

Revised

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session on Wednesday, September 28, 2022 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Ms. Betty (remote), Mrs. Caramanello (arrived late), Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone (remote), Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mrs. Roy (remote)

Board members absent: Mr. Moore and Mr. Stone

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. Siegel, Learner-Centered Specialist.

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Long-Range Facility Planning Discussion

A. Facility planning history

Mrs. Petrella sent out a document with the history and Mrs. Maloney had also sent out some of the prior options. Mrs. Petrella does not want to dwell on what happened before, but wanted to provide background.

Mrs. Petrella also noted that people who had been on the Utilization Committee wondered why they were not meeting and Mrs. Dahlheimer, who chairs Utilization, stated that between the strategic planning and the configuration process, utilization will take place during these work sessions. Once it gets rolling, the Utilization Committee will meet again. Mrs. Petrella also mentioned that committee meetings were never broadcast before and there was very limited access to what was going on. Mrs. Petrella noted that the board will decide in December on how to move forward.

Moving to the background on closing a school, the board established a Utilization Committee in 2014 to address declining enrollment and that committee recommended the closing of Korn School as their first action. The board voted to close Korn in October, 2015. The board continued to develop options to address declining enrollment, and all of them considered closing Lyman School due to its age, size and capital needs. Early options included of renovating Brewster and Memorials as K-5 schools. A single preK-5 at Korn School was also evaluated. All of those proposals were rejected by the board due to costs and two options were developed with minimal improvements to Brewster and Memorial (options A and B). The Utilization Committee recommended option A and, in March of 2018, with no public input, the

board voted 6-4 to adopt option A. This action was rescinded at the next board meeting due to huge public outcry.

The board then held a public hearing and created a survey, with subsequent analysis of the results along with several visioning sessions. The board then voted to establish a single-track curriculum program in December of 2018. On January 9, 2019, the board voted to adopt option A which is the current proposal, consisting of a preK-2 at Brewster, a 3-5 at Memorial, 6-8 at Strong and 9-12 at Coginchaug. The board prepared final plans for that option, which included a six-room addition to Brewster with elimination of portable classrooms and minor improvements to Memorial which was the least expensive of all options.

The board prepared the referendum documents for bonding the improvements, but Bond Counsel required the Regionalization Plan be amended to allow the board to close any school. The amendment was prepared and a hearing was held. That amendment was defeated at referendum, with a negative vote from both towns. There was then a large time gap, due to COVID.

In May, 2021, the board voted to change the Plan of Regionalization to permit the board to specifically close John Lyman School. On November 2, 2021, the citizens of Durham approved the change in the Plan of Regionalization, but the citizens of Middlefield did not. Therefore, the change to the Plan of Regionalization to close John Lyman School failed, in spite of being approved by the majority of combined voters. A change to the Plan of Regionalization must pass in each town.

On December 8, 2021, the board voted to ask the citizens of Durham and Middlefield to fund \$7.5 million in necessary capital improvements and replacement of end-of-life mechanical systems at John Lyman School. On February 8, 2022, the referendum to fund the \$7.5 million was overwhelming rejected by the combined voters of Durham and Middlefield. This vote required a simple majority of the combined communities.

This resulted with the board not being allowed to close John Lyman, nor to make the necessary repairs. Because of this conundrum, the Board of Education passed a resolution to authorize the closing of John Lyman School at the end of the 2022-2023 school year. This resolution was passed to the State Legislature for their decision to resolve the issue. The legislature did not vote on the issue.

Dr. Darcy asked if the referendum to change the Plan of Regionalization was to allow the board to close any school or specifically mention John Lyman. Mrs. Petrella reiterated that the first proposed change was to close any school and the second was just for John Lyman School.

B. Enrollment forecast follow-up questions/discussion

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that the enrollment forecast was recently done and goes out to 2033. No one had any further questions. Mr. Mennone felt it was well-presented and showed what has been an ongoing trend. Mrs. Petrella agreed that the new projections follow along the older ones.

C. Ideas and recommendations moving forward

Mrs. Petrella felt that the most popular option with most of the community is option A which includes closing Lyman, preK-2, 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they really need to look at Middlefield and Durham and find out what is equitable. They need to work together as a community to find a solution that works the best for both towns. She would like the board to look at the possibility of a K-5 expansion at Memorial with the ability to close Lyman, 6-8 at Strong and 9-12 at Coginchaug. That would leave K-5 in Middlefield and 6-12 in Durham. Mrs. Dahlheimer wasn't sure where Brewster would fall in that.

Mr. Roraback felt that the communities are not happy with multiple transitions and Mrs. Dahlheimer's option would certainly alleviate that. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that it would drastically lower building resources and staffing as well, but most importantly kids would be in school together from K-12. She felt that the Lyman kids spending just one year in Memorial now is not a good thing. Mrs. Petrella agreed that it is hard to build communities when the kids aren't in school for very long.

Dr. Schuch stated that the most troublesome thing he heard from the community during the last round is that people kept asking for a plan. He felt that they are now to the point where they are discussing what is best for the learners in the district. The leadership team spent time on this during the summer and some people advocated for option A. Once they started talking about Mrs. Dahlheimer's proposal, they agreed there is a lot of merit to that and it would keep schools in both towns. This became a unanimous consensus as the obvious place to start as a discussion point. Dr. Schuch felt that if they are going to start reimagining, they need to reimagine for all and get away from things like school choice. He agreed that transitions are difficult for children, but noted that they are difficult for families as well.

Dr. Schuch also felt that a K-5 elementary school is the prevailing model nationwide, probably because it allows children and families to develop a relationship with a school. He added that their plans may be difficult to accomplish on three separate campuses. Dr. Schuch also mentioned that the community felt that the district is over-staffed and this would help with that as well. He added that the team wasn't sure what would happen with the Brewster campus, but do feel that Memorial's location lends itself to expansion and there is already under-utilized space there. Dr. Schuch added that they would choose that Brewster remains active because the facility is in superior shape compared to Lyman.

Mrs. Dahlheimer added that Brewster has to remain as educational property and cannot be sold, but Dr. Schuch felt there were some other options. Dr. Schuch would like to have a facility plan that includes some undesignated space and added that they may want to do more preschool. He also felt there may be a potential to partner with other agencies to do things on that campus that would also support the strategic plan.

Dr. Schuch summarized that the leadership team felt that it is a no-brainer to consider Mrs. Dahlheimer's proposal vs. option A from a few years ago. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they still need to look at all options and what each community is looking for.

Mrs. Petrella clarified that Dr. Schuch was not talking about Brewster being a full school, with administrators and staff. He explained that the campus would include four buildings, but basically three schools and a swing space. He felt that Brewster could serve multiple purposes and change over the years and it would be a way to take advantage educationally and fiscally.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that Brewster may give the district a way to accommodate a universal preK which many states are moving toward.

****There was a break in the recording at this point****

Mrs. Dahlheimer reiterated that the community needs to come together and division has been building for years. She felt that this option would provide a chance to have social workers, school psychologists and guidance counselors tracking kids from the beginning. She felt that there is a big difference between Lyman and Brewster as far as special needs learners and this would allow them to be together.

Mr. Roraback hoped that a lot of the division has been alleviated by moving to a single program. Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that it was hard to tell, but felt that the two programs are still different. They may have the same curriculum, but the make-up of the schools is different. She would like to see the district offer the same exact education with the same social growth from the beginning.

Mr. Roraback recalled venturing to Wadsworth Falls State Park when he was at Memorial and that can be expanded for outdoor education. He asked if there was room for expansion there and Mrs. Petrella explained that there is an adjacent lot which is owned by the church. They were willing to either sell or lease the property in the past for parking. Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that she didn't want to know if it was possible, but rather wanted to see what she felt would be best for the kids and then figure out how to make it work.

Mrs. Roy asked if there has ever been a work session involving the learners in the different options. She also felt they need to stay focused on retaining learners in the district. Mrs. Petrella stated that students were approached in the past and the overwhelming response was that they wanted to be together. Mrs. Keane added that they did a lot of work with that on Portrait of a Citizen, including student focus groups across the district. Dr. Schuch met with a group of seniors in his first few months in the district and heard that it was difficult to join together in the later grades. They had all enjoyed their experiences up to that point, but Dr. Schuch wondered why they would even set the students up for that.

Ms. Betty stated that she is in favor of a K-5 school because the kids need to be together. She felt that it is ridiculous that kids have to go to basically middle school for third grade. Ms. Betty felt that this would be a very good compromise to keep a school in Middlefield and one of the best options to present. She also felt that they need to get rid of the school choice for kindergarten because it does make people think there are two different programs and it should go away immediately. Mrs. Caramanello added that it adds a tremendous amount of pressure and competition between the staff that is completely unnecessary. Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that the website still states that John Lyman is integrated day and Brewster is contemporary.

Mr. Mennone felt that the confusion about all of this needs to end. He felt that the idea of having K-5 at Memorial is a phenomenal idea as it adds stability and fiscal responsibility. He reiterated that it is important for the board to focus on three state-of-the-art schools with one curriculum and one community. Separating the kids over different schools does not promote a community.

Mr. Mennone also felt that a timeline is necessary to move forward. This option provides ownership to both towns, but it is important to realize that it shouldn't be the town towns; it should be the district and all of the kids. He felt that what is happening now is a disservice to the learners.

Dr. Schuch felt that, at some point, every school needs to have a major renovation. If this district envisions that they are going to keep quality facilities over the years, it would be much more fiscally

responsible to have to renovate three campuses rather than four or five and the community may be more supportive of that. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that they have to be careful not to out-tax the citizens of the two towns.

D. Next steps

Mrs. Petrella stated that the biggest thing moving forward is getting information out to the communities and getting their support. The last piece that the community heard was K-2, 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12 configuration. She asked if they should present the community with both of these options with upgraded numbers. Mr. Mennone felt that they should stick to one plan and the K-5 plan would probably be the best one because it is the most fiscally-responsible decision for both communities as well as getting all the kids together.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that option A completely goes against the board's goals and objectives for student achievement. Mrs. Roy agreed with Mr. Mennone as did Mrs. Caramanello, but she felt the community would need concrete numbers. She felt that people will want to see a plan. Mr. Mennone agreed and added that closing two schools will provide an amazing savings. Mrs. Neubig agreed and stated that concrete numbers would not be a problem.

Mrs. Caramanello asked if they were talking about closing two schools. Dr. Schuch stated that the staff recommends closing Lyman and retain Brewster, at least for the short term. He felt that staffing are the larger costs, so that would be reduced at Brewster. Mrs. Caramanello summarized that there would still be expenses at Brewster and it would not be the same as closing it down. Dr. Schuch noted that savings would come from collapsing K-5 classes and reduction in support staff as well.

Mrs. Dahlheimer would want to see architect numbers and building costs, but also how it would affect the students and families. Dr. Darcy also felt that they have to look at when and how many teachers will be laid off. The implications for the teaching staff could be foreboding. Mrs. Neubig stated that they did that for Lyman, but not with the Brewster component. Ms. Betty asked how many teachers they would actually lose because they would still have the same amount of kids and the class sizes are pretty large right now. Mrs. Neubig explained that it was more in the area of related arts, administration, office staff, nursing and custodial.

Dr. Schuch asked if the board is together enough on this issue to dive into that detailed level of planning or requires more input. It will take time, effort and money. He added that there will be a transition phase which will not be ideal. It can be phased in and will likely be dictated by the construction timeline. Dr. Schuch would hope that children will be allowed in the school while construction is happening, but that presents problems of its own.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they need more information before they can actually do a ThoughtExchange. She would not want to see people asking for information that the board knows is available. Dr. Darcy felt that people who have been passionate about the closing of John Lyman are owed the opportunity to hear and respond first-hand before moving into any commitment to get hard numbers. Mrs. Caramanello agreed, however they have already done that and she fears that that will just rehash what they have already talked about. Knowing that history, Mrs. Caramanello would like to just proceed with this plan as

it is fiscally responsible and also listens to the voters. Dr. Darcy agreed, but she would like to hear if the public felt this plan allays their concerns.

Mrs. Caramanello asked if it would be for the entire district or just John Lyman parents and what would they do if the majority aren't happen with this plan either. Dr. Darcy felt that it would still have to go to referendum, but Dr. Schuch was not sure about that and they will research that. He felt that they would need permission to move away from John Lyman, but reallocating learners to different buildings is fully within the board's purview. He reminded everyone that this plan would require a capital investment at Memorial which would very likely require a bond referendum and voter support. He reminded everyone that this will affect children who are not even in school yet, but also affect taxpayers who have no children. Dr. Schuch felt it was important to be clear about the reimagining as well.

Mrs. Keane explained that the district is in transition and has no timeline. When they look at grade configuration and a single-track curriculum, they don't have that yet. This transition has been happening since 2012 and are not where they want to be yet.

Mr. Roraback recalled that the public just wanted the board to make a decision and they will need to supply pictures, numbers and backup information. Mrs. Neubig felt that the communities would rather the district spend their resources on how to make this the best option rather than updating numbers of two options. There is some money in the budget to get an architect involved.

Mrs. Neubig added that Brewster does still require some capital improvements that were included in the bonding but have not been completed as of yet. She reminded everyone that State reimbursement may be affected by having available space at Brewster unless it enhances and improves the educational experience of the students. Mrs. Neubig noted that if she can apply to the State for reimbursement by June 30th of this year, meaning a referendum in May but could also be done as late as November 15th, they would hear from the State in December as to what projects were approved. Funding is provided the following July 1st and construction would need to begin within one year. That puts the project being finished by June, 2026. That is also the year that the district's debt service falls significantly and she has asked the bond counsel to determine how much can be borrowed without increasing the debt service. They stated that that number would be \$5.1 million, but that could change due to interest rates. Mrs. Neubig stressed that this lines up perfectly with the year debt service drops and that won't happen again until 2041-2042.

Mrs. Neubig stated that there would be savings in other line items, such as salaries, and that can all be computed based on best estimates. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if it would be possible to go to referendum sooner if they had an architectural plan because she would be concerned about issues at Lyman between now and 2026. Mrs. Neubig explained that she can't move that timeline because it's state-dictated because of reimbursement and, right now, they reimburse at about 52-53 percent and that would be locked in when the district applies for the grant.

Mrs. Petrella added that she would like to get some input from the community before going too far. She asked if they could use ParentSquare or do a mailer. Dr. Schuch felt that they needed to decide what they would actually be looking for. He felt that ThoughtExchange is tailor-made for this. Mrs. Dahlheimer would be okay with a ThoughtExchange, but felt that a public hearing may involve too few people.

Mr. Pietrasko added that ParentSquare is opt-in only and people would have to sign up to receive the information. Ms. Betty reviewed that the board has gone to the public several times and they have asked for an option or a plan. She felt that it will become even more muddled if they keep asking for opinions. Ms. Betty felt that they needed to move forward in getting an architectural plan and cost estimates and present that.

Mrs. Petrella agreed that it doesn't make sense to put out additional options. Ms. Betty felt that they need to tell the communities that this is what the board feels would be the best option moving forward and then get opinions. Mrs. Caramanello agreed that this is based on what the community has been saying for several years. She felt that they should get a plan, get numbers, create a timeline and then ask if the community backs it. Mrs. Neubig stated that the architect will do a presentation with renderings. Dr. Schuch stated that if the board has consensus that this plan has merit, they are prepared to start going into the details.

Mr. Mennone felt that Mrs. Neubig's information about the timeline makes sense and he is in favor of that. He added that the longer they wait, there are still buildings that will require capital improvements. He felt that the keys to this are the financial impact and how it will affect the learners. A presentation with that information would be helpful. He added that he worked with Meriden schools when both high schools were renovated at the same time, with learners in the buildings. Mr. Mennone reviewed that they keep talking about this and it's time to move forward.

Mr. Roraback envisioned a community night at Memorial once details are available, including pictures, financial impact and student impact. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it was different than when they had several options. Dr. Schuch felt that this is a very simple plan and they are not suggesting any changes to Strong or Cuginchaug which some of the past plans did. Mr. Roraback felt that it was important to emphasize that any savings reaped from this will make the education stronger.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked that this issue be put on the agenda for the next regular meeting and to encourage everyone to go back and listen to this work session. Dr. Schuch would like to ask for a formal vote at that meeting and Mrs. Neubig will wait to contact the architect until then.

Adjournment

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to adjourn the special meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of adjourning the special meeting of the Board of Education: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mrs. Roy. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First