

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, September 22, 2021 at 7:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug High School.

Board members present: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino (arrived late)

Board members absent: Dr. Friedrich, Ms. Geraci, Mr. Hicks

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Brough, Human Resources Specialist, Mrs. DiMaggio, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology, and Mr. Warner, Principal of Coginchaug Regional High School

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. Petrella, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

CRHS Reporters - Nora O’Connell, Logan Palardy and Rebecca Tobin

Nora O’Connell reported that everyone is back in person this year, wearing masks. They all seem to be happy to be back. A lot of people are volunteering at the Durham Fair, with both clubs and sports. Field trips have started up again.

Rebecca Tobin reported that this is a big year for music, with a concert scheduled for October 26th. They are also preparing for performances at the Durham Fair where Show Choir and Jazz Band will perform.

Logan Palardy reported that all of the sports teams have been doing very well. Football is 2-0, boys’ soccer is 1-1-1, girls’ soccer is 3-0-1, volleyball is 3-1 and both cross country teams have been doing amazing as well.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education special meeting - August 25, 2021

Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the minutes of the August 25, 2021 Board of Education special meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the August 25, 2021 Board of Education special meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried.

Next Board Meeting - October 13, 2021 at 7:00 PM**Presentation - RSD 13 Summer Learning Opportunities**

Mrs. DiMaggio reported that the summer of 2021 was very exciting, with many learning opportunities thanks to the ESSER II funds. The learners were also able to get back together again during the summer.

Ryan Bothamley, Melody Lee, Mrs. Aronson, Noelle Durkin and Joanna Schmidt were all present at the meeting tonight. Mrs. DiMaggio explained there were also summer learning padlets and she acknowledged those that helped put them together.

Mr. Bothamley reported that they designed a class for the students to transition back into in-person learning. It was a week-long class, three hours every day. Each day started with a hands-on experience with a medium that the students weren't expecting, including tiles and glass. The students then went on to work on their own projects, including painting, sculpture, paper quilling and epoxy resin. Mr. Bothamley was thrilled with the students' projects and the work was brought home to be shared with their families. He then read letters from students who appreciated the class.

Mrs. Lee led the Chinese exploration class this summer which ran for a week, two hours per day. Seven students participated and they took part in an hour per day of language instruction. By the end of the week, the students could have a conversation and they did a presentation at the end of the class. In the second hour of the day, they learned about Chinese calligraphy, history, the political system and music and culture. Mrs. Lee also read comments from the students about the class. Several students decided to continue their studies independently, including Chinese mythology, Chinese history and the language. That student hopes to establish a Chinese language club with other students.

Mrs. Aronson reported that in the summer exploration camps, the students were able to take Math and Coding and incorporated lots of fun activities in that, including going outside and using robots. Mrs. DiMaggio added that the camps all revolved around 3-5 grade students.

Mrs. Longley did some mixed media art. There was also a STEAM camp. Ms. Sorenson had a bug day, a day focused on birds, a day spent collecting rocks and painting them with positive messages and a day learning about folklore and taking a hike. Mrs. Howes held a ceramics camp and they developed deep personal connections.

Mrs. Durkin reported that about 80 students entering grades 1-5 attended camps and there were eight teachers and two paraprofessionals. Mr. Moriarty and Mrs. Durkin were co-directors of the summer program this year, along with an administrative assistant and a nurse that were shared with the ESY program which had about 70 students and eight teachers as well as paraprofessionals. Brewster School was very busy this summer. They personalized instruction to the individual students, working on reading, writing and math, with small class sizes of less than 11 students. A report was sent home to all families as well as principals, interventionists and teachers.

This year's summer program was almost double what it had been in the past, both in students and teachers. This allowed a focus on unfinished learning during the pandemic. Transportation was also offered this year and most students did take advantage of that. Breakfast and lunch were offered as well. Mrs. Durkin had asked teachers,

students and families for feedback and read that to the board. She noted how much the students enjoyed the social interaction.

Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Schmidt reported that the goal of the Kindergarten Academy was to help incoming kindergartners get used to the routines, see the teachers and get to know other children as well as allowing teachers to get to know the kids. There were more than 40 students participating, with two experienced teachers and two paraprofessionals. They read some feedback from families. Mrs. Schmidt noted that there were both morning and afternoon sessions. They played instruments, sat in circle and played outside. They felt that the academy was extremely beneficial for the students' social and emotional well-being. The program was developed using state standards and routines were followed. Insights were shared with the principals and teachers as well.

Mrs. DiMaggio thanked all of the teachers, paraprofessionals, office support and nurses who participated in the program this summer.

Mr. Yamartino asked if this program was a pilot for the reimagining education that the district is undergoing. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that that had been the intention. Since ESSER II funds will not be available next year, Mrs. Booth asked which one program Mrs. DiMaggio felt was the most important and she felt that all of them were beneficial. She loved the personalized learning in all areas and especially with the incoming kindergartners. Dr. Taylor also asked if this type of program was sustainable for the future and felt that they should prioritize it from the board's standpoint.

Mr. Moore asked if any of the high school students wanted to continue with their projects and Mrs. DiMaggio noted that the Chinese studies are continuing. Mr. Bothamley explained that he had students after school today working on their own projects. Dr. Schuch thanked everyone and added that if the district restricts this type of work to summer, they will be missing tremendous opportunities. Mr. Roraback loved the feedback from parents, especially the kindergarten families. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that the program was offered to all incoming kindergartners and it was provided to everyone who signed up. The program was held in one school, as they needed a nurse in the building.

Committee Reports

A. Building Committee Meeting - August 24, 2021

1. Vote to accept the final plans for the Memorial roof

Mrs. Booth reported that the Building committee met and the board needs to approve the final plans for the roof at Memorial which will be done next summer. A grant has been received for part of it. Mrs. Neubig added that the Building committee approved the educational specifications and the drawings. The state will reimburse the district at 55.72 percent. The cost is \$275,000 and was included in the \$6.9 million bonding. Mrs. Booth added that Mr. Croteau was happy with the plans.

The Building committee also discussed the culvert which is planned for May-August, 2022. The security vestibule funds have been reallocated to other security projects taking this project off the management of the building committee. It is no longer a state construction project so it does not need to be a building committee project.

Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Mr. Yamartino, to accept the final plans for the Memorial roof. We hereby certify that the final plans and project manuals, as prepared for bidding and dated July 9, 2021 and the professional cost estimate completed in accordance with level 3 of ASTM International Standard E-1557, standard classification of building elements, and related site work, Uniform Act 2 for this project dated July 9, 2021, have been reviewed and approved for this project on the date shown above.

In favor of accepting the final plans for the Memorial roof, as stated above: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Communications

Mr. Moore received a letter from Amy Lenoce regarding getting high school credits for college courses. Mr. Warner has worked with her and they are coming to an agreement on how it should be handled. They believe it can be handled at the principal level, rather than the board having to be involved. Dr. Taylor asked what the actual plan is for that and also felt that that opportunity may not have been offered to all students since the school year has started. Mr. Warner explained that that has all been part of their discussions and they are trying to figure out the most equitable way to do it for everyone. Dr. Schuch felt that any course at a college or university should be allowed and Mr. Yamartino agreed. He felt that if someone has a passion for a particular subject, the district should recognize the value of those classes. Dr. Taylor cautioned that it could be a slippery slope and encourage the best students to take classes that are not offered in the high school. He does believe that students should be acknowledged for those classes, however he's not sure that credit should be offered for both high school and college. Dr. Taylor does believe that weighting is a different issue and that all college classes are not the same.

Dr. Schuch felt that the problem really is the weighting of grades and the unhealthy competitiveness that comes with that. He added that all AP courses are not of the same rigor. Dr. Schuch believes that it is difficult to defend one course over another. He would like to encourage learners to follow their passions and help connect them to the resources. Mr. Moore felt that Dr. Taylor's suggestion that the Student Achievement committee look at this is a good idea. Dr. Taylor would not support any changes this school year because it has already started.

Mr. Moore also received a message from Stephen McDonald about clarification of COVID testing and response. Mrs. Keane has addressed the question.

Mrs. Petrella received a phone call from a Middlefield resident about the upcoming referendum. She was asked if the board was going to keep coming back until they receive a yes vote. They also wanted to know why capital repairs aren't kept up and asked about how many students are actually being lost to other schools.

Mrs. Booth asked if the daily COVID update is happening and Mrs. Keane explained that it is happening on the RSD13 website.

Update on John Lyman potential closure

Mr. Moore stated that all of the required documents have been filed with both Town Clerks and they are posted at the Town Halls. The referendum has been scheduled for November 2nd. Mr. Yamartino was concerned that the comment about the board moving to go to a single program was struck from the language by the attorney,

but the comment about the board establishing a separate program was kept in. He felt that people may assume that if the school is kept open, then the program stays open as well.

Mr. Moore also signed the resolution that stated that Lyman would not close until June or July of 2023 if the referendum passes.

Mr. Yamartino added that he keeps being asked why money isn't being reserved for the buildings and the district is unable to do that because of state regulations. He asked that the board work closely with Mrs. Neubig during the budget process to flush out the 20-year plan and how much needs to be reserved. He would like to hold a joint meeting with the Boards of Selectmen and Boards of Finance and ask them if they'd like the district to continue to go to bonding or if they would like to reserve money for this purpose. The towns are unlimited in what they can reserve while the district is limited to 2 percent. Mr. Roraback also hears a lot about closing the school because so much needs to be fixed. Mr. Moore suggested that this issue be brought to the Finance committee in November.

Superintendent's Report (if applicable)

Dr. Schuch reported that convocation was held on August 27th and thanked those that attended. He felt it was very powerful to be able to be in the same room with everyone, even with masks. Service awards were recognized for longevity in the district and the Good Apple awards as well. Kristen Allen was recognized as the Teacher of the Year.

September 1st was the first day of school and Dr. Schuch felt it was the smoothest opening that he's been a part of. Dr. Schuch pointed out that the incoming kindergarten class is the class of 2034 and noted all the changes that have occurred, yet so much of school is still the same. The district still has some shortages in bus drivers, but is fairing much better than other districts. He gave several examples of transportation issues in other districts.

Dr. Schuch also reported that they are being told that the trend line for COVID in Connecticut is plateauing and is a sign of hope. The mask mandate is in place as is the employee vaccine mandate. The district is in the process of the vaccine mandate going into effect next Monday and he was thrilled to share that 96 percent of all employees are fully vaccinated. The handful that are not will start testing and submit those results weekly.

Dr. Schuch noted that the executive orders all expire on September 30th and a special session of the General Assembly will be held next week. He believes that the House and Senate will extend the Governor's executive orders power until early February, 2022. Dr. Schuch also noted that Pfizer is now saying that their vaccine for 5- to 11-year-olds is safe to administer and will enter the FDA process of approval. Dr. Schuch stated that the district will encourage families to consult with their medical professionals, but would say that the more people that are vaccinated, the sooner they can get away from mitigation strategies. The recommendation now is a booster vaccine for anyone immunocompromised or over age 65.

Mrs. Keane added that Kristen Allen has been chosen as one of the four finalists for the State Teacher of the Year.

Mrs. Booth asked where the information comes from about students who are in town that do not go to the district's schools. Mrs. Neubig stated that they would only know if the parents told them if the students have never been in the district. Mrs. Booth stated that she knows two students who left the district last year for IDS

and the report shows only one student. She also asked for the final number of how many students left between eighth grade and ninth grade. Mr. Yamartino reminded everyone that the final numbers are usually available in October. Mr. Warner added that families are not required to tell the district where their students will be going.

Director of Finance's Report

Mrs. Neubig reported that the district has expended 14 percent of the budget and received 18 percent of revenue. MTA is at 4 percent, both expended and received. The capital reserve account has been increased by over \$2 million as proceeds have been received from the bonding anticipation notes. That will pay for the Memorial mechanicals project and some culvert work.

The auditors will be doing field work during the next two weeks. They will follow the executive order that their staff be masked. There is an unaudited estimated surplus of around \$800,000 to \$1 million before the \$400,000 balancing amount. The \$250,000 for the chiller is also included, just in case the grant is not approved. Mrs. Neubig reported that the grant has gone through the initial approval stage, but the reviewers have been told not to approval any grants at this point. The state will try to expedite the grant, if needed. The Eversource incentive for the chiller is about \$35,000 with an energy savings of \$20,000 per year which cannot be guaranteed. Mrs. Neubig reported that she and Mr. Yamartino did meet about capital leases and the rates were too high and they concluded that the ARP grant might be the best way.

Mrs. Booth asked for clarification about the ARP grant and Mrs. Neubig noted that the grant was for \$449,000, with \$90,000 earmarked for learning loss recovery. They have included the \$275,000 for the chiller and a COVID liaison at the schools.

Mrs. Neubig reported that the manhole at the track is causing the problem with the sink hole. A firm will come and seal the manhole and pour a concrete base, at a cost of \$10,000. This work will begin in early October. Mrs. Neubig also reported that the indoor scoreboards have been ordered. The outdoor final proofs have been received and will be ordered soon.

Mrs. Neubig also reported that there is a bus driver shortage. Dattco is collecting vaccine and testing information and will provide that to the district periodically. She did note that the bus drivers are doing an amazing job and are very flexible. They are still three to four drivers short and the office assistant often has to drive routes, but Dattco has put the safety director in the office when that happens to answer parent phone calls. One driver is waiting on a background check, one driver is in training and one student transport van driver is awaiting medical clearance. There were five days when they had to double quite a few routes.

Mrs. Booth asked who parents should call if there is a problem with a bus and Mrs. Neubig explained that they can call the school or Dattco. They will get a faster answer if they call Dattco directly.

Organizations, such as CASBO and CABE, as well as the State of Connecticut are involved in creative solutions to the shortage including getting background checks done faster and looking at pay rates.

Mrs. Neubig also reported that she met with Mr. Moore about the advertising policy as well as meeting with the auditors. They do not require the funds to go into any specific account. Mr. Moore added that he felt that it would not make sense for the district to run the advertising program as they would probably not make any money on it. They also talked about what other programs would fall under this policy and felt that certain programs would probably need to be exempt. Most of the organizations associated with the district as 501(c)3

and are responsible for reporting their revenue. Mr. Moore felt that the district could specify the size, type and content of signs as well as their location and let the Benchwarmers determine the cost, collect the money and distribute it. The district would still need to approve any items being bought with that money, other than t-shirts or food, etc. Mrs. Neubig has started to draft the policy and will bring it back to the Policy committee.

Mr. Yamartino asked if the groups currently report their revenue to the district and they are not. He mentioned that most of the groups have booths at the Durham Fair to raise money and Mr. Moore added that most of the money comes back in scholarships. Dr. Taylor was concerned that money from signage needs to be used equitably across programs. He gave the example of signage at the track/football field. Mr. Moore felt that that could be controlled by having one organization in charge of the sign program and Dr. Taylor felt that the district wouldn't know that information unless it was built into the policy.

Mr. Roraback also felt that the signs would be put up and taken down after events which would allow other entities to use the space. Other board members felt that the signage would be more permanent. Dr. Schuch felt that the signs would more likely be up for the full year. Mr. Moore added that the time period would be during the sports seasons and not during graduation. They also felt that there should be no signs in the gym other than the scoreboard.

Mr. Yamartino also mentioned corporate sponsorship for sports and felt that that should reside with the board.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

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

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

Meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Alwaz First