

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, August 10, 2022 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone

Board members absent: Mr. Mennone

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mr. Brough, Human Resource Specialist, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology and Mrs. Quarato, Learner-Centered Specialist

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

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

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Public Comment

John Rasimas, a candidate for state representative in the 101st district, wanted to let the board know that one of his main issues is state reimbursement for educational aid. It is an important issue to him as he has been an educator for 20 years. He believes that towns like Durham have been short-changed when it comes to state aid.

Maureen Funke, from Durham, reiterated her ongoing concern that diversity, inclusion and anti-bullying be included in every meeting in some way. She also asked if there is a plan to keep board members apprised of any racial or bullying/exclusion issues in the upcoming school year. She would also like the public to be kept apprised of what actions are taken to address these issues.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, thanked John Rasimas for taking an interest in the education system. He hoped that remote access will get resolved soon.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education Regular Meeting - July 6, 2022

Mrs. Petrella noted that the meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on July 6, 2022, as amended.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on July 6, 2022, as amended: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Superintendent's Report

A. 2022-23 Planning Updates

Dr. Schuch thanked everybody for their well wishes and concerns after his bike accident on July 16th. He did have multiple fractures and the acute healing period has passed. He hopes to resume more normal activities.

Dr. Schuch announced that Monday, August 29th is the first day of school. He mentioned that the incoming kindergarten class will be the graduating class of 2035 and how they cannot anticipate what changes will happen during that time. Convocation will be held on Wednesday, August 24th, starting with breakfast around 7:30 AM. They hope for the program to be over mid-morning. Dr. Schuch added that there will be a federal EPA ceremony in front of Strong School in connection with the water project at 11:00 AM on that day as well. Quite a few dignitaries will give speeches that day as well. Mr. Moore noted that the project started back in the 80s.

There is a professional learning day scheduled for August 26th. They now need the employees to do the work on reimagining, so two sessions will be offered that day. If anyone on the board has not done the reimagining work yet, they are invited to attend on that day or on September 26th. Mrs. Petrella encouraged everyone to attend the reimagining workshop if they have not been able to do that yet.

Dr. Schuch added that they had a really good planning leadership team meeting. He highlighted that they started trying to map out work session topics for Board of Education meetings by month, staff reports by month and presentations from learners by month. They want to be able to give as much of a head's up to everyone as possible. They also worked on strategic planning and invited all of the action teams to give input as well as develop measurable outcomes. They hope to reach out to graduates multiple years out to determine how they are doing. They also worked on some broad-based digital communication to the community and published the inaugural issue of the District Snapshot. Currently, four issues are planned to go out during the 2022-2023 school year. Dr. Schuch mentioned that there could be an opportunity for the board to have a section in those snapshots.

Mr. Moore asked if they have tried to figure out how to get these out to non-parents and Dr. Schuch explained that ParentSquare is now available to anybody, but will need to be publicized by word-of-mouth. They did like the idea of opting in so that people don't feel inundated. Mr. Pietrasko explained that community members can go to the district or any school's webpage and click on the ParentSquare button. Mrs. Petrella encouraged them to put the pop-up back on the website. Mrs. Dahlheimer suggested contacting both town halls as well. She also suggested that they need to have at least one thing go out in paper form as well, considering the number of seniors in the communities. Mrs. Dahlheimer also mentioned that the District Snapshot has disappeared from ParentSquare. Mr. Pietrasko explained that ParentSquare archives everything at the start of a new year, but they can make a PDF and put it elsewhere.

Mrs. Roy asked if the district verifies that people who opt-in are truly Durham and Middlefield residents as she is concerned about student safety. Mr. Pietrasko noted that there was no automated way to do that. Dr. Schuch explained that most of what is put out is done after the fact and events are all listed on the website as well.

Dr. Schuch also reported that they are working to make sure that the professional learning calendar is supporting all of the different professional learning they are trying to get in. The State is rolling out a brand-new IEP system. They continue to work on equity and diversity as well as school safety and security training.

Dr. Schuch reported that they also talked about long-range facility planning and associated grade level configurations, but did not have the updated enrollment projections available. Once that comes in, they hope to have a recommendation for the board. Mrs. Neubig added that they have supplied all of the information and hopes to have the report in another week or two.

They also talked about the organization of the district and had a pretty detailed discussion about safety and security. They also had an opportunity to get data from a Youth Risk Survey done by Durham-Middlefield Youth and Family Services and they will follow up with the individual administrators. Mr. Moore asked Dr. Schuch to share that report.

Dr. Schuch added that they also talked about technology use by the learners in school that is beyond those that are school-issued. They would like to strike a proper balance in that area. Dr. Schuch felt that the board and the staff need to be on the same page with this. Administrators stated that their jobs are becoming more difficult because of this issue.

Dr. Schuch added that both Mrs. Gonzalez and Mrs. Stone would be willing to come in to the September meeting to give detailed presentations about things planned for their schools.

Mrs. Petrella suggested that the snapshot be added to the district's Facebook page as well.

Staff Reports

A. Budget and Finance Update - Kim Neubig

Mrs. Neubig reported that they are 5 percent expended on the general fund, with revenue 6 percent received. Auditors are on site this week and next week as well, returning for two weeks in October to do their final work. The financial statements are due to the state by December 31st.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that the federal government has given lunch funds to the state and the intent of these funds is to help households transition back into paying for school lunches. The district has been allocated \$173,000 of that money which is based on a predetermined formula. Those funds are estimated to last three months which brings up the issue of increasing the price of school lunches. The district last increased lunch prices in 2016, from \$3.00 to \$3.50. They are proposing a couple of different options, including increasing the lunch price to \$3.85 which will help the food service account but will also require an increase in 2025. If they go up to \$4.00, they do not anticipate having to ask for another increase until 2027. Mrs. Neubig does want to start a cafeteria equipment replacement cycle in the

upcoming budget. The last option would be to not increase lunch prices, but there will be a deficit in the cafeteria account at the end of the year.

Ms. Betty asked if Mrs. Neubig had any idea what other districts are charging and Mrs. Neubig did not know that but she will get that information for the next meeting. Mr. Moore also asked her to estimate the deficit. Dr. Darcy asked if the grant money had to be specifically used to provide free lunch and Mrs. Neubig explained that they cannot charge anybody until the funds are gone.

There are two opportunities for food service equipment grants. Mrs. Neubig applied for the first one, but they did not receive any funding. She will apply for the second one soon.

B. Safety and Security Update - Kim Neubig

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that administrators previously attended a two-hour presentation from the State of Connecticut called “Run, Hide, Fight” before COVID hit. This is followed up by on-site school-based simulated events, but the district never got to that point. They are now working with the State Police to try to get some dates. They are hoping to get more people involved.

The Town of Waterford is having the FBI come in to do a training seminar and have invited area districts to attend. Mrs. Neubig did sign up for that training.

Mrs. Neubig had emailed the board about some software programs, but none of that was budgeted this year. One program is Mutualink which was vetted in the past and includes a live feed of the cameras. That program costs about \$120,000, with an ongoing cost of \$18,000 per year. Another program is Warnable which one of the administrators has used before which costs between \$6,000 and \$15,000 per year, depending on the size, how many users (whether they did everyone or just certified staff), etc. Mrs. Roy asked what certified staff would be and Mrs. Neubig explained that would be teachers and administrators.

Dr. Schuch added that he felt that cost is not the challenge with these things and it is more training and consistency as well as staff turnover. Mrs. Neubig added that she and Mr. Pietrasko had vetted a system years ago and she felt that she would never remember how to do it. People have said that these are very user-friendly. Mrs. Petrella asked for both vendors to make a presentation to the board.

Mrs. Neubig also reported that she received an application for a fund raiser from Coginchaug POPS (Parents of Performing Students) who would like to sell seat plaques that would be attached to the auditorium seats. Mrs. Neubig had heard that this was denied in the past as it was being affixed to permanent property of the Board of Education, but wondered how this board felt about it. The plaques would be priced at \$100 and would support the Music Department at Coginchaug. There was some discussion about the age of the seats in the auditorium.

C. Health and Safety Update - Jen Keane

Mrs. Keane explained that the update came out from the state with two publications: Launching Into Healthy Learning: Operational Strategies for Fall 2022 and Launching Into Healthy Learning: Fall 2022 Respiratory Disease Prevention Strategies for Schools, Childcare and Camps. The intent is to help keep

kids in school while keeping everyone healthy and safe. Resources are included and updates are provided as well.

As they move from executive orders to local decision-making, DPH has provided three recommendations. One is to continue to recommend vaccinations, both flu and COVID-19, for all staff and school-aged learners. The second is a new strategy that is test, mask and go which is basically if learners and/or staff display mild respiratory disease symptoms without fever or any known contacts with COVID-19 cases, if they test negative daily they can report to school as long as they wear a mask and feel well enough to participate. The third strategy is to keep an eye on community levels.

Mrs. Keane will continue to report positive cases on the website on a weekly basis. They must continue to report positive cases to the Department of Public Health and they will support individuals who choose to wear a mask. They will continue to remind learners to practice healthy habits and follow the CDC isolation guidelines for individuals who test positive. The guidelines are currently isolation or quarantine for five days after testing positive, returning on the sixth day if they are symptom-free. They will discontinue routine contact tracing, virtual instruction for students that are home sick and notification of positive cases to specific groups or classes.

Mrs. Caramanello asked about test, mask and go and Mrs. Keane explained that if a child or teacher tests negative, but has symptoms, they no longer have to be sent home. She wasn't sure if they would be required to wear a mask, but thought that they would under this new policy. Dr. Schuch added that they feel like the onus is now on individuals and it is more about educating everyone, not about being the mask police. He also mentioned that the guidelines are starting to de-emphasize the term COVID and refer to respiratory illnesses. Mrs. Dahlheimer knows quite a few kids that suffer from allergies all fall.

Mrs. Roy noted that her son is autistic and nonverbal and couldn't wear a mask and had to be out of school for 10 days after exposure. She felt that that is the population that needs to be in school, getting their services. Mrs. Keane explained that the guidance leaves that up to the local decision-making board. Mrs. Caramanello asked who would be the one making those decisions and Mrs. Keane explained that there have always been mask exemptions in place. In terms of the general population, they would have to mask if they have symptomatic unless they have a doctor's note. Dr. Schuch felt it would be an administrative decision, but if the board felt very strongly they would want to have a conversation. They are now hearing that the negative impact of children not being in school is a greater harm than the possibility of a spread of COVID. They will let families and employees know what the policy is so they can make informed decisions. Dr. Schuch felt that the State is no longer going to tell them what to do and there are no more executive orders governing this.

Mrs. Caramanello confirmed that the district is no longer mandated to provide remote learning, but felt that they would need to provide something if groups of kids were required to stay home. She hoped there could be a link for them to join the classroom in real time if they are required to stay home. Mrs. Roy felt that it's important that the district put something out with frequently asked questions.

Mrs. Petrella added that she has read articles that there are a number of people who are still positive 10 and 12 days after contracting COVID, even though they may not have symptoms. Mrs. Keane explained that they do not require a test to return. Mrs. Keane reiterated that the guidance states if someone tests negative, but has any respiratory symptoms, they need to wear a mask. Dr. Schuch stated that the district

will recommend that to parents, but it will not be enforced. He added that the state had eliminated the requirement for remote learning last year. The district will continue to work with families on this.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked what the CIAC is saying about athletics in the fall and Mrs. Keane noted that they have not updated anything. Ms. Betty noted that a policy had been adopted on August 25, 2021 putting Dr. Schuch in charge, so none of this would be a decision of the board. Dr. Schuch noted that they are not asking for a vote, but rather wanted to provide the information. Ms. Betty asked if they would want to remove that policy and put it in the board's hands. Dr. Schuch felt that that would require more meetings any time information changed. Mrs. Petrella suggested that the Policy Committee take a look at it.

Mrs. Petrella asked the board for consensus wearing masks when they have non-COVID symptoms. She felt more comfortable with advising parents to have their child wear a mask, but not mandating them to. The rest of the board agreed.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked that the Policy Committee meet prior to its scheduled September 21st meeting, as close as possible to the beginning of the school year.

D. Remote Meeting Access Update - Ken Pietrasko

Mr. Pietrasko reviewed that there is nothing budgeted for this because the executive order to provide remote access was expiring. The General Assembly then voted to allow remote access going forward. He has found two audio/visual options, with one quote about \$22,000 and the other about \$45,000. The board had asked him to find an audio-only option and he has had conversations with several different vendors.

This morning, Mr. Pietrasko found a way to use the current equipment to provide an audio-only option and they can try it at the next meeting. They can add an extra laptop for a board member to moderate the public's input. It will be done via Zoom and can also be live-streamed to YouTube. This option will not cost the district anything unless they decide to make some tweaks to it and he is working on getting proposals for that.

Many other districts have public comment sign-ups to help the moderator, with a cut-off the day before the meeting. Many have a three-minute maximum per person and others have put a maximum of 30 minutes on public in general.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that getting that no-cost audio option is important and hopes that the board agrees to do that. She proposed trying it at a subcommittee meeting prior to the next board meeting. Mr. Pietrasko noted that they do not typically stream Building Committee meetings and it would require someone to monitor the setup. Dr. Schuch stated that he tried it today and it worked. He asked that the board give clear guidance to him, Mr. Pietrasko, Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Dahlheimer and Mrs. Maloney in setting up the agendas about any new procedures. Dr. Schuch felt that two public comment periods is excessive and would like to have everyone address the board at the beginning of the meeting. He also felt that sign-ups should be required and would like the board to consider both individual time caps and an overall time cap as well. He felt that would encourage people to sign up early. Dr. Schuch also asked who would speak first, the remote people or the in-person people. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the sign-ups would help the meeting to be more organized. Mrs. Roy suggested partnering with the library to allow people to use their equipment. Mr. Pietrasko added that people can use their phones to access the meeting as well via the

Zoom app. Mrs. Caramanello felt that the issue with the seniors is that they wanted to stay at home. It was decided to try the Zoom option at the September meeting.

Mr. Stone suggested having a sign-up sheet for online public comment only. Dr. Darcy asked what the process will be for sign-up. She did not feel that requiring an email address is inclusive. Mr. Pietrasko suggested having people sign up online or possibly calling someone to sign up. Dr. Schuch stated that the only requirement in his past districts was that someone could not sign someone else up. Once someone signs up, they will be contacted the day before the meeting with instructions. Mr. Pietrasko and Dr. Schuch will work on the procedures.

New Business

A. Board Self-Evaluation/Retreat (proposed September 10, 2022, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM)

Mrs. Petrella reported that the presenter is not available on September 10th. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked for everyone to take a look at their Saturday schedules in October. She will send an email which will include a self-evaluation for everyone to fill out.

B. Approval of Committee Member Appointees

Mrs. Petrella recommended John Cross for the Building Committee. He has been a resident of Durham since 1993 and worked over 35 years in commercial construction. He is the Director of Facilities at Hamden Public Schools and has served on numerous building committees.

Mr. Moore asked how many people were on the Building Committee and felt that they needed to be careful not to have too many.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to accept John Cross for the Building Committee.

In favor of accepting John Cross for the Building Committee: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.

Mrs. Petrella noted that negotiations on the teachers' contract will start on October 13, 2022 and Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Dahlheimer and Mrs. Petrella will be part of that. Mr. Moore and Ms. Betty volunteered to join the committee as well.

Communications

Mrs. Petrella received information from Nick Faiella about how much the Benchwarmers do for the district. By the end of the 2022 school year, the Benchwarmers will have donated nearly \$20,000 to the athletic department and an additional \$8,000 in scholarships. They are also working on the advertising program.

Mrs. Petrella received emails from Andrew Taylor regarding a vape detector system and Michelle Gohagan regarding the district's response to her concerns.

Mrs. Dahlheimer has been in contact with someone from Madison Public Schools who are rolling out the See It, Say It, Send It anonymous reporting app. She would like the district to look into this as well. The app allows students and the entire school community to report safety concerns or instances of bullying to the administration for investigation.

Mr. Moore received a letter from Ashley McDowell who wanted to coordinate a Go Pink project. Mr. Moore responded to the administrators that each athletic team has a pink-out event.

Mrs. Roy received communication from a member of the Middlefield-Durham Racial Justice Team about how the district will be adding the racial justice issue to be a standing agenda item at board meetings. Mrs. Roy thinks this is a great idea. She also received various communications about in-person trainings for parent on the new IEP format and has spoken to Mrs. Keane about that.

Public Comment - at the end of the meeting should refer to items not on the agenda

Michelle Gohagon, from Rockfall, noted that 176 days ago her daughter was the target of a horrible racist attack and 167 days ago, she and her husband came to the board asking that they be informed of the plan for addressing the prevalent racism in the schools. They had hoped that the board would have empathy for their daughter's experience, but unfortunately recognize that, at times, people only have sustained empathy when they can envision these experiences happening to them. As a result, no plan has been presented and no substantive change or action has taken place. She noted that CABA (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) states that school board members work to serve students by supporting a healthy school culture, adopting and maintaining current policies, setting the direction of the school district to achieve highest student performance and having strong ethical standards. A good member is described as being flexible and to understand there are times when changes must be made. Mrs. Gohagon felt that changes must be made in the schools to combat the prevalent racism that exists. It has become clear to them that no plan or policy will be written or suggested by the superintendent without the board's clear direction or expectations. She then asked that this be made an ongoing agenda item, ask Dr. Schuch to present a detailed plan on how these issues will be addressed and create a policy that bans hate speech, symbols of hate and outline the responsibilities of the school and district leaders as it relates to such as well as what actions should be taken should these be brought into the schools.

Mrs. Gohagon reviewed that Dr. Schuch had suggested that creating a plan or policy was difficult because it was polarizing. She did not feel that protecting children and combating racism is polarizing and is simply the right thing to do. Good educational leaders would be willing to do the hard work to fulfill their obligation of making the children their ultimate focus. She waits for the board's and the superintendent's next steps.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, felt that the remote access plan sounds encouraging, but he is really concerned about the board trying to get tight control on public comment. He felt that people should have a chance to have their say as long as they don't get out of hand.

Adjournment

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, 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. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First