

**Revised**

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, December 8, 2021 at 7:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug High School.

Board members present: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Stone and Mr. Yamartino (arrived late).

Board members absent: None

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

Guests present: Michelle Miller, Silver Petrucelli

Dr. Schuch called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**Election of Officers**

*Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to postpone the election of officers until Mr. Yamartino was in attendance.*

It was generally agreed to wait.

After Mr. Yamartino's arrival, Dr. Schuch explained that they will begin by electing a chairman and that nominations do not require a second.

*Mrs. Petrella made a motion to nominate Mrs. Booth as chairman. Hearing no other nominations, Dr. Schuch closed the nominations. Motion failed 5-5, with Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Yamartino voting in favor and Ms. Betty, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone voting in opposition.*

*Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to reopen nominations for chairman.*

*In favor of reopening nominations for chairman: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Stone and Mr. Yamartino.*

*Mr. Stone made a motion to nominate Mrs. Dahlheimer as chairman. Hearing no other nominations, Dr. Schuch closed the nominations.*

Mr. Yamartino asked what the candidate's views are on what she would like to specifically do to move the board forward.

Mrs. Dahlheimer thanked the board for the nomination and felt that she had the time and the commitment to be chairman. She currently serves on two boards in Durham and has a lot of support. She would like to see projects move forward and subcommittees streamlined so that the board members can spend less time away from their families, but remain consistent and effective.

Dr. Friedrich asked exactly what moving forward means to Mrs. Dahlheimer and she explained that she felt that there have been times where things have sat in committees for a long time and she would like to see issues move more quickly. When asked specifically, she noted that she would like to see the situation with Lyman move forward by making the decision to either close it or keep it open. Mr. Yamartino noted that the voters made that decision on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. She added that the board now needs to find the next steps to either fund the building or go back to the voters.

Mr. Yamartino had a problem with the issue of transparency and noted that he has repeatedly heard that the board is not transparent. He felt that actions have meanings. He had been approached by some members who were interested in the leadership position as well as having been asked himself if he would be interested. Mr. Yamartino added that words also have meaning and wanted to understand exactly what was meant by transparency. He noted that the board conducts all of its meetings in public, all committee meetings are held in public and the board meetings are broadcast as well. Mr. Yamartino takes affront when people say that the board is not transparent and finds it insulting. He noted that this is the only board in the state of Connecticut that has committees with members of the public invited to serve on and he, in fact, led the movement to do that. This was done to include more public expertise and inclusiveness. Mr. Yamartino also mentioned that the board is one of two or three in the state that has a Finance Committee where over half of the membership is townspeople. He explained that he would like to hear where transparency comes into play before casting his vote for anyone.

Mr. Yamartino added that silence also has meaning. Throughout the election process and referendum on Lyman School, he read many inaccuracies on social media about things the board was trying to do. He gave examples of several inaccuracies and asked why no one took the opportunity to correct those inaccuracies and chose to remain silent. He is very, very, very disappointed when he sees work that he and the other volunteers are doing, as well as the administrators and staff, continually being bad-mouthed on social media. He asked what the new board members meant by a lack of transparency and what will be done to improve it. He has also heard that there is a lack of fiscal responsibility and asked what they want to do about that. During the campaign, someone had stated that they want to help the board meet enrollment projections and Mr. Yamartino didn't understand what they meant by that.

Mr. Roraback did not believe the board was trying to hide anything, however he noted that he was opposed to some of the messaging, particularly about Lyman School. He had expressed his concern to various board members and noted that they paid for a public relations agency to get the message out and they did not do a good job. Mr. Yamartino agreed that communication on Lyman was abhorrent once again. Mrs. Petrella added that other members of the board brought that issue up as well. Mr. Yamartino did feel that there was a huge difference between communication and transparency. He interprets transparency to mean that they are intentionally hiding things, withholding information or skewing information and stated that he does not believe any board member has done that.

Ms. Betty asked if Mr. Yamartino was talking specifically about Mrs. Dahlheimer's post and Mr. Yamartino explained that he was talking about everything in the campaign literature. Ms. Betty explained that the only thing they were referring to was the YouTube videos of board meetings that were not available for public

viewing after the meetings had concluded, but did admit that they may have been able to say it a little bit better. Mr. Yamartino asked why they didn't specifically say that and Mrs. Dahlheimer added that the timing of the YouTube videos coming offline followed the large meeting at Lyman. She explained that she had been told that ADA compliance was not met and the videos needed to be pulled, but she felt that it was never talked about again. Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed that live-streaming is a good thing, but noted that many parents are putting their kids to bed or parents are working at night and having only written minutes is not acceptable. She apologized if Mr. Yamartino thought it was more than that. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that many people had said that the communication from the board just didn't make sense to them and she felt that there had to be a way to make the words understandable to everyone. She asked that the board try harder and stated that she is willing to try harder.

Mr. Yamartino agreed that communication has been a big issue and noted that he pushed for a communication expert to help with the Lyman information. Mr. Roraback felt that Mr. Yamartino was giving social media too much credit as it is a very small minority of the population. Mrs. Caramanello disagreed and felt that people in town voted on what they read. Mr. Yamartino added that there were also articles in the Town Times written by people at the table and they did not state that the lack of transparency was that one single item.

Mrs. Booth added that she had also asked about the YouTube meetings and was told it was an ADA issue and Mr. Pietrasko had agreed with that. Mrs. Booth also felt that parents reach out to each other and get misinformation. Mrs. Booth then stated that it was 7:32 and they needed to vote. Mrs. Booth added that she respects that Mrs. Dahlheimer wants to be the chair and has the time to do so, however she was not sure it was the right thing as she is a new member of the board.

*Motion failed 5-5, with Ms. Betty, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone voting in favor and Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Yamartino voting in opposition.*

Dr. Schuch then opened the floor once again for nominations and noted that if there were no nominees, he would move to adjourn the meeting. He felt that if there were two nominees and the vote was 5-5, it would be decided by the flip of a coin.

*Mr. Yamartino made a motion to nominate Mrs. Petrella as chairman. Mr. Mennone made a motion to nominate Mrs. Dahlheimer. Hearing no other nominations, Dr. Schuch closed the nominations.*

Mr. Yamartino asked if the vote could be taken by paper ballot, but Dr. Schuch stated that the board members needed to identify who they voted for. Dr. Friedrich then explained that he had asked Mr. Moore to check with the board's attorney about his resignation letter and was told that it must be clarified by giving a time of resignation. He revised his letter to allow him to participate in tonight's meeting and his resignation was submitted, effective at 11:59 PM. Dr. Friedrich added that he felt that his experience on the board might have been helpful.

Mr. Roraback asked if Mrs. Petrella wanted the position and she explained that she would like to be chair as she has the time, has lived in town for over 30 years, is a retired educator and has been on the board for over six years. She has also been active in the community on other boards and commissions. Mrs. Petrella has never felt that the Board of Education was a political board and she is concerned that she is now sensing some politics coming in. She felt that they are all there for the children of the community, but they don't

always do the right thing. However, they always go back and tweak things to try to make them better. Mrs. Petrella added that she was also looking for ways to get information out to the public. She mentioned that she felt that the public can read the minutes as though they were in attendance at the meeting. She did agree that communication needs to be tweaked. Mrs. Petrella added that she didn't even know which political party board members belonged to until just recently. She felt that this is a critical time in education because there is so much in the schools that doesn't belong there.

Mr. Mennone had respect for what Mrs. Petrella said and everyone on the board. He added that he had no social media and felt that everyone was there for the children. He stated that he was not there for politics, but wanted the children to get a good education and want to come back to town with their children. Mr. Mennone stated that he will listen, never argue and give everyone 110 percent. He does not want to be divisive and felt that everyone needs to think about what's best and to work together.

Mrs. Petrella added that the chair is only one person and there are nine board members who hold a lot of influence. She added that her only concern with Mrs. Dahlheimer is that she is new to the board and there is a six-month window before the next election of officers. She would like her to wait and spend some time on the board.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the divisiveness is on all sides. She wondered why Dr. Friedrich would be voting tonight when he will only be on the board for four more hours and would have hoped he would abstain.

Mr. Roraback welcomed the new members and commented that the unfortunate thing was actually the election process. He looks at everyone as individuals, not as a group of four that is coming in to tear things down.

Dr. Friedrich added that this is the first time there has been an open election process for board members and there is a lot of anger in the current environment. People are angry about COVID and everyone's lives have been disrupted. Dr. Friedrich had understood that Mrs. Dahlheimer did not want him to be at the meeting and she did not disagree but felt that he would not be in a position that he would have to vote. Dr. Friedrich reviewed that they have had to deal with new curriculum for language arts, math and science as well as struggling with unfunded mandates. He feels that there are so many balls in the air that while Mrs. Dahlheimer wouldn't be a bad leader, he is afraid that they may drop some balls even though Dr. Schuch and Mrs. DiMaggio would not let that happen. He added that he is sorry that he will not be on the board in six months to vote for Mrs. Dahlheimer.

Mr. Yamartino explained that he had the pleasure of serving on Middlefield's Board of Finance with Mrs. Petrella, even though they did not always agree. He always found her to be very pragmatic in her approach to making decisions. She also chaired the Board of Finance. Over the last several years, Mrs. Petrella has also co-chaired the Student Achievement Committee which he feels is one of the more important committees. Mr. Yamartino added that he has had several discussions with Mrs. Petrella about moving the board forward and had also had discussions with Mrs. Booth. He felt that Mrs. Petrella would do a spectacular job leading the board, with her fingers on the pulse of all the different programs.

Mrs. Caramanello added that she has had some conversations with Mrs. Dahlheimer and commends her for her commitment to the position, however she felt that she needed to vote for more experience on the board. Mrs. Dahlheimer understood and added that she certainly doesn't want to be someone who watches any balls drop. She knows that she could lean on other board members for their experience. She does feel that she has

a good pulse on both towns as her kids have been in Cub Scouts in Middlefield and the majority of their friends are in Middlefield as well. She serves on two Durham town committees and attends most of the Board of Selectmen meetings. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that they are all excited to be a part of the board.

Mr. Roraback wanted to explain his reasoning for not voting for Mrs. Booth as he didn't want any bad feelings, but Mrs. Booth explained that she had no bad feelings other than it was already 8:02 PM. Mr. Roraback's issue was her time to devote to the position of chairman. Mrs. Dahlheimer has attended CABA meetings and committee meetings and he sees her level of commitment. He realized that the vote hinged on him, but Mrs. Booth stated that they needed to vote to see if anyone changed their mind.

With no further discussion, Dr. Schuch called for a vote. *Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino voted for Mrs. Petrella and Ms. Betty, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone and Mr. Stone voted for Mrs. Dahlheimer. Mrs. Petrella was elected chair of the board, by a vote a 6-4.*

Mrs. Petrella humbly accepted the position. She thanked the other candidates for agreeing to run and hoped the board will continue to work together cohesively. Mrs. Petrella then asked for a nomination for secretary.

*Mrs. Booth made a motion to nominate Mrs. Dahlheimer as secretary. Hearing no other nominations, motion to elect Mrs. Dahlheimer as secretary carried unanimously.*

Mrs. Petrella then asked for a nomination for treasurer. *Mrs. Booth made a motion to nominate Mr. Stone as treasurer. Hearing no other nominations, motion to elect Mr. Stone as treasurer carried unanimously.*

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the agenda, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Stone and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.*

### **Public Comment**

Rhonda Riggott-Stevens, from Durham, asked for six minutes so that she doesn't get cut off and Mrs. Petrella asked her to be as short as possible. She is concerned about the quarantining process for vaccinated and unvaccinated kids in the district. She wanted to address screen-and-stay which has been going on at Strong School. For some reason, kids at Strong have been outed for not being vaccinated even though there was no proof and kids were sent home. Through a FOIA request, she asked for documentation that allowed the district to ask for personal information regarding vaccination that was not on the vaccination schedule. Mr. Brough responded that that information does not exist. She asked if there was a law requiring kids be vaccinated for COVID to attend school and the answer was that they do not. There is now guidance from the US Department of Education that says that kids cannot be excluded because of their vaccination status. The document created by Mrs. Branciforte, at the direction of Dr. Schuch, states that there is a tiered vaccination quarantining system and she asked the board to investigate that as to whether or not that document is legal.

Mrs. Riggott-Stevens also stated that that document says that the school can ask a student if they are vaccinated or not, with a yes or no answer. In fact, kids do not have to answer nor do parents as there is no

law that states that someone has to answer. She did not feel that it would be right for the board to adopt a screen-and-stay program because that is contingent on the tiered system.

Doug Forbush, from Durham, asked to comment on the YouTube videos, but was encouraged to hold his comments until public comment at the end of the meeting.

### **Approval of Minutes**

#### **A. Board of Education regular meeting - November 10, 2021**

*Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to approve the minutes of the November 10, 2021 Board of Education regular meeting, as presented.*

Mrs. Booth suggested that wording on page four be revised to read that “Mrs. Booth didn’t feel there was another option.”

*In favor of approving the minutes of the November 10, 2021 Board of Education regular meeting, as amended: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Stone, with Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino abstaining. Motion carried.*

#### **B. Board of Education special meeting - November 18, 2021**

*Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to approve the minutes of the November 18, 2021 Board of Education regular meeting, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of the November 18, 2021 Board of Education special meeting, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Yamartino, with Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone abstaining. Motion carried.*

### **Next Board Meeting - January 12, 2022 at 7:00 PM**

#### **Capital improvements at John Lyman Elementary School - discussed updated cost estimates**

Mrs. Neubig introduced Michelle Miller, the architect from Silver Petrucelli, and reviewed that they worked on getting updated numbers since the referendum did not pass. The original numbers for Lyman were from 2014. Silver Petrucelli did a study and came back with a few different scenarios, including emergent needs, all-in capital needs and renovate-as-new which would be state-reimbursable. The study has been distributed to the board members. Mrs. Neubig noted that if the board wanted to hold a January referendum for bonding for Lyman, a decision would need to be made tonight so that it could go to a district meeting.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that she had estimated \$2.8 million emergent bonding need at John Lyman, and the current study is estimated at \$3 million. Silver Petrucelli classifies priority 1 items as life safety only, whereas Mrs. Neubig also includes items that would prevent school from opening due to a system failure. The updated study totaled \$6.5 million to address the capital needs with a renovate-as-new option would be \$6.37 million after approval of state reimbursement.

Dr. Schuch added that the time line is very aggressive, but they can hold off if the board is not ready to move forward. There is a retreat scheduled for January 22, 2022 and this time line would allow the referendum to

be held on January 18<sup>th</sup>. He would like to be sure that the retreat is after the referendum. Mrs. Neubig added that, depending on the option chosen, there would be a .3 percent or a .8 percent increase in the budget and she would need to include that.

Ms. Miller stated the parking lot is concerning as there is only one point of entry. There are also some ADA issues throughout the site. On the exterior, some doors and railings will be needed as well as other ADA issues. The big concern in the interior is the gym doors which are extremely hard to open and the rest of the issues are ADA-type issues. There is also asbestos flooring and ceiling tiles that will need to be replaced.

Looking at plumbing, again there are ADA issues. There are quite a few things in the mechanical section and the fire alarm system is on its way out. They divided the needs into different categories, with number ones needing replacement immediately; number twos within one to two years; number threes within three to five years and number fours in five to 10 years. She reminded everyone that the numbers do not include escalation and they are trending high.

Looking at renovate-as-new, Ms. Miller stated that it was based on \$400/square foot and it takes the whole area of the school, assuming there would be no portables. Reimbursement is based on 52.86 percent from the state, but there could be a reduction based on enrollment projections and space standards. This option would basically take almost everything out of the building and rebuild it like new, including the exterior parking lot, fields, etc.

Mrs. Booth asked if the children would have to relocate to do a renovate-as-new and Ms. Miller stated that they could look at phasing in the different options and using the portables. Mrs. Booth also asked if there might be any grants or reimbursement for ADA requirements. Ms. Miller stated that alterations for code violations would have the same percentages applied, but that would be a little harder to do as they would mark things ineligible. Mrs. Neubig added that there are no guarantees that the state will fund renovate-as-new and they will always look at enrollment. A question might be why a district with declining enrollment needs a renovate-as-new school. Mrs. Booth confirmed that the state would be looking at the district's entire enrollment based on the square footage that is available and mentioned that there is a lot of available space at Cuginchaug. Ms. Miller stated that the state could question that, but the reimbursement numbers would be based on Lyman itself and the percentage of reimbursement could come down. She added that she thought they could have a good idea of the reimbursement rate before the referendum, based on projections. Mrs. Neubig added that they wouldn't know if the project was accepted, but if it failed they could just pull the project.

Mrs. Booth offered that there would be two options, to go to referendum for a bond to renovate-as-new at X dollars or go to bond to do all of the other things. Mrs. Neubig added that they can pick and choose.

Mr. Yamartino added that the current enrollment at John Lyman is 192 students, but no one was sure how many students the building holds. Mrs. Booth would be in favor of renovate-as-new, but not if it costs too much more. Mr. Mennone added that it looks to be \$200,000 cheaper to do renovate-as-new than to just do the repairs. Mrs. Booth would also not feel it would be good to have construction going on in a building with students.

Ms. Miller stated that it is typically a year for design and maybe a year-and-a-half to two years for construction, depending on what is being done. No addition is included in the numbers. In that time, the district would need to keep putting more Band-Aids on which will also cost money.

Dr. Friedrich asked if for subtotals by priority numbers. Mrs. Neubig stated that the total for priority one issues is \$181,000, which is based on life safety. Priority two issues total \$4,614,500, with a total of \$4,795,500 for all priority one and two issues. Priority three issues total \$1,380,000 and priority four issues total \$333,120.

Mr. Yamartino explained that these are budgetary quotes and they will go out to bid at the time of awarding a contract. Mrs. Petrella asked how often schools are renovated-as-new and Dr. Schuch stated that, in his experience, schools are on a 30- to 40-year life cycle. Ms. Miller added that they deem structures to be 50 years and everything else at least 25 years.

Mrs. Petrella summarized that if they choose to renovate-as-new, there would be the possibility of reimbursement from the state but they would also be spending a lot more money that may not be necessary. She felt that some items could be taken care of, with the rest being put in the capital budget over time. Mrs. Neubig explained that they have to have a definitive number in order to send it to a district meeting. Mr. Yamartino added that they could have multiple questions on the referendum and Mrs. Neubig stated that she would check with the attorney but she didn't think that was possible.

Mrs. Booth was concerned about not doing priority 3 and 4 because things that are not emergent get pushed to the side to keep the budget low which is why they ended up where they are now. Mr. Yamartino summarized that priority 3 and 4 items will have to be done in the next few years anyway. He also reminded everyone that the district can save only a limited amount for capital.

Dr. Schuch asked if there was a sense to move this forward tonight and what the dollar amount might be. He reiterated that they were not trying to rush the board on this.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that for renovate-as-new, they would be allowed to change the footprint and include different types of rooms, but the \$4.8 million would leave the exact same building with new mechanicals. Mrs. Neubig added that a decision can be made tonight, a district meeting held and the voters still don't approve the bonding at referendum. That would leave the board right where they are now.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked when the last analysis was done at Brewster, Memorial and Strong and Mrs. Neubig explained that Silver Petrucelli did that in 2016. There is money already set aside for significant capital improvements at Brewster and Memorial has had significant mechanicals work and roofs are happening soon.

Mrs. Booth asked how far out the issue would be pushed if they waited until the next board meeting to make a decision and Mrs. Neubig stated that they would miss the opportunity to have a referendum before the board retreat and potentially miss the opportunity of getting it in the budget. Mrs. Caramanello felt that the priority 3 and 4 items seem cosmetic and, while she would like renovate-as-new, she felt that it would be too expensive. She would like to see two questions on the referendum, one to approve the \$4,795,500 and another to approve the whole \$6 million. Mr. Stone felt that some people might not be educated enough to realize that they are separate issues and suggested having two separate referendums. Mrs. Petrella felt that the first question would be for the \$4.8 million for the priority 1 and 2 items and the second question would be for the renovate-as-new at \$6 million. She felt that the public should be aware of the options. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that they will also have to make it clear that the taxpayers do not have to vote for either one and can say no to both.

Mr. Yamartino felt that that would then become an either-or question which the bond counsel will not allow. He also mentioned that they would have to ask for approval of a bond of \$13.5 million for renovate-as-new in the event that the reimbursement from the state doesn't come through. That debt service would then have to get built into the budget. Mr. Yamartino does not want to delay this any further as it has already been delayed for years. He questioned what would happen if John Lyman needed to be closed for repairs for any length of time.

Mrs. Booth asked if the voters do not approve this bonding, yet voted to not close the school, when would it become enough is enough. No one knew the answer to that. Dr. Schuch felt that that would put the board in a different position if they can't close it and they can't repair it. He did feel that the \$6.3 million vs. the \$4.8 million is a no-brainer and they should renovate, but added that he didn't feel a \$13.5 million referendum question would pass.

Mrs. Caramanello felt that it would be in good faith to the two towns to ask for priority items 1 and 2 which are essential and not trying to make a state-of-the-art building. She would like to be able to present something that has the potential to pass so that they can move forward. Mrs. Booth mentioned the playground equipment and Mrs. Neubig explained that it was added in to meet general guidelines for adequate playground equipment. Mr. Roraback asked if each question could be illustrated with a picture. Mr. Yamartino agreed with Mrs. Caramanello about being fiscally responsible, but he does believe there are many items in 3 and 4 that are so close and they will have to come back for those soon. He felt that maybe they could select specific items from the 3 and 4 lists to add to the question.

Mr. Yamartino then explained that chillers went down this past summer at the high school and they used the American Rescue Plan funds to pay for it. Had the district not had those funds, they would have been looking for different options to pay that. One option could have been to divide the bill and send it to the two towns because they are obligated to pay the district's debts. He felt that the board needs to make sure that the towns understand that.

Mrs. Petrella directed everyone to item 8 on the agenda which states that they do have to present a specific amount for bonding. Mrs. Neubig reminded everyone that that is to get on a January referendum, but they do not have to push for that.

Michelle Miller explained that the bonding does not have to be for the whole \$13 million. That has been changed and it now has to only be the town's share with 15 to 20 percent as a cushion.

Mrs. Booth wondered whether it would be fair to have a newly-renovated school when they still don't know what they will be doing about grade configuration. She felt that parents will want their kids to go to the new school and that could present problems.

Dr. Schuch suggested they see if there is even a majority to move something forward. Mrs. Caramanello asked if these renovations were based on Lyman remaining a K-4 school and Ms. Miller stated that that was the case. Mrs. Caramanello wondered if the numbers would change if the reconfiguration was different and both Mrs. Neubig and Ms. Miller agreed that it would.

General consensus was to move forward with something soon. Mrs. Neubig stated that the annual payment on \$5 million would be about \$360,000 (1 percent of the budget) and the payment on \$10 million would be

\$721,000. She added that the debt service will also drop 1 percent in 2025-2026 after debt is retired in 2024-2025, so the debt service would be up for a couple of years.

Mrs. Booth mentioned that renovate-as-new would displace the kids and Dr. Schuch agreed that that needs to be considered, but there will be some displacement with any project. He felt that they could do the work in phases so that it has as little impact as possible and that it would not be that no one could be in the building for a year. Ms. Betty felt that that would impact how parents vote. Mrs. Booth was also concerned about the time line for renovate-as-new and the fact that they will still have to pay for repairs during that time. She also mentioned that they could ask the voters for money and then not do all of the projects. Mrs. Booth suggested bonding for \$6 million to get some of the priority 3 items done as well. Mr. Stone felt that they would be better off asking for the entire \$6.5 million and hope to come under budget.

Mr. Yamartino asked if the wording of agenda item 8 would hold the board to any specific renovations and whether they could edit what it sent to referendum based on the district meeting. He suggested asking for \$7.5 million but getting input at the public hearing and possibly changing the referendum question.

**Schedule a District Meeting to be held at Coginchaug Regional High School Auditorium, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut on Thursday, December 16, 2021 at 7:00 PM for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the recommendation of the District Board of Education to appropriate \$7,500,000 for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School in Middlefield and to authorize the issuance of bonds or notes of the District in an amount not to exceed \$7,500,000 to finance the appropriation (approve Warning of District Meeting attached hereto).**

*Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to schedule a District Meeting to be held at Coginchaug Regional High School Auditorium, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut on Thursday, December 16, 2021 at 7:00 PM for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the recommendation of the District Board of Education to appropriate \$7.5 million for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School in Middlefield and to authorize the issuance of bonds or notes of the District in an amount not to exceed \$7.5 million to finance the appropriation.*

*In favor of approving the above motion: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Stone and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.*

*Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the Warning of District Meeting/Public Hearing, Regional School District 13, towns of Durham and Middlefield, December 16, 2021. The electors and citizens qualified to vote in town meetings of the Towns of Durham and Middlefield (the Member Towns) are hereby warned that a District Meeting of Regional School District 13 (the District) will be held at the Coginchaug Regional High School auditorium, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut on Thursday, December 16, 2021 at 7:00 PM for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the following recommendation of the district Board of Education: (1) that \$7.5 million be appropriated for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School in Middlefield (the Project). The appropriation may be expended for design, construction, renovation and installation costs, engineering and professional fees, materials, equipment, purchase costs, legal fees, financing costs, interest expense on temporary borrowing and other costs related to the project. The appropriation shall include any federal, state or other grants and aid received for the project. The Regional School District 13 Building Committee (the Building Committee), established by the District Board of Education as the building committee for the project, shall be authorized to determine the scope and particulars of the project and may reduce or modify that scope of the project as*

*desirable and the entire appropriation may be spent on the project as so reduced or modified. The District anticipates receiving grants from the State of Connecticut for a portion of the eligible costs of the project to defray, in part, the appropriation. (2) That \$7.5 million of bonds, notes or temporary notes of the District be authorized to finance the appropriation. The amount of the bonds authorized shall be reduced by the amount of any grants received by the District for the Project. (3) That the Chair of the District Board of Education and the District Treasurer be authorized to make representations and enter into written agreements for the benefit of holders of the bonds or notes to provide secondary market disclosure information. (4) That the Building committee be authorized to contract with architects, engineers, contractors and others in the name and on behalf of the District with respect to the Project, to approve design and construction expenditures for the Project and to exercise such other powers as are necessary or appropriate to complete the Project. (5) The authorization of the issuance of bonds, notes or temporary notes shall be submitted to referendum vote by the electors and citizens qualified to vote in town meetings of the Member Towns of the District. Dated at Durham, Connecticut this 8<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2021.*

*In favor of approving the above motion: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Stone and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.*

## **Committee Reports**

### **A. Student Achievement Meeting - November 17, 2021**

Mrs. Petrella reported that they examined the student achievement results for 2020-2021. She felt it was important to celebrate and acknowledge the teachers, staff, administrators and students during that time. She reviewed that schools were fully remote from mid-March to mid-June of 2020 and started in the fall in a hybrid model, moving to in-person in October.

Benchmarks were looked at the scores were compared, both in Connecticut and nationwide. They also reviewed how placements changed and were compared to scores from 2016-2020. They looked at NGSS percentages and SAT scores as well. Some scores improved and some scores went down. Looking ahead, they are interpreting the data and curriculum and instruction are being adjusted, with standards being prioritized. The district is making sure to support the teachers, staff and learners. Focus continues on the social and emotional needs and the coaching model is being resumed. Strategy groups are being implemented to target instruction in reading and math in grades K-8.

Mrs. DiMaggio did send the data out, but will be sure to get it to the new board members.

Dr. Friedrich added that everybody took a hit from COVID, but the district is in very good shape when compared to national and state averages. Some students did better than others and there is a lot of intervention going on. There are also differences between reading and math, with less being lost in reading than in math. He added that when comparing the fall to spring, there were wonderful levels of improvement which indicates successful interventions.

Mrs. DiMaggio emphasized that they work as a team, with the instructional coaches and administrators, and noted what a fantastic job everyone does. Dr. Friedrich added that in the fall of 2021, 29 percent of students met a level of expectation and 65 percent met that level in the spring. Mrs. DiMaggio credited the students, classroom teachers and the coaches for that.

**Communications**

Mrs. Booth had a couple of people reach out to her about the recent quarantine at Strong School.

Mr. Yamartino announced that the Town of Middlefield elected Peter Neidhardt to the District's Finance committee in place of Jim Irish. He will ask Mr. Neidhardt to attend the next board meeting to introduce himself. Mr. Yamartino and Mrs. Petrella thanked Mr. Irish for his service on the committee.

Mr. Roraback received a note from Maryann Zieminski from Middlefield about online learning opportunities for high school level students that are free to the district.

Mrs. Dahlheimer has heard from a couple of parents who are concerned about upcoming spring events. They were upset that prom has been called off in the spring and that homecoming didn't happen.

**Superintendent's Report (if applicable)**

Dr. Schuch congratulated the new officers and assured them that they will be fully supported by the administration. He also officially welcomed the four new members. He has met with the new members and had a good conversation. Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Stone and Dr. Schuch all spent the day today at the CAFE new board member orientation. They have also all scheduled one-on-one meetings with Dr. Schuch in the next month or two. Dr. Schuch also thanked Dr. Friedrich for his service to the board.

During his transition work, Dr. Schuch heard two things from a lot of people, one of which was the Durham Fair which he experienced this year and the second was the Community Round-Up which was this past Saturday. He thanked Kathy Bottini and Rebecca Sinusas for organizing it, but also thanked everyone who was involved and everyone who donated. Almost 10,000 pounds of food and a little over \$3,000 was donated.

Dr. Schuch reported that 99 percent or more of the cases in Connecticut are still the delta variant, not the omicron variant. The number of cases in the district has risen quite a bit through Thanksgiving. He thought that the combination of the vaccines, masking and screen-and-stay is keeping many more asymptomatic learners and employees in school.

Dr. Schuch then noted that vaccinations are now available for 5- to 11-year-olds and boosters available for anyone 18 and older. He felt that vaccines are still the best long-term mitigation strategy and would encourage everyone to consult with the healthcare provider to determine the best decision. Looking at screen-and-stay, Dr. Schuch explained that they are the rules and the district believes they should be doing it as it keeps more children and employees at school if they opt into the program. He emphasized that screen-and-stay is an opt-in program and nobody has to do it. It only applies when the close contact occurred at school during the regular school day and only permits the learners to attend school for the regular school day. He then explained that when an employee or a learner stays in school under the screen-and-stay, they have to agree to quarantine at all other times.

Dr. Schuch noted that some of the rules are starting to get more flexible, even as the number of cases rises. The state has offered exceptions now. In performing arts, the state has now said that you do not have to be masked during a performance if you are fully vaccinated. In order to opt in, proof of vaccination needs to be provided. The second exception allows for fully-vaccinated adults in school buildings to not be masked after

school hours when learners are not present. The third exception allows fully-vaccinated athletes to be unmasked while in competition, in certain indoor sports. The athletes would have to wear masks while sitting on the bench. Mrs. Keane clarified that these are winter sports guidelines which do not start until the end of December. Right now, athletes must be masked at all times. There are different regulations for recreational sports.

Mrs. Booth found it interesting that the kids need to wear their masks during practice with the kids they know, but then can take their masks off when they're with an entirely different group of kids. She also felt there were a lot of cases of vaccinated people becoming positive. Dr. Schuch noted that that was why he was bringing these issues to the board.

Mr. Yamartino stated that the board had adopted a policy which mandated that the administration follow all guidelines, but there is now a choice. Mrs. Booth mentioned that no vote can be taken as it is not on the agenda. Mrs. Booth stated that she would be against all of the exceptions, but would be willing to revisit the issue after the holidays. Mrs. Caramanello agreed and suggested that the chorus wear clear face masks, but Mrs. Booth disagreed with that as well.

Mrs. Dahlheimer does not want to see kids singled out and felt that kids would be picked on because they are wearing a mask. Mrs. Petrella does not like distinguishing between who is vaccinated and who isn't. She also felt that if someone is exposed and should quarantine, vaccination status should not matter, but Dr. Schuch noted that that would be a change to the state guidelines. Ms. Betty felt that vaccination status is a family decision and Mrs. Dahlheimer would never want a child to feel like they have to be vaccinated because of what other kids are saying.

Dr. Schuch then summarized that everyone felt that the kids should stay masked during performances and sports, but asked if there were any thoughts about adults outside of school hours. Dr. Schuch suggested that masking be in place for any large gatherings, including board meetings. Mr. Yamartino suggested that they allow adults to unmask if there are no students present. Mrs. Booth still felt that everyone should be masked other than when they are alone.

Dr. Schuch explained that these exceptions are starting to come into play, because they will begin to transition to no mask mandates at all at some point. Mrs. Petrella felt that it would not be a motivation to get vaccinated by singling someone out. No one objected to allowing adults working alone during non-school hours to unmask.

Mr. Warner reported that the reporters could not make it tonight as they had prior commitments. He stated that there are two upcoming concerts, with choir on December 15<sup>th</sup> and band on December 21<sup>st</sup>, both at 7:30 PM. On January 13<sup>th</sup>, Show Choir and Jazz band will perform. Auditions will be held next week for Emma and some students from the band went to the Senior Center last week for a holiday gathering.

Homecoming is set for next Friday. Oceanography went to Groton and Model UN had two students place in their event. The DECA coat drive was successful and PJ for Kids, connected to CCMC, is this Friday. Some students made the finals in the Junior Achievement Entrepreneurial Challenge of SW New England and will compete tomorrow.

The sports banquet was held on Monday to celebrate the achievements of the teams and individuals. The state championship softball team was recognized during the Thanksgiving football game. Recognition of the

baseball team will happen during a halftime of a basketball game. The Powder Puff game was won by the seniors, 22-0. The indoor track team had their first meet tonight.

Mr. Warner had no idea what the rumor was about prom as it has not been canceled. Homecoming is outside, but people can go inside Strong School to warm up and light refreshments will be available.

Mr. Roraback gave a shout out to Tim Fisher for his efforts at the tree lightings. Mrs. Dahlheimer added how nice it was to see the older kids interacting with the younger kids.

Dr. Schuch also reported that he hopes to have a draft of some of the key elements of the Strategic Plan for the retreat on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. To this point, about 80 individuals have gone through at least one of the reimagining workshops and want to stay involved. He will also collect input from them as well for inclusion at the retreat.

### **Director of Finance's Report**

Mrs. Neubig reported that the financials are in everyone's packets for their review and encouraged them to email her any questions. She also asked Mr. Stone to see her after the meeting to add him to the bank account.

### **New Business**

#### **A. Vote to approve Strong Camp Jewel field trip request**

Mrs. Booth had reached out to Dr. Schuch as she had heard that the students may have to sleep with masks on, but Dr. Schuch had not heard that. Mrs. Booth does have some reservations about the trip. Mr. Yamartino reminded everyone that the language states that the board can cancel a field trip at any time, due to circumstances described in the policy.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the Strong Camp Jewel field trip request.*

*In favor of approving the Strong Camp Jewel field trip request: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Stone and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried, with Mrs. Booth abstaining.*

### **Recognition of outgoing Board of Education member**

Mrs. Petrella read the following into the minutes: "Regional School District 13 Board of Education, Durham and Middlefield, Connecticut; be it known by all those present that, on this date, Victor Friedrich, distinguished Board of Education member since 2013, is duly recognized and acknowledged for his dedication to the children and citizens of Regional School District 13 and whereas Victor Friedrich, having served with honor hereby concludes this challenge for the responsibility of educating our youth; be it known that, by these words, that his deeds, his positive manner and enduring good sense, his gentle tone and insightful viewpoints will be long remembered and cherished by his peers, the towns of Middlefield and Durham and, indeed, our children. And whereas Victor Friedrich served this district as a Board of Education member, his thoughtful questioning and in-depth challenges, his unique thinking, comments and suggestions

will long be remembered as a guide for those that follow in future public service. And whereas Victor Friedrich always brought his well-timed, droll humor and scientific thought process to every discussion which served to lighten the moment and subsequently redirect board member debates with his pointed focus on student growth and well-being; and whereas Victor Friedrich demonstrated his tireless work ethic on many subcommittees for this board, most notably the Educational Resources, Human Resources, Policy, Student Achievement, Utilization and Well-Being committees. He served as a valuable co-chair of the Student Achievement committee and his presence and unique point of view will be sorely missed at those meetings. And whereas Victor Friedrich is a respected and admired member and leader of Regional District 13's Board of Education. Therefore, be it resolved that we, the members of the Regional School District 13 Board of Education, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2021, celebrate Victor Friedrich and encourage others to do the same and join us in recognizing Victor Friedrich, a leader who made an extraordinary difference in the success of this school district and the advancement of its mission. All this is with our sincere gratitude for your years of unselfish service. By your actions, you have distinguished yourself and brought great pride upon your community, our schools and hundreds of children that will love and remember you for all the good work you have done.”

Dr. Friedrich explained that, as a child, he had great parents and a great family as well as a wonderful school system. He has always felt that he owed something and needed to give back. He remembers well the teachers who laughed and related a story from his school days. Dr. Friedrich felt that there are so many good teachers in this district and it has been an amazing and wonderful privilege to serve them. Education has been a cauldron in these past few years and everybody who has helped the kids deserves a lot of credit for sticking with it. He hopes that the board makes sure to help the teachers as much as they can going forward. He thanked everyone and was sorry he would not get to know and work with the new members. He is sad to leave, but his family circumstances make it necessary. Dr. Friedrich wished everyone the best and looks forward to following the board's progress.

Mr. Yamartino thanked Dr. Friedrich for his hours of dedication and all of his work and insights. Mrs. DiMaggio added that she has really enjoyed having Dr. Friedrich on the Student Achievement committee and for how he always challenged and supported her.

### **Public Comment**

Bob Moore, from Durham, thanked Dr. Friedrich for all of his work on the board and his commitment to the students. He added that it is very seldom that you get to work with a neuroscientist who is not looking inside your head, but instead helping you think how to solve problems. Mr. Moore added that it has always been a pleasure to work with Dr. Friedrich and also offered his congratulations to the new officers and wished them good luck.

Doug Forbush, from Durham, noted that this is his first Board of Education meeting and he was there to be more involved. He felt Mr. Yamartino's frustration about the comments of lack of transparency and felt that they were specifically from the fact that the videos were not available of the board meetings. They are available only while the meeting is happening. He felt that minutes are only just a summary of a meeting. Mr. Forbush recommended creating transcripts of the recordings of the meetings. YouTube auto-generates transcripts, but can only do it well if the audio quality is clear. If the transcript does not meet a 90 percent accuracy rate, it is rejected by the ADA. Mr. Forbush also asked for an investigation as to why certain children were asked to quarantine last week and would like to see that answer in writing. He also asked if

they can find out what percentage of the newer cases in the district are in vaccinated vs. unvaccinated persons and whether they are teachers or students.

Rhonda Riggott-Stevens, from Durham, asked to return to the state guidelines, titled “Adapt, Advance and Achieve.” This is a 55-page document that has been added to 14 times, followed by interim recommendations. There are dozens of exceptions about masks and she believes none of them seem to be completely based in science. District 13 then came up with their own document, authored by Pam Branciforte, the COVID liaison, stating the vaccinated and unvaccinated kids have different quarantine days and state that Mrs. Branciforte can ask if they are vaccinated or not. However, parents are not told that they do not have to answer. Mrs. Riggott-Stevens noted that these are recommendations from the State Department of Education, not rules and the new Commissioner of Public Health has made that very clear. She felt that the Board of Education has the power to decide what mitigation measures they want. The State Commissioner of Education has also made that very clear. She also noted that students do not have to answer whether or not they are vaccinated. She felt that a tiered system of quarantining based on vaccination is a violation of students’ rights and the State Department of Education states that students cannot be excluded based on COVID vaccination status because the vaccine is not approved by the Connecticut General Assembly or the Department of Public Health. Since it is not on the vaccine schedule, it is not required and therefore the district needs to make these decisions. Mrs. Riggott-Stevens felt that these decisions are crushing kids and the younger kids are behind. She would like the board to look at the suggestions and noted that the only rule is the mask mandate.

### **Adjournment**

*Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.*

*In favor of adjourning the regular meeting of the Board of education: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Stone and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.*

Meeting was adjourned at 10:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First