he also appreciates teamwork and sportsmanship. He reviewed that the softball team played four games in the tournament and outscored their opponents 36-4 while the baseball team played five games and outscored their opponents 56-5. Dr. Schuch was able to see a number of the games and recognized that both teams were dominant champions. He was also proud that the teams cheered each other on at their respective championships.

Mr. Petronio thanked everyone for coming. He then introduced the six captains. Owen Clancy thanked the Board of Education, Dr. Schuch, Mr. Falcone, Mr. Petronio, coaches, staff and their families for their constant support. He noted that the boys have been playing together since they were six and have become a family. Their parents always told them they would win a state championship and that gave them the drive to keep working hard to achieve their dream.

Evan Faiella also thanked the Board, Dr. Schuch, Mr. Falcone and Mr. Petronio as well as the coaches and teammates. He will always remember the last game, winning the state championship. He also thanked all of his coaches for their countless hours throughout Little League. Matt hoped that it doesn't take the district another 50 years to win a state championship.

Kolby Pascarelli thanked the Board, coaches, families and teammates for their endless support. He thanked the coaches for their confidence in the team. Kolby also congratulated the softball team.

One of the softball captains thanked the Board of Ed, Mr. Petronio, coaches and parents, but most importantly the team. She recognized that this team is a very young team who worked hard and learned to play together. Another softball captain thanked everyone for coming to the celebration and thanked their coaches. She also thanked all of the fans and parents and especially Dr. Schuch for supporting them. She never had a doubt that the team could accomplish this. She also thanked her mom and dad for all of their support over the years. The third softball captain thanked the Board of Ed, coaches, families and the team. She also congratulated the baseball team.

Mr. Petronio also congratulated the six captains, explaining that they waited 19 months to get onto the field and overcame challenges. These six captains never complained, but always asked how they could help. They were fantastic go-betweens between Mr. Petronio, the coaching staff and the teams.

Coach DeMartino thanked the Board for inviting them tonight. He noted how young the team was. Sixteen out of 21 players were first-year players, but he quickly learned that they were full of energy, optimism and talent. Over half of the team was quarantined due to COVID in the preseason, with two players actually having it. They all had to wear masks during practice and used FaceTime so that missing players could be a part of practice. After practice, the girls sat in a circle and wiped down every softball they used with disinfectant wipes. After starting the season 3-2, Coach DeMartino told the team that the rest of the season was up to them. Something clicked at that point and practices became more focused and intense. The team won the next 13 games in a row, before losing to North Branford 1-0 in the Shoreline conference semifinal.

The team finished the regular season 16-3 and were feeling really good about the Class S tournament as the number 4 seed. After a first round bye, they got by Wheeler 12-0 and then Thomaston 5-0 in the quarterfinals. In the semifinals, they faced Notre Dame Fairfield, the number 1 seed, and held off a bases loaded threat in the bottom of the last inning to win 5-2. The championship game was a rematch of the 2019 title game against Somers. The game was scoreless until the top of the third when Cuginchaug got a home run over the centerfield fence for a 1-0 lead. They never looked back and exploded for 14 runs on 17 hits. Every player on the team had a hit during that game. They won the Class S State Championship 14-2. Coach DeMartino then talked about the fire truck brigade, with cars pulled over and honking their horns and people standing outside their house celebrating. The Little League game stopped and the players lined the fences and cheered. He then thanked the CIAC and RSD 13 for allowing the season to happen this year and Mr. Petronio for helping them work through all of the issues. He thanked the parents for their support, the Blue Devil Diamond Club for their volunteer work and fund-raising, Paul Augeri from Middlesex County Sports for his media coverage, Coach John for all of his support and motivation and the three seniors who were incredible leaders. Coach DeMartino then acknowledged the members of the team.

Coach Basil congratulated the Lady Blue Devils for their outstanding year. He thanked Dr. Schuch for supporting the athletes. He thanked Mr. Moore and the Board for recognizing the athletes. The baseball team had 10 seniors this year, with nine positions on the field. Everyone had a role on the team and it was all about teamwork. The three captains were elected because Coach Basil saw their ability to make the people around them better, but all of the seniors had some responsibility. Communication was key with this team. This team practiced with a purpose and did whatever was asked of them. The team was built on pitching, with defense second and their hitting supported everything else. Coach Basil is proud of these young men as players, but most certainly as people. They played the game with sportsmanship and with purpose. He thanked Mr. Petronio for his support and his connection with the players. He also thanked his coaching staff, the group of parents, the fire department for the bus ride and everyone else for their support throughout the year.

Mr. Petronio and Dr. Schuch then presented a gift to each of the players. Mr. Petronio added that they have state championship banners as well but they will present them at a sporting event in the fall.

Mr. Petronio concluded by thanking the Board of Education for their support of the kids and the coaching staff.

Plastics Proposal: Sustainability at CRHS - Mrs. Callahan's 9th Grade Geophysical Science Honors Class

Mrs. Callahan gave an introduction to the board explaining that the students were in her honors geophysical science class and they ended the year with a unit on sustainability. The students had asked if they could do more to promote change and have come up with a plastics proposal.

The students noted that it was very encouraging that the Board of Education allowed them to come and share their ideas. Sophia explained that plastic is wonderful because it is durable however that also makes it horrible. Plastic stays around pretty much forever and keeps accumulating in the environment. A video was played about plastics in the oceans.

The class decided to do some research and found that it was important to act fast because, by 2026, climate change could become irreversible. Their generation knows what needs to be done, but needs the older

generation to listen. Less than 10 percent of plastic is recycled and it takes plastic 500 years to break down. The waste produced today can actually affect health.

Dia went on to review the health concerns, including the fact that 93 percent of Americans over the age of six have tested positive for BPA hormone receptors that are linked to breast cancer, early puberty and infertility. There are also developmental and reproductive toxicities. Dia also reviewed that the North Atlantic Ocean has 930 billion pieces of plastic in it, the Indian Ocean has 1.3 trillion pieces and the North Pacific has 2 trillion pieces. The plastic can't be picked up because it can't be seen. This all starts with litter going into a sewage drain and into the waterways. From there, it flows directly into the oceans where fish and birds try to eat it. This causes choking, entanglement and indigestion problems leading to death. Scientists have predicted that by 2050, there will be more plastic than fish by weight in the oceans. Dia also noted that 1.5 million pounds of plastic is being made every minute of every day and 325 micro plastic particles can be found in a single liter water bottle. Seventeen minutes is the average working life of a single-use plastic bag.

Jason stated that COVID and its regulations have resulted in the district using a lot more plastic than usual. The first big waste of plastic used in the school is student ID cards which are given to every student in every school every year. He suggested using a QR code instead. Another waste is plastic gloves. There are compostable plastic gloves available on Amazon and they are cheaper than what is currently used.

Carter talked about waste disposal at CRHS. There are six large garbage bins in the cafeteria, but only one small recycling bin. He mentioned that all of the bins are made of plastic and lined with plastic bags. The class ran an experiment of putting a small Post-It note at the bottom of the garbage bin to see if the custodians changed the bag when there was nothing in it. The custodians did change the bags. This year alone, over 21,000 single-use plastic bags were used. Carter noted that most landfills are located in low-income and minority group areas. He proposed some solutions, including changing the trash less often and adding more recycling bins. Garbage bins are closer than recycling bins throughout the school. He felt that a cultural shift was needed.

Claire stated the utensils used during lunches are a huge source of plastics. During the school year, 1,000-packs of spoons, forks and knives are purchased, with each costing about \$38.00. Alternatives are available at about the same price. There are compostable birchwood forks on Amazon for \$40.00. There are also birchwood sporks at \$44.21, however being a spoon and fork together cuts the cost almost in half. Another major issue is plastic water bottles. Claire suggested using paper cups which are recyclable or compostable. She also suggested that the school needs to shift over to more of a composting culture and more composting/recycling bins would need to be provided. Educational resources are available to help with this, including clips of YouTube. Claire suggested that the videos could be shown at an assembly or during home room. She added that a composting bin at the school is already being used to provide soil for the small garden. Claire suggested that small farms in the community can pick up the food waste to use as well.

Tiana understood that this may seem overwhelming, but the district could start small. Durham relies heavily on agriculture and the environment. The Durham Fair provides many opportunities for the town, including fund-raising by local groups and donations they make. She believes that the problems presented here tonight are important and hope that the board does as well. Tiana also proposed setting up a booth at the Durham Fair for fund-raising to help offset any associated costs. She also felt that the positive PR from being a sustainable school would drive more environmentally-conscious people to enroll their kids here in this era of declining enrollment. They were taught about the importance of responsibility in elementary school and feel that that should be central in their entire lives. She felt that by not taking action on such prominent issues is

avoiding that responsibility. The CRHS mission statement mentions the local and global communities and the proposal tonight is their way to improve upon those communities. The students called on the board for help.

Mrs. Booth commented that it was pretty amazing that the students presented here tonight. Mr. Moore asked if the students would be willing to work on these issues as the board's representatives and they agreed.

Resolution to call a Special District Meeting/Public Hearing to Present the Proposed Amendment to the Plan of Regionalization for District 13

Mr. Moore suggested having the district meeting before the regular board meeting on August 11, 2021 and then vote to set the date for the referendum after the public hearing. That must be filed with the Town Clerks by September 2nd to get on the November ballot.

Mrs. Booth asked when they could no longer spend money on this issue and Mr. Moore explained that that would be August 11th. Mrs. Booth noted that she hasn't seen anything from the public relations firm other than what the board has received privately. Mr. Moore clarified that they are meeting on Monday and documents will start coming out after that.

Mrs. Petrella worried about having the public hearing before a board meeting in order to allow the public enough time. Mr. Moore felt that the board meeting could start at 6:00, recess for the public hearing at 7:00 and reconvene after that. Mrs. Booth was concerned about summer vacations and how many people will actually show up for the public hearing. Mrs. Petrella reminded everyone that people can submit written correspondence if they are unable to attend. Mr. Moore also suggested that they can hold the hearing open for a few days as they don't have to act until September 2nd.

Mrs. Booth read the resolution. That Regional School District 13, Town of Durham and Middlefield, resolution to call a special district meeting to present a proposed amendment to the Plan of Regionalization for the district. Be it resolved, that pursuant to section 10.47c of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Regional School District 13 Board of Education hereby call a special district meeting to be held on August 11, 2021 for the purpose of holding a public hearing to present and receive public comment on a proposed amendment to the Plan of Regionalization for Regional School District 13. Further resolved, that the attached warning of special district meeting is hereby approved. Regional School District 13 warning of special district meeting: August 11, 2021, 7:00 pm. The electors of the towns of Durham and Middlefield, Connecticut are hereby warned and notified that a special district meeting will be held at the Coginchaug Regional High School auditorium, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut on August 11th, 2021 at 7:00 pm for the following purposes: Item 1, to choose a moderator for said meeting. Item 2, to hold a public hearing to present and receive public comment on a proposed amendment to the Plan of Regionalization for Regional School District 13. A copy of the report on the proposed amendment to the Plan of Regionalization is on file and available for inspection at the office of the Town Clerk of Durham, the office of the Town Clerk of Middlefield and on the district's website at www.rsd13ct.org. Following the special district meeting, the district's Board of Education is expected to set the date for a referendum vote in Durham and Middlefield for approval or disapproval of the proposed amendment to the Plan of Regionalization. Dated at Durham, Connecticut, this 7th day of July, 2021. Regional School District 13 Board of Education, Robert Moore, Chairman.

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to adopt the resolution as read by Mrs. Booth.

In favor of adopting the resolution as read by Mrs. Booth: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanella, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Communications

Mr. Moore reported that graduation was a great event.

Mr. Yamartino received a text message reporting that all of the pickle balls courts were filled over the weekend. He reported that there are several groups that have organized and use the courts regularly. He also noted that the trees behind the courts have been removed. Dr. Friedrich recognized Mr. Yamartino's efforts for the pickle ball courts and Mr. Yamartino noted that it was a committee effort with the support of the board and Middlefield's Board of Finance.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Schuch thanked everyone for recognizing the accomplishments of the softball and baseball teams as well as the plastics proposal.

Dr. Schuch has also received correspondence about the health and safety protocols being proposed for the fall. He explained that the district is currently under an executive order that states that face coverings are required in schools, but that is due to expire on July 17th. No direction has come from the state about whether or not that will continue. Dr. Schuch did share that not one person has asked for the mask mandate to continue. He explained that the district will follow any state mandate, though they are hoping that there is no mandate. If left up to a local decision, Dr. Schuch personally feels that it will be difficult to mandate wearing masks in school when they are allowed to not wear masks just about everywhere else. Families would then have to make individual decisions.

Dr. Schuch has also encouraged everyone to get vaccinated as he believes that decreases the likelihood of any type of outbreak, quarantining or serious illness.

Director of Finance's Report

Mrs. Neubig reported that the fiscal year closed with the general fund 99.94 percent expended. A lot of that is due to some line items being over-expended and others being under-expended, primarily due to COVID. Salaries were over-expended, but were offset with other accounts. They also received a \$574,000 incentive from Eversource for the energy project, which was a little higher than expected. There have also been some savings in outplacement costs, travel, supplies and dues and fees. Overall, the year could end in an unaudited estimated surplus in the \$700,000-\$800,000 range with \$400,000 committed to balancing the 2021-2022 budget.

The district also received \$380,000 in coronavirus relief funds which paid for PPE and COVID related substitutes. The ARP application is due in August with a 2024 deadline for expenditures. MTA was 78 percent expended and the general fund has been reimbursed for health insurance. Mrs. Neubig estimates a \$229,000 surplus from MTA this year with under-expended accounts due to COVID.

Mrs. Neubig reported that the auditors were out in early June for preliminary work and will be back in October, with the final audit report being available by December.

Mrs. Neubig reported that they met with the Benchwarmers yesterday to discuss advertising on the athletic fields. They will look into policies about this issue and bring it to the board for review.

Mrs. Booth asked about the extra FTE above what was budgeted and Mrs. Petrella felt that it was a special education assistant. Mrs. Neubig will look into it and email the information.

New Business

A. Teacher and administrator evaluation flexibilities

Dr. Schuch explained that flexibility in evaluations has been provided by the State Department of Education due to COVID. Everyone has blessed this and he is now recommending this to the board. Mrs. Keane added that it was very similar to what was done this year. Mr. Yamartino questioned if board approval is really necessary in this case, but Dr. Schuch noted that Mrs. DiMaggio had asked for the board to approve it.

Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to accept the teacher and administrator evaluation flexibilities.

In favor of accepting the teacher and administrator evaluation flexibilities: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

B. Vote to approve CRHS Latin instructional materials

Mr. Moore explained that this is basically approving the purchase of the materials, not the content.

Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve CRHS Latin instructional materials.

In favor of approving CRHS Latin instructional materials: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Public Comment

Mike Charron, from Durham, understands that the governor may be attempting to extend the mask mandates in schools and asked the board not to impose a mask mandate for the upcoming school year. If the board did not want to challenge the governor's executive order, he asked that they at least come up with a plan with clear language stating the masks would be optional for students in the district. As a high school teacher, he witnessed the detrimental effects that masks had on the children. Students were simply not as happy, lacked focus, enthusiasm, energy, interest and emotion. He found it especially difficult to get students to participate or even crack a smile. As a parent with two young daughters, Mr. Charron is concerned about the impact of wearing a mask all day is having on their social development. They have already had years taken from them by COVID and he sincerely hopes they can get this year back. They need to see their teachers' and classmates' faces in order to learn how to read facial expressions for appropriate social development. He felt that the impacts are clearer now than ever and according to the CT.gov COVID tracker, there have been 21,552 cases in the state in children under 10 years old. Of those 21,552 cases, there has been one death. Of

the 8,279 COVID-19-related deaths in Connecticut, one death was under the age of 10. Children are far more likely to have asymptomatic cases of COVID-10 which means the case number is probably higher, making the fatality rate even far lower. Looking at the 10-19 age group, there have been over 41,000 total cases of COVID-19, with a total of three deaths. Looking at data from May 22nd, there were 238 people hospitalized in the state with COVID -19, with 10 people under the age of 18 or roughly 4 percent of total hospitalizations. Mr. Charron does not feel that COVID-19 poses a significant danger to the K-12 age group that it does for older populations. Looking at long-term effects, the medical community felt they could see tiredness and fatigue, difficulty thinking or concentrating, headaches and dizziness upon standing. He felt that those symptoms could also be associated with wearing a mask five days a week. Based on the statistics, Mr. Charron felt that the push to keep the children in masks is not really for the purpose of keeping them safe. With the vaccines, he does not feel there is a need to sacrifice childhood. The vaccines seem to hold up well to the variants and there has been no evidence so far that the delta variant is any more dangerous to children. Mr. Charron urged the board to put a stop to potential social and emotional damage that masking has inflicted on the children.

Rhonda Stevens, from Durham, explained that she holds six Connecticut teaching certificates and has had one child go through District 13 and has another one that will be a senior. She asked to share her concerns regarding the mask mandate. She feels that the children in district 13 should never, ever be masked again because of the physical and psychological effects. When the pandemic began, both the Surgeon General and Anthony Fauci stated that masks do not work at stopping viruses. On March 8, 2021, the CDC released a study that proved that masks do not stop the transmission of COVID. But mask mandates have been in effect despite the fact that no scientific data exists to provide masking the children stops the transmission of COVID or any virus. Knowing this information, Governor Lamont still continues to keep the in-school mask mandate in place. Should the executive order expire, the power to decide if masks will be required falls to the board and superintendent. The Connecticut State Department of Education and the Department of Public Health may make recommendations, but the decision will be made locally. Knowing about the inefficiency of masking to stop the spread of viruses, Ms. Stevens urged the board to never, ever mask the children again. As parents, they encourage the board to read the mask boxes and see that they are not for medical use. Masks never did and never will stop the spread of the COVID virus. It has also been widely publicized that children are not super-spreaders of COVID-19. The average age of death from COVID in Connecticut is 79.5 and not a threat for children. Mask mandates are literally depriving the children of oxygen and causing anxiety and depression. Masks take away their identity and their individuality. A recent study done by the University of Florida showed that the masks that kids wear all day are dangerously filled with harmful germs, including strep, tuberculosis, meningitis, sepsis, pneumonia, food poisoning, Lyme disease, diphtheria and Legionnaire's disease. The kids are crowded together all day long and take their masks off at lunch. Ms. Stevens asked how many of the board members have worn a mask five days a week, from 7:20 to 2:10. She bets that no one has had to do this. The teachers have the NEA to protect and advocate for them. The children have no union. They only have the board and their parents. She does not feel it is ever morally or ethically right or just to sacrifice children for adults which is what has occurred throughout the past year when they were incorrectly categorized as super-spreaders. Ms. Stevens urged the board and superintendent to stand up for the children going forward, take a stand for them and let them breathe with no masks. Finally, she added that it is very important for all staff and anyone talking to the children to know that it is an emergency use authorization only with no longitudinal studies. It usually takes 10 years to roll out a vaccine and this was done in under a year. She asked them to please be sure to tell them about the dangers of the vaccine and that they have the right to informed consent and the right to refuse.

Mike Stevens, from Durham, is a concerned parent because he doesn't feel this is going to end. He feels that they will be asked to mask the kids again and asked to vaccinate all of the kids. He noted that society has never sacrificed the well-being of the children for the supposed well-being of older people. He asked what has been done when they have muzzled the kids with masks. They have put them behind plastic bubbles and he is sure that they will be required to take a vaccine for which there are completely unknown side effects. It is known that masks and plastic shields are ineffective. There has not been a single documented case of transmission outside, yet he has seen little kids playing soccer with masks on. Mr. Stevens noted that the death rate from the flu is greater than the death rate from COVID for people under 18. All of the kids have been locked up, activities have been canceled and, worst of all, they have been told that if they don't wear a mask they must stay home in their bubble and they are complicit in killing their grandmother or their grandfather. He felt that this has caused an epidemic of depression and guilt. Mr. Stevens understands that the mandates need to be followed, but asked if they have checked in with the kids to see how they are feeling. He asked if the board has looked into the rate of suicide or depression in the last year and brought this information to the attention of state authorities. Mr. Stevens asked if the board just follows orders without giving any push-back. He noted that they were elected to be leaders, not to just follow mandates. He asked the board members to join them in the fight against this.

Lindsey Dahlheimer, from Durham, felt that this was a very emotional topic. Her 11-year-old was the most fun-loving, outgoing, empathetic, people-pleasing kid before COVID and he has fallen victim to this. Halfway through the pandemic, he started with massive obsessive compulsive disorder brought on by anxiety. He now worries about everybody and how they feel every minute of the day that he is wearing a mask. She felt that letting the kids watch the news is probably the worst thing they can do right now. Ms. Dahlheimer is hopeful that the district will give the option for masks and asked everyone to think about the individual children. One of her twins is completely oblivious to the situation and thrived during COVID. The other twin literally crumbled.

Adjournment

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

Meeting was adjourned at 7:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz
Alwaz First