

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, April 6, 2022 at 7:30 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello (arrived late), 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. 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 meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education Regular Meeting - February 23, 2022

B. Board of Education Regular Meeting - March 9, 2022

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to approve the minutes from the Board of Education Regular Meetings held on February 23, 2022 and March, 9, 2022, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes from the Board of Education Regular Meetings held on February 23, 2022 and March 9, 2022, as presented: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Next Meetings - District Meeting on May 2, 2022 at 8:00 PM and Board of Education Regular Meeting on May 11, 2022 at 7:00 PM in the CRHS Library

Teacher Non-Renewals

Mrs. Petrella explained that every year the board has to go over teacher non-renewals, by law. Mr. Brough reviewed that this is a process that occurs on an annual basis as part of the budget process and state statute requires that all non-tenured teachers who are not going to be renewed need to be notified by May 1st of each year. They let non-tenured staff know before May 1st why they are receiving a letter and explain that if they are forced to cut staff, this process allows that to take place. Dr. Schuch explained

that the teachers have received the first letter and will receive another one after tonight's vote and, hopefully, a third letter after the budget passes informing them that it has been rescinded.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, that the contract for the employment of Kenneth Holt, Pamela Longley, Danielle Miller, Elizabeth Bayreuther, James Hanson, Isabelle Baranski, Katie Wheeler, Amy Ryan, Kate DeMartino, Sarah Sportelli, Jeff Landry, Alexis Noheimer, Justine Plourde, Toby Rascati, Laura Mongillo, Victoria Abolafia and Jennifer Dowson not be renewed for the following school year, upon its expiration at the end of the 2021-2022 school year and that the Superintendent of Schools is directed to advise each of the persons in writing of this action.

In favor of the above motion: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Committee Reports

A. Student Achievement Committee Meeting - March 23, 2022

Mrs. Dahlheimer reported that Mrs. DiMaggio did a wonderful presentation on literacy coaches in the district. They are hoping to put their presentation on the district's website for everyone to see. Mr. Roraback added that the focus was largely on younger learners and trying to be proactive in the early years. Mrs. Petrella noted that they also focused on the Orton Gillingham method that they are using, with 25 being trained thus far.

B. Well-Being Committee Meetings - March 16, 2022 and April 5, 2022

Mr. Moore reported that their March 16th meeting was about the issues of race, discrimination and bullying. They reviewed the policies and some actions were recommended. A number of students spoke about their needs to deal with some of these issues and they had a lot of comments from people who have been affected. Mr. Moore has produced a list of actions from that meeting.

Their April 5th meeting focused on the things that the district is doing. Dr. Schuch went over the training courses that are coming up for students, teachers and the community. Mrs. Schmidt and a number of students have taken the equity policy and produced a list of definitions that they would like the board to adopt. They also talked about upcoming activities at Strong School, with a variety of student-led programs and leadership programs. Dr. Schuch also talked about the integration of these efforts into Reimagining Education.

Mrs. Petrella noted that there were many initiatives mentioned to address issues that have come up. She would like to see those initiatives presented to the board and the public for them to review. Hopefully, they could do that at the May 11th meeting.

Communications

Mrs. Petrella has received quite a number of emails since the last meeting and has forwarded them to all of the board members. Christine Geraci and Moriah Roy wrote regarding playground accessibility and a thank-you for addressing the preK ramp at Brewster. Claudia O'Connell wrote regarding concerns about a situation at the high school. There was an email from Todd Petronio with an update on baseball and

basketball scoreboards. Kurt Bober emailed offered assistance for Pickett Lane improvements. Donia Viola emailed regarding weather and in-person board meetings, work break times and not enough budget discussions. Craig Bradanini emailed, on behalf of the teachers, supporting standing together to confront racism.

The following people expressed comments and concerns about Lyman, the board's legislative resolution, not being in favor of closing Lyman and offering suggestions going forward: Linda Gitner, Lori Fusco, Sarah Hofferd, Jennie Szewczyk, Jennifer Tomer, Samantha Eddinger and Donia Viola.

Comments and concerns about racism, threats, issues regarding racism in schools, questions about specific racism initiatives in the schools, suggestions for various ways to address racism were received from Katherine Forline, Maya Perry Lis, Janet Flewelling, Ann Cassidy, Bronwyn Commins, Chad Reddick and Michelle Gohagon.

Mrs. Petrella received an email from Chuck Stengel with suggestions for budget cuts and from Leslie Paoletti supporting the district's efforts to address combating racism. Cheryl Gonzalez outlined middle school opportunities for creating an inclusive and caring community. Mrs. Petrella also sent a thank-you to Ms. Bowman and her classes for the delicious goodies they provided.

The board agreed to skip to item 12 on the agenda at this point.

New Business

A. Healthy Food Certification - Vote on Healthy Food Initiative and Food Exemptions

Mrs. Neubig explained that the district participates in the National School Lunch Program and, to get reimbursement for free or reduced lunches, they have to attest that they will not serve foods that are in direct competition or unhealthy foods and/or beverages. There are also exemptions as to when other foods can be served, i.e. a basketball game or a fund raiser.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to approve the healthy food options pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes, section 10-21.5.f, Board of Education of Regional School District 13 certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in schools under its jurisdiction and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2022 through June 20, 2023. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from the reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs and any fund-raising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or by non-school organizations and groups.

In favor of approving the healthy food options pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes, section 10-21.5.f, Board of Education of Regional School District 13 certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in schools under its jurisdiction and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2022 through June 20, 2023. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from the reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs and

any fund-raising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or by non-school organizations and groups: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in section 10-221.q of the Connecticut General Statutes, provided that the following conditions are met: (1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; (2) the sale is at the location of the event; (3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An event is an occurrence that involves more than just a regular scheduled practice, meeting or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays and interscholastic debates are events, but soccer practices, play rehearsals and debate team meetings are not. Regular school day is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the school day. Location means where the event is being held.

In favor of allowing the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in section 10-221.q of the Connecticut General Statutes, provided that the following conditions are met: (1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; (2) the sale is at the location of the event; (3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An event is an occurrence that involves more than just a regular scheduled practice, meeting or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays and interscholastic debates are events, but soccer practices, play rehearsals and debate team meetings are not. Regular school day is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the school day. Location means where the event is being held: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Adjourn for Public Hearing on the Budget at 8:00 PM

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to adjourn the meeting to wait for the public hearing to begin at 8:00 PM.

In favor of adjourning the meeting to wait for the public hearing to begin at 8:00 PM: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Resume regular session Board of Education meeting

Ms. Adams made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, to resume the regular meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of resuming the regular meeting of the Board of Education: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

2022-2023 Budget**A. Discussion on Public Hearing**

Mrs. Petrella asked board members for their comments after the public hearing. Ms. Adams explained that she finds herself in a very different position. She will support the budget as a board member, even though she wasn't present for the vote. She did feel that the process was different this year and there was a good reason for having budget workshops. She did not want to comment on staff, but the board has a statutory duty to be sure that money is spent equitably across all schools. From a process perspective, Ms. Adams would very much like to see that process work differently and she felt that they spent very little time looking at the budget. She also felt that the budget is the most important policy document, so if Reimagining is the board's vision, they need to be clear about investing in that. She realizes that will take some strategic planning, but wants to make sure everything aligns. Ms. Adams doesn't expect to go back and redo everything now, but felt that they need to spend more time looking at.

Mrs. Petrella began to go through the time line of the budget, but Ms. Adams asked her to not do that and noted that the meeting was changed and she couldn't be present. She is frustrated right now and felt that they need to help themselves with the process. Mrs. Petrella explained that she is not pushing back on Ms. Adams, but noted that spending for Reimagining will be more concrete at some point but is still in development. Dr. Schuch was thrilled that people want to put resources into changing the education system in the district, but explained that this is heavy work that doesn't allow you to jump into a budget. He reiterated that this budget does not reflect any substantial Reimagining work other than the design work which is already happening, but he felt that the 2023-2024 budget will. Dr. Schuch explained that over 100 people are working on this and they will generate a lot of energy around it.

Ms. Adams clarified that she did not believe money should be in this year's budget, but that she would like the board to be more planful as it moves forward.

Mr. Roraback reviewed that he has been serving on the board for five years and finds it quite frustrating that they have not been able to move forward. They cannot reconfigure grades or figure out building utilization. There has been a reluctance not to reduce staff because of the unknown factor. During the work session, there was a pretty vibrant conversation about what will happen once the utilization issue is solved. As a teacher, Mr. Roraback noted that the number of students in the classroom is what dictates his job. If he didn't have the correct number of students in his class, he would be gone. There are a lot of people leaving at the high school level, with a lot of other choices available now. Mr. Roraback felt that they need to have a program that makes people want to come to Coginchaug.

Mrs. Booth felt that the people are saying they want the budget to be cut further. She would not want to just push it through, crossing their fingers that it will pass. She didn't want to have to say it, but they do not need a field storage unit which represents .5 percent of the budget. Mrs. Booth would rather cut that than staff. She has heard there are classes at the high school with less than 10 kids in them which she does not believe to be fiscally responsible.

Mr. Moore explained that in order to get the increase per household in Middlefield down to about \$250, they would have to cut the increase to Middlefield down to about \$500,000 from \$1.3 million. That would require a very large cut across the budget.

Ms. Adams added that sometimes it's not getting it to certain number, but more hearing what people are saying.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked about the SRO and Mrs. Neubig explained that it's about \$180,000. The yearly salary for the second administrator at the high school was \$124,000 this year. An estimate for reduction of two staff members at the high school would depend on what level they are, but it could be about \$100,000 each including benefits if applicable.

Mrs. Petrella stated they talked about the implications of cutting staff at a workshop in January and she is concerned about doing that with the significant impact of COVID on students. In order to address that lack of growth, staff needs to be there to do that. Masks have just recently removed and more COVID is looming. The other issue with cutting staff is that the student enrollment decline doesn't happen in any particular area. Class sizes may be lower at the high school in elective classes which are there to keep students in the district. The more staff is cut, the less interesting place the high school becomes. They are working on ways to keep the eighth graders interested in coming to the high school. They are looking at grade configurations and increasing programming at the high school to attract students. The board agreed to hold any staff cuts until things are clearer.

With regard to the field house, Mrs. Petrella explained that the referendum that did not pass was for \$800,000 and she was personally not in favor of that. She now understands that the project will be started and then picked up by community organizations over time. It has now sat there for 10 years. She supports the field house now, even though it may not be enough to cover the full cost, because it is at least a start. Sports programs are such an important part of student development, the district and the community coming together. She hopes that it will become a focal point and not just be a storage building, however she would also not be willing to continue to fund it down the line.

Mrs. Petrella then asked the board if they want to cut the budget or not. She would not want to cut capital, but did state that Pickett Lane will not be done this year and noted that it hasn't yet been vetted. They have a project cost of \$1.7 million, but another alternate has come forward at less than \$400,000. She did feel that that number could be either completely cut or at least reduced.

Mrs. Booth asked if this decision needed to be made tonight and Mrs. Petrella explained that they do. It was also confirmed that once a vote is taken tonight, the board can longer advocate for the budget other than as individuals. Mrs. Booth felt that they would be taking a huge risk by not reducing it any further when the Middlefield Board of Finance does not support it.

Mrs. Caramanello agreed with Mrs. Booth and asked Dr. Schuch if he felt two administrators are needed at the high school. His opinion would be that this is not the time to be cutting staff. If the board had wanted that, they were prepared to do that in the proposed budget. They do plan to cut staff in the next year's budget. In his years of being a superintendent, he has cut staff almost every year due to declining enrollment. If cuts were going to be made at the high school, he would want the principal to work with them to reduce staff. He stated that if the enrollment declines to a certain level, that position will probably go away. Dr. Schuch explained that if they didn't have Mrs. Trainer over the last few weeks, they would have been crushed. He also noted that eliminating an administrator will put undue stress on the teachers to pick up that load. In summary, Dr. Schuch could support fewer administrators and fewer teachers, but would like to do that in a long-range planning process. He did admit that the board is ultimately responsible for the budget and they will support them in that.

Mrs. Caramanello was surprised to hear Dr. Taylor's number of 25 percent less students at the high school and it made her wonder if two administrators were necessary, especially since they are actively looking to hire one. She also asked Mr. Moore if he had a number that would actually make a dent in this and Mr. Moore also felt that Pickett Lane could be done differently, through bonding next year. He also felt that saving for capital improvements will help to avoid future issues.

Mrs. Neubig reported that over the past week, they lost a transfer switch in the pump house that controls the sprinkler system. Mr. Croteau has to physically go down into the vault in the event of a power loss to switch it over. They have gotten no response from the vendor about a replacement part. The pump house has now become a priority and she thought that maybe some of the Pickett Lane money could be put toward that or it be included in a future bonding. Mrs. Neubig felt that they would need \$200,000 to \$250,000 to bring the pump house above ground. If it were to be moved to an alternate location, it would be a lot more.

Ms. Adams felt that coming up with other ways to fund things will provide goodwill with the community. Mr. Moore wondered how many vacancies will come up next year due to retirements and noted that they only used a 97.5 percent vacancy rate. Mrs. Booth thought that Mr. Brough had said there were only four retirements. She had also asked about administrators at the board retreat and reminded everyone that Dr. Schuch had said he would rather cut capital than staff. She felt that they need to come to consensus on the budget and, if cuts are going to be made, let those decisions be left to Mrs. Neubig and Dr. Schuch.

Mr. Mennone felt that the board has been pushing things off for years and has no capital to get things done. He felt that it comes down to what will happen with John Lyman.

Mrs. Petrella noted that if the legislature had not given regional school districts the okay to save 2 percent of the budget for capital, they would still be at 1 percent. If they were to cut back Pickett Lane and put money in for the pump house, she wondered what that would do to the capital percentage. Mrs. Neubig explained that that would not change the numbers as they would just be transferring the money to a different project. Mrs. Petrella would take money out for Pickett Lane and leave \$100,000 for the pump house. Mrs. Neubig explained that that would not be enough.

Mrs. Booth didn't understand how they can think about cutting either of those items before talking about cutting the field storage house. She felt that the field house is a want while the pump house is a need. Mrs. Neubig explained that if the field house is removed, that would bring the budget to a 3.47 gross and a 3.83 net. Mrs. Booth added that they can't keep not saving for capital at the 1 percent level, but noted that they need to pass the budget.

Dr. Schuch explained that the increase in this budget is very much in line with just about every district around, in fact on the low end. Other districts are at 5, 6 and 7 percent increases. He felt that the real decision is do they run the risk that the budget fails or how far they would need to lower it to have it pass.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that it was very hard to see this increase, but picking items won't really help. For years, funds have been allocated to offset the budget and taken money away from savings, surplus, COVID and from the buildings. This year brings inflation issues and projects that have been neglected for years. She believes kids having to fill up buckets from a rusty hose behind a fence is disgraceful and heartbreaking. Pickett Lane is terrible as well. She felt that they need to have pride in their buildings and

their roads. She reminded everyone that money wasn't put into it originally because somebody sued the district and it hasn't been finished 10 years later. She gave the example of having to transport an athlete to the basement of the high school to submerge them if their body temperature is too high. Mrs. Dahlheimer has confidence in the booster clubs to make sure that the building gets outfitted. She recognized that it is a want, but felt that it reflects on how the district looks. She supports sending the budget to referendum in the hopes that the public will understand. She would not support cutting any staff, not knowing what next year will look like. She felt that the teachers need support as do the kids.

Mrs. Neubig added that the district had a healthy fund balance in the past and they aggressively used that to offset any increases for two years in a row. The budget would have gone up both years if those funds were not available. The district does not have that this year as she is estimating a fluid surplus this year of roughly \$250,000... She also noted that the surpluses are becoming less and less due to more stringent budgeting.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked Mrs. Neubig if she would feel comfortable moving the vacancy rate to 97 percent and she explained that they are running at 96.5 this year. Mr. Mennone reminded everyone that they had made a conscious effort to get the increase under 4 percent. He did not feel there was much more that they can do. He stated that they should be concentrating on making four state-of-the-art schools, but if John Lyman is to stay open, things will have to be fixed.

Mrs. Petrella went back to Pickett Lane and noted that there are other options available. She again asked what the percentage would be if they removed \$225,000 from Pickett Lane and Mrs. Neubig stated it would be 3.35 and 3.7 percent. Mrs. Neubig added that the two roofs on Lyman are degrading and Mr. Croteau has recommended that a sealer be applied this summer at \$50,000. Mr. Moore stated that if they take Pickett Lane out of capital reserve that will commit them to going to bonding.

Mrs. Caramanello felt that they are nit-picking at this point and everything in the budget represents community needs. She recognizes the desire to cut, but feels that this is a very responsible budget and would want to leave it where it is. Several board members agreed. It was also agreed to move \$325,000 to the pump house and any amount left over could be moved to other projects, by board vote.

B. Finalize Budget for District Meeting

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to go to District meeting on May 2, 2022, followed by a referendum on May 3, 2022 with the 2022-2023 Regional School District gross education budget of \$38,489,206.

In favor of going to District meeting on May 2, 2022, followed by a referendum on May 3, 2022 with the 2022-2023 Regional School District gross education budget of \$38,489,206: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried, with Ms. Adams and Mrs. Booth voting against the motion.

Public Comment

Carl Stoup felt that the field house is a fiasco. The booster clubs have offered a few thousand dollars which will not even touch the total. The building will start to deteriorate and the district will have to maintain it. He asked the board to be real about it and recognize that it is a real want, not a need.

Andrew Taylor, from Durham, stated that he has heard that Lyman will not be addressed through the state process, so the board has their work cut out for them in figuring out how to solve that issue.

Craig Bradanini, from Durham, a teacher and president of the teachers' association, read a statement from the association. "The members of the Regional District 13 Education Association wanted to share that we stand together with the superintendent and the Board of Education to confront racism in our school district and to stop it in its tracks. Every child deserves a high-quality education and it's every public school educator's right and responsibility to teach students about their world through an honest, fact-based, age-appropriate curriculum, even if some lessons are difficult and uncomfortable. Combating racism, erasing inequalities and advancing racial justice are critical to every aspect of our society, including and perhaps especially education. To achieve success, we must collectively and proactively oppose racism, prejudice and discrimination and promote diversity, inclusion and equity in our schools and our community."

Rick Parmelee stated that he agreed with Carl Stoup's comments.

Adjournment

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

In favor of adjourning the special meeting of the Board of Education: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:08 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First