

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held a work session on Wednesday, February 9, 2022 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone

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. Brough, Human Resources Specialist, and Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology

Mrs. Petrella called the work session to order at 6:00 PM.

Mrs. Petrella asked that anyone needing to use their cell phone excuse themselves and leave the meeting. She also recommended that everyone accept the offer of a Chromebook to avoid printing any unnecessary copies.

Streamlining board meetings, committee meetings, etc.

Dr. Schuch had emailed everyone his suggestions and felt that they aligned with where the district is going with the strategic plan. He felt it is important to honor the time of board members and to be sure it has the most impact. He explained that he has never been in a district that has so many committee meetings. Dr. Schuch has now attended committee meetings and feels that there is a lot of redundancy. He has also observed that none of the committee meetings are live-streamed and that may create an appearance of a lack of visibility. Another observation he has is that many board members attend the committee meetings and they are almost full board meetings. Dr. Schuch is used to having just one or two board members at committee meetings. He also feels like the lines of authority are blurred in the committee meetings and the information shared in committee meetings would be better shared in full board meetings. He also felt that committee meetings tend to get a little casual and that should not happen. Dr. Schuch felt it is awesome that community members, parents and students take part in committees, but also felt that there were other ways to engage the community.

Looking at regular board meetings, Dr. Schuch noted that this was the first place he's ever been that had two public comment opportunities in a given meeting. He is accustomed to having public comment being time-bound, both per individual speaker and total amount of time. He suggested a sign-up sheet and if time runs out, they could accept written comments or the chairperson could exercise discretion to allow more speakers.

Dr. Schuch also mentioned that they have reached out to people to sign up for teams to start drafting actions around the draft strategic plan. He would also want the board members to engage in that work as well but doesn't want to take more of their time. Dr. Schuch also felt that work sessions like tonight help and that prior boards he has worked with preferred having longer nights to multiple nights. He added that there is a statutory requirement to adopt and post a meeting schedule prior to the first meeting in July. He suggested that this transition may be best started in the 2022-2023 school year.

Mr. Roraback asked if Dr. Schuch was suggesting having work sessions prior to board meetings to address any of the committee issues. Dr. Schuch felt that they would want to examine each individual committee to decide if there was a way to streamline. He gave the example of the textbook that is being

presented at tonight's meeting which would have typically done at a Student Achievement meeting. He also suggested that the information could be presented at one meeting and voted on at the next. Another example would be the auditor's report being presented to the full board rather than the ERC committee. Dr. Schuch also felt that committees, such as Well-Being, may need a different process to engage a larger group.

Dr. Schuch commended Meg Maloney for the awesome job she does, but noted that agendas and minutes are a significant time drain. He felt that her time could be better spent on other issues.

Mr. Moore was concerned that board members controlled the agendas in the past, but now that is mostly controlled by the superintendent or staff. He felt that both approaches would work, but some details may be lost. He did feel that the Personnel Committee needs to remain intact. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the Building and Finance Committees can go and Dr. Schuch explained that the Building Committee isn't technically a board committee, but a state-required committee in order to get reimbursement. Dr. Schuch added that Mrs. Neubig is happy to give board members time to review any issues, but that would not require a committee.

Dr. Schuch also noted that any board member can request anything to be on the agenda through the chairman. He explained that he meets with the chairman, secretary and Mrs. Maloney to develop the agenda. Mrs. Petrella added that there is a board policy that board members can contact the chairman to have items put on the agenda. Mr. Mennone asked what would happen if a board member did not want an item on the agenda and Mrs. Petrella noted that she was not aware of that happening. Dr. Schuch reminded everyone that the agenda can always be amended.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it would be a really bad idea to get rid of any committees at this point as people are upset about so many issues and getting rid of committees would only add to that. She felt that they should stick with the committees they have, but cancel meetings as necessary. She also felt that that would give new board members time to decide if the committees are good. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they should wait until the fall before making any changes and Dr. Schuch agreed.

Dr. Schuch added that he has had individuals tell him that they would serve on the board were it not for all of the committees. He would not want to make serving on the board something that people feel like they can't do. Mrs. Dahlheimer did feel that the board could still have workshops.

Mrs. Booth stated that the board seems to be at meetings for hours and hours during budget season and she came an hour early tonight, knowing she won't be home until 10:00 or 10:30 tonight. She felt that she starts shutting off when she gets tired. There are also committee meetings in the next two weeks and then another board meeting. She gave the example of March 23rd when there is a Student Achievement meeting at 4:00, Policy at 5:00 and then a full board meeting at 7:00. She wasn't sure that she can be at meetings for three to four hours every two weeks.

Dr. Schuch stated that he is also not accustomed to have meetings every two weeks during budget season, but more like one presentation and then one or two budget work sessions being scheduled prior to the following meeting. Mrs. Booth felt that the district has done it both ways. Mr. Moore stated that, in the past, the budget meetings were held for budget issues only, not a full agenda. Dr. Schuch explained that he and Mrs. Neubig would like to streamline the budget process and have fewer meetings, without

rushing through it. Mr. Roraback added that the meetings would also be streamlined if there weren't committee reports.

There was also discussion about the committee meeting minutes being detailed and not a real need for more discussion at the full board meetings. Mrs. Booth also asked about the need for the Utilization Committee and Dr. Schuch felt that that committee was the most redundant and should be a work session for the full board.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked what Dr. Schuch would suggest for the Well-Being and Student Achievement Committees. He felt that the information presented at Student Achievement should be done at full board meetings in a streamlined manner. If more time was required, they would move to a workshop. Dr. Schuch felt that the last Well-Being Committee meeting was just trying to check in with people to see how they were doing and that may not necessarily be a board committee. He added that six board members were at that last meeting. Mrs. Caramanello added that it would be great to hear from different students, staff and other people in the community.

Dr. Schuch explained the advisory concept includes a larger group, but smaller groups as well. In the past, they ran the budget and other difficult issues through that group. His past advisory group included learners as well. His goal would be for the current board members to do less or at least the same and not add to their plates.

Mrs. Petrella noted that she has been on the Student Achievement Committee for a number of years and the information discussed there is so vital that it belongs at the full board so that the information is available to everyone in the public. She suggested that if it required more time, it could be done in a work session so that it is publicized. Mrs. Petrella also felt that streamlining is necessary and asked what committees the board members felt should be part of board meetings on a regular basis and if they felt there would be enough time.

Mrs. Booth felt that they should also look at how many people are on each committee and what is really required. She stated that she currently serves on six committees, while others are on only two or three. Mrs. Petrella emphasized that that is a fluid document and will be revamped. She felt that Student Achievement is really the nuts and bolts of the board and suggested that Student Achievement be part of regular board meetings or work sessions. She encouraged everyone to think about what committees should remain and how the Well-Being Committee should be handled. Mrs. Petrella did mention that the issues with John Lyman School will require some heavy-duty thinking and planning to move forward.

Mrs. Petrella asked if everyone wanted to have budget discussions as part of board meetings or meet an hour before and encouraged everyone to think about it. Mr. Mennone noted that putting those discussions in the hour before a board meeting may limit discussion. Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed that she would not want to lose the time to discuss important issues. Dr. Schuch felt that budget work sessions would not be held before a regular board meeting, but on separate nights.

Mrs. Petrella also reminded everyone that budget information is supplied on Google Docs and the board members can ask Mrs. Neubig questions directly. She then asked everyone to think about what has been discussed and send their thoughts out.

Mrs. Dahlheimer would also like to address the subject of adding online public comment to meetings.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 6:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

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Alwaz First