

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, January 11, 2023 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

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

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 Resource Specialist, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology and Mrs. Quarato, Learner-Centered Specialist

Mrs. Petrella called the work session to order at 6:01 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Approval of Agenda**

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

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

### **Work Session**

#### **A. Elementary Literacy Programming**

Mrs. Quarato explained that literacy work in the district has been ongoing and the State of Connecticut has come out with seven approved reading programs that they have asked schools to select from and implement. A team of coaches and administrators began meeting in October to discuss the work that has been done in curriculum, the new legislation and what next steps would be best for the district's learners. Members of the team then introduced themselves to the board.

Mrs. Allen reviewed that they met with the Student Achievement committee last year and reviewed the literacy shifts in the district. Over the last five years, they have realized that the curriculum was very comprehension-heavy and they needed to shift more towards the Science of Reading and structured literacy. The curriculum was changed and Foundations was implemented. Training was also provided within the district, including Orton-Gillingham training. Science of Reading professional development was also provided to teachers K-5, including dyslexia, a summer institute for K-2 teachers and a presentation of structured literacy. Employees also attended professional training outside the district. Benchmark assessments were revised. The district was also recognized for this work and were asked to be panelists at the ReadyCT conference.

The curriculum is a live document and is always moving. There are links available to the curriculum documents and the literacy presentation. Mrs. Allen has been training interventionists, tutors, coaches and special ed teachers in the district in OG practices. The assessments that the district has been using include iReady assessments in grades 2-8, DIBELS in K-2, PAST and Foundations.

Mrs. Quarato explained that while they continue to improve upon the curriculum, it is just not sustainable to continue the current curriculum as there would just not be enough time. After first meeting in October, they were tasked to research the approved vendors. In November, Mrs. Murray and Mrs. Allen attended a vendor fair and the top vendors were discussed at the team's next meeting. Those top three vendors were invited to speak to the team in mid-November and the team then talked with Dr. Schuch. The team then asked for quotes as well as references from other schools. Unfortunately, only one program is being used by a district in the state out of the seven available.

The team met again last week to discuss next steps after today's meeting. They would like to get this program into the teachers' hands to explore what it has to offer. Training is also lined up for coaches.

The top three vendors only represent two different curriculum options. One is CKLA that is done through Amplify. The other program is EL Education offered through two publishing companies. The team met with all three vendors. The team then decided that the EL Education option was the one that they felt really encompassed where the district is now and where they want to move toward more learner-centered education. A big component of this program is the shift from whole group instruction to small group instruction. It is much more personalized, but there are whole group components as well. It would include about two hours every day of literacy instruction. The Foundations program would be replaced with this program. They offer differentiation options for small groups which are based on assessments. There is also a learning lab block that is more interdisciplinary which is a district goal.

The team then went on to review the pros and cons of EL Education. One of the biggest pros is that EL Education is mostly done through small group instruction and is very personalized. The learning lab is interdisciplinary and will allow the district to integrate science and social studies. Both a pro and con of the program is the assessments that are done weekly that don't replace the DIBELS assessments but can be a part of progress monitoring.

There are rubrics within a lot of the learning as well as different genres of writing. Professional learning is included. The decodables that they provide weren't a big selling point, but they can be supplemented. There is a lot of collaboration and peer work that happens within this program.

Mr. Ford then went on to explain that the team met with two companies, Imagine Learning and Open Up, who publish the materials. They believe that Imagine Learning will be more expensive than Open Up. Mr. Ford reviewed the two options from Open Up and explained that the basic differences between the two are the digital components and more personalized learning features. He also reviewed the estimated costs for the in-house, current program which would be higher.

Mrs. Quarato then asked if anyone on the board had any questions. Dr. Darcy encouraged the team to not dismiss Imagine Learning because they imagine what the cost would be. She is also trying to pull some strings to get someone to call them. Dr. Darcy has experience with Imagine Learning, but it is the same curriculum regardless. She noted that a DIBELS screener is a one-time thing and wondered why it is used three times a year. Mrs. Quarato explained that they are still having conversations about that. They do not plan to continue with iReady after this school year, but they are given more actionable data from DIBELS. Dr. Darcy felt that the weekly assessments just happen and the kids don't even realize they're being assessed. She would think that DIBELS would be done once a year and then progress monitoring otherwise.

Dr. Darcy asked if they have considered letting the teachers see the two programs and the team has done that. She also asked how EL would fit into a broader K-12 literacy plan and noted that another program has a really strong middle school program. Mrs. Quarato explained that they will definitely have to look at the 6-12 curriculum and how it can be built into that. Some Science of Reading practices have been started at the 6-12 level. Dr. Darcy asked if they might want to keep some Foundations for specific populations and the team is hoping that the new curriculum will help target smaller group instruction, but they may have to supplement with Foundations and OG.

Mr. Roraback thanked the team for coming to the meeting. He asked if the platform supports English language learning students. There are strategies to incorporate learning for ML and special education learners, but they will need to do more research on that. Mrs. Quarato felt that they will probably still need to bring in special materials for those learners. Mr. Roraback asked if they felt that resources will need to be redirected to better support that group. Dr. Schuch explained that they are considering that in the budget proposal and are looking to see if there are existing funding streams available for the one-time costs. Dr. Schuch hoped that the board will allow them to move forward with this new program and look at budgeting.

Mrs. Caramanello asked Mrs. Quarato about other schools using the program and she explained that the school in Connecticut is using one of the approved programs, but not this one. She believed it was Suffield, but wasn't sure. Mrs. Caramanello asked about this program in particular and Mrs. Quarato explained that there are no schools in Connecticut, but a few schools in Massachusetts use it and the representative is trying to put them in contact with them. Mrs. Caramanello definitely would want feedback from schools that are actually using it. She also asked Mrs. Durkin about replacing the Foundations program with all of the time and money that has been spent training the teacher. Mrs. Durkin felt that the new program will encompass the elements of Foundations, however there are certainly elements of Foundations that can still be used to guide instruction. She added that Foundations is not a one-size-fits-all program and EL seems to match a little bit more with the direction the district is heading in for Re-Imagining and personalizing learning.

Mrs. Caramanello asked how the teachers will implement this small group structure in a typical classroom. There will be independent, personalized activities within the program as well as small group instruction that the teachers will do. Mrs. Durkin added that the program also provides a block of time in the beginning of the year to launch this type of learning. Mrs. Caramanello explained that she was trying to figure out how this will be different from what they have been doing and Mrs. Durkin felt that the biggest difference is the fact that it is not comprehension-heavy and all the other pieces are included in the program. Mrs. Caramanello summarized that it is a convenience factor.

Mrs. Quarato explained that the weekly assessments will help the teachers to home in on what learners are struggling with and what they are doing well with. They will then be able to use that information to plan for their next lesson on a more individualized level. Dr. Darcy added the district has to do something because they have to show they are addressing the pieces of the Science of Reading and structured literacy. Whether it's part of a full package or addressing individual gaps, something needs to be done. The real shift will be what happens in the small groups. Mrs. Caramanello agreed and noted that the staff has been asking desperately for quite a while. She did state that she will have a hard time supporting this at budget time since the district already has two instructional curriculum people that they are paying. It was explained that it would be a very large undertaking for two people to write a K-5 curriculum and would take years. Mrs. Caramanello understood, but felt that she would need to know more about a

curriculum that would cost this much money yet would still need to be supplemented. She felt it would be irresponsible of the board to say go ahead with this without more information.

Mrs. Caramanello also asked if teachers will be held accountable to do the weekly assessments and the team explained that they would be part of the small group instruction and they are very quick. Dr. Darcy added that the assessments are included in activities that the students do with the key to get everyone to move at least a grade level every year. Mr. Mennone asked why no other district is using this program if it's as good as the team is saying. The team felt that it was because of the Science of Reading and Connecticut now feels there is a sense of urgency based on that.

Dr. Darcy explained that none of the schools in Connecticut use the programs that the state is saying they have to and the district will have to choose one. Mr. Mennone asked what other districts are saying and it was explained that RSD 13 is ahead of the game on researching this. The district's reading data shows that they need to do something for the learners. They are also hoping to bring in the optional learner labs because they are really interdisciplinary.

There have been conversations with the teachers, but not any specific information has been provided. The big thing will be getting them to make the paradigm shift to the Science of Reading. They plan to give the teachers time to explore the program and ask questions. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if the board could send questions to the team. Dr. Schuch explained that he and Mrs. Neubig will be asking the vendor financial questions.

Mr. Roraback would like to see the students' input into the digital part of the platform as it can be excitement, engagement or endurance. He has heard comments that the computer becomes the main dish and the teacher becomes the side dish. The team assured him that the teacher will not be the side dish.

Mrs. Petrella wondered why, once they decide that this is the program, they would pilot it and not just implement it with extensive training. She would like to see some of the materials. Mrs. Roy would be interested in learning more about how this will help special needs children and which program is most culturally and ethnically responsive as well as social-emotional needs of the students. It was agreed to create a Google Doc where board members can send their questions.

Mrs. Petrella would also like a presentation to the board about the Orton Gillingham program. Mrs. Keane reiterated that this is a need and they either need to revamp the current curriculum or adopt a new one. This is not a convenience nor a choice. Mrs. Caramanello thanked the team for all of their time and effort.

## **Presentations and Recognitions**

### **A. CRHS A Capella Group**

Erin Schilling introduced the A Capella Choir who are all members of the Show Choir and the musical, Matilda, which starts rehearsals next week. The a capella students meet at night for rehearsals. The concert is tomorrow night at 7:00 and will feature Jazz Band, Show Choir and A Capella. The choir then sang the song Roar for the board.

**B. CRHS Reporters - Hayden Gonzales and Christine Waterman**

Christine Waterman reported that Catherine Taylor will be away for a few months and Hayden Gonzales is practicing with the Jazz Band tonight. The Winter Wonderland formal will be hosted by the senior class on January 28<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Cuginchaug participants were just notified of their acceptances, with the event being held on March 17<sup>th</sup>. Unified Sports will hold a pep rally on January 26<sup>th</sup>. The winter sports captains and seniors have come up with a new tradition called Athlete of the Month and December's first winner was basketball player Preston Mennone. The boys' and girls' basketball teams have started their seasons strong. Cheerleaders are working on new routines for competitions and many athletes on the indoor track team have already qualified for Shorelines and States.

Members of the Pep Band played before a Quinnipiac men's' hockey team game. The CMA Southern Region festival will be this Friday and Saturday and some of the district's students will participate. Rehearsals for Matilda begin next week, with the shows at the end of March. Christine reiterated that the Jazz Band, Show Choir and A Capella concert is tomorrow at 7:00 in the auditorium.

**Auditors' Report****A. Vote to accept auditors' report**

David Flint, a principal from CLA presented the 2021-2022 independent audit. He began by calling the boards attention to page 1, the Auditor's Opinion. The district received an unmodified opinion for the financial statements dated June 30, 2022. An unmodified opinion is the best opinion that can be received and indicates that it was a clean audit. Additionally, he noted a new accounting standard adopted this year which has to do with operating leases now appearing on the balance sheet.

Mr. Flint noted that the Statement of Net Position now includes the assets and liabilities of any operating leases. The district had a total net position of \$25.25 million at the end of the year, with most of it being in net investment in capital assets.

Exhibit 3 shows the fund-based financial statements which do not include capital assets or long-term debt. The General Fund had a balance of \$780,000 and the school cafeteria fund had a balance of \$325,000. Mr. Flint highlighted the cafeteria fund because most years, that fund runs at a deficit but that changed in 2022 due to the amount of federal funding received. There is also a significant fund balance in Capital Reserve as a result of bonds that were issued in FY 2022 that have not yet been spent. Looking at the income statement, the General Fund had a deficit of \$877,000 for the year as they had appropriated \$784,000 from the fund balance to balance the budget.

Mr. Flint then reviewed a snapshot of the pension plan and the district had a net pension liability of \$1.6 million at the end of the year which is basically more than the assets in the trust. The funding percentage for the year was 86.72 percent and more than most other districts. Last year, there was a net pension asset which is very rare. The actuary determined that the district should have contributed approximately \$314,000 into the pension in 2022 and the district did 100 percent of that required contribution.

In addition to the pension plan, the district also offers a health plan for retirees. There is no trust related to this plan and the district pays the claims as they come in. The total liability is \$3.8 million for this plan.

Mr. Flint then responded to the questions he had received about the Financial Statements. Looking at page 9, Operating Grants and Contributions, is down from \$12.5 million to about \$5.6 million. This swing has to do with the State Teacher Retirement Plan. It is balanced out by the decrease in expenses in the General Instruction line.

The Board of Education terms are noted as being three years, but it has been brought to his attention that the terms for Durham are four years and that will be updated. On page 35, Capital Asset footnote, there was a large decrease in buildings and improvement with about \$620,000 due to disposal of Korn School. Land is listed at \$200,000 and is obviously worth a lot more than that, but capital assets are recorded at historical costs. Land does not depreciate or appreciate.

Mr. Moore asked about an error on page 21 where it says town instead of district and Mr. Flint has already corrected that.

Mr. Flint noted that they were also engaged to do a federal and state single audit. Historically, the district has not had to do a federal single audit except for the last few years due to the influx of COVID funding. An unmodified opinion was issued for the federal single audit with no compliance findings to report. They audited the IDEA and ESSER grants for FY 2022.

Moving on to the state single audit, they have issued an unmodified opinion with no compliance findings to report. They audited three grants, the Workforce Alliance, Adult Education and Health Foods Initiative.

*Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, to accept the 2021/2022 Auditor's Report, as presented.*

*In favor of accepting the 2021/2022 Auditor's Report, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

Mr. Moore thanked Mrs. Neubig for the work she has done.

**Public Comment - at the beginning of the meeting, public comment should refer to items on the agenda**

**A. In-person public comment**

Maureen Funke, from Durham, thanked everyone for all the work they do. She believes that the new literacy program sounds amazing and she would fully support a budget for that. As a member and co-chair of the Middlefield-Durham Racial Justice Team, they are interested in getting the district to recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day ideally as part of this year's calendar. They feel that it would be an important step for the district. She then read a draft motion for the board.

Nick Faiella, from Middlefield, felt that the district cannot consider changing the name of an existing federal or state holiday. Both the nation's and the state's website still list October 9, 2023 as Columbus Day. He suggested that, if the accomplishments of Native Americans are not adequately addressed in the

existing curriculum, the school should work with the appropriate parties to make sure their role is acknowledged.

Julia Talbert-Slagle, a senior at Coginchaug, would appreciate Columbus Day being changed to Indigenous Peoples' Day because the district has a lot of work to do on being more inclusive and this would be a great first step. She has been disappointed in the lack of knowledge she has on indigenous people since they are so essential to the United States as it is today and the land originally belonged to them.

**B. Remote public comment**

None.

**Approval of Minutes**

**A. Board of Education Regular Meeting - December 14, 2022**

Mrs. Petrella asked if the board wanted to clarify the statement about the remote grievance hearing by adding support staff to that description.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on December 14, 2022, as amended.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on December 14, 2022, as amended: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

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

Dr. Schuch wished everyone a Happy New Year and had nothing additional to report tonight.

**Staff Reports**

**A. Director of Finance Report - Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig reported that the general fund is 46 percent expended and 49 percent of budgeted revenue has been received. MTA has expended 29 percent, with 27 percent budgeted revenue received.

As a follow up to last month's meeting, Mrs. Neubig reported that there has been a significant drop in lunches compared to the month of October (between 18 to 30 percent, depending on the school). The surplus that was reported by the auditor will help to cover this difference. There were some supply chain issues and issues with the quality of the produce. Mark Basil was then going to Sam's Club weekly and then the club put a limit on how much could be purchased. It seems to be getting better now and the limits have been lifted and their regular vendor is now able to supply more reasonably priced produce. Made-to-order salads are being offered at the high school.

Mrs. Neubig noted that the district ended the year with a surplus of about \$185,000 which is significantly lower than in the past. Expenditures came in under budget by \$226,000 and revenue was also under budget, by \$41,000. Certified personnel was overspent by \$271,000 which was not surprising, as that line was budgeted at 95 percent and she would want to budget at least a 96.5 percent vacancy factor going forward. Property Services was over-expended due to unanticipated repairs and maintenance. Building supplies was over-expended due to natural gas and electricity. Employee benefits were under-expended as were Purchased Services-Operations due to buses being doubled and for athletics. The district had difficulty getting copy paper which also resulted in a surplus in office supplies.

Debt service was budgeted for bonding, but the proceeds were not received until May. Capital reserve looks like it was over budget, but the district received an incentive from Eversource for the lighting project at Memorial that was transferred to the capital reserve account which funded the project. They also were over budget in Miscellaneous Revenue and under budget in Special Ed Excess Cost grant.

Mrs. Neubig is having a meeting next week about the State Partnership Plan for insurance for the 23-24 budget preparation, which is running at a deficit. She asked the board members to email her with any questions about the audit. Ms. Betty thanked Mrs. Neubig for answering all of their questions about the cafeteria.

Mrs. Neubig added that they are having a meeting with Silver Petrucelli and a committee of educators in the district to start the educational aspect design of a Memorial K-5 renovation/expansion. Following that, they will get other stakeholders involved. One of those things will be to include the Building committee who really have a wealth of knowledge. Dr. Schuch added that, in his last district, the architectural firm allowed all stakeholders to have input in the design of the building, however that is not what is happening right now. No actual designing will be done until the taxpayers have approved the project. Mrs. Petrella added that she will ask additional board members to join in at a later time and will add a report to the agenda for the board meetings.

Dr. Darcy asked if Mrs. Neubig would be the one to negotiate with a vendor for a new curriculum and Mrs. Neubig explained that she and Dr. Schuch would do that.

#### **B. Organizational Charts/Job Descriptions 2023-2024 - Kevin Brough**

Mr. Brough distributed copies of the organizational charts to everyone. Going through the chart beginning with Central Office, Mr. Brough reviewed that there are five leadership strands under Dr. Schuch. They include the Director of Student Services and Special Education, Learner-Centered Specialist, Director of Infrastructure, Security and Technology, Human Resources Specialist and Director of Finance. Under each of those positions, there are accessory positions that are district-based and various staffing numbers associated with them.

Looking at the individual building levels, there is a similar structure under each of the principals. At Coginchaug, there is an Assistant Principal as well as teachers, student services, special education, school nurse, athletic director and support staff. At Strong, the format is similar with the major difference being no Assistant Principal but there is a Coordinator of Student Affairs. The three elementary schools have a similar structure and include coaches and interventionists as well. There are also school psychologists, counselors, ABA staff, tutors and speech and language pathologists. There is one nurse in each building



as well as custodians, food service personnel, secretaries and teacher assistants. There was also an organization chart for MTA.

Mr. Brough felt that this would give the board a better idea of staffing levels and how staff are aligned at a building level. Supervision is not linear and could almost be described as three-dimensional. Members of Central Office actively support and collaboratively supervise staff with the building principals. Mrs. Keane has many of her staff infused in the different buildings.

Mr. Brough explained that these positions are budgeted primarily through the district budget, but there is also some budgeting through various grants, such as the IDEA grant and Title I funding. He added that a number of positions are also split between buildings and there are also half-time positions as well. Mr. Brough explained that these positions are not static and flexibility is required to meet the needs of the students. He added that they will provide a comparison of staffing levels from 2022-2023 to 2023-2024 for the upcoming budget proposal.

Dr. Schuch added that these charts are based on what was budgeted and explained that some of these positions may be vacant at any given time. Starting in February, they will provide snapshots of changes in staffing for the month. Mrs. Petrella felt that that report will help the board better understand that staffing summary that they currently see.

Mr. Brough also explained that there are about 59 individual job descriptions in the district and they will be working to revise them. He hopes to have them all in place before the budget presentation. They are currently missing just the Transition Coordinator at the high school.

Mrs. Petrella asked if there was some way to highlight the people who are half-time or shared between positions. She thanked Mr. Brough for his work on this.

Mrs. Caramanello asked for further clarification on the 17 positions at Central Office. She would like to know the actual people, both who they are and what they do. Dr. Schuch explained that job descriptions are available for all of those positions. Mr. Brough will supply names and positions to Mrs. Caramanello. Dr. Schuch reminded her that people come and go and they wouldn't want to have to update the chart repeatedly.

Mrs. Dahlheimer would also like additional information on related arts, ABA and speech pathologists because she would like to be able to see what could be combined in a K-5 school. Dr. Darcy would be interested to know how the work is divided up between people with the same job title, specifically with the learner-centered specialist and coach. Dr. Schuch explained that those jobs, in particular, are very fluid at this point.

Mr. Roraback asked about support for new staff coming in and he is always concerned about teachers who don't really know who is available for support. Mr. Brough explained that there is new staff orientation before the start of school and each new teacher has a team mentor. Dr. Darcy asked how many part-time, certified educators are in the district and Mr. Brough thought there were five to six. The threshold for full benefits is .5 and Dr. Schuch explained that it has been their desire to have full-time people even if they are divided between buildings. Mrs. Petrella encouraged everyone to send any additional questions to Mr. Brough.

Mrs. Caramanello felt it was important that the board understand and know what every position is and how it's moved around before they can further discuss consolidation.

### **C. District Climate Committee Update - Jen Keane**

Mrs. Keane reported that the results of the climate surveys are in and they had an 85 percent participation rate with the learners K-12. She reviewed the K-2 form, the 3-5 form and the 6-12 form. Mrs. Keane had sent the results to all of the board members and reviewed how they were compiled. Generally, there are good, strong connections with teachers or adults. Mrs. Keane noted that five students stating that they do not feel safe or don't have a connection with an adult are five students too many.

Mrs. Keane explained that the entire survey is confidential and the only time kids can be identified is in the last question which includes their name or email address if they would like to talk to an adult. She did redact that information for the report.

Dr. Darcy noted that the challenge of having a five-point scale is kids default to the neutral and she suggested a two- or four-point scale to eliminate that option. Dr. Darcy felt that is necessary in order for the data to be actionable. Mrs. Keane agreed, but Dr. Schuch felt that if they truly are neutral and are forced to choose, they will not be accurate or they will just skip it. Dr. Darcy felt it would be better if they just skipped it. Dr. Schuch did not disagree with the idea, but wasn't sure it would provide more accurate information. Dr. Schuch also noted that if they do change the scale, it limits their ability to compare year to year. Dr. Darcy added that she looks at the neutrals as negative and is grateful for the written responses. She felt that the written responses were very positive.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if this survey is a template from state and Mrs. Keane explained that the questions were directly from the state and were best practice in 2012. Mrs. Dahlheimer looked at other districts and saw that some questions were different. She wondered if we had changed them or if the other districts did. Dr. Schuch felt that they might want to add items, but then the responses are different from year to year and the survey may become too long.

Mrs. Roy noted that there was a question about feeling safe on the bus in the lower levels, but not in the upper levels. She also stated that she is very concerned and wondered how some of the comments from the high school and Strong were dealt with. There were a lot of comments about unfair treatment from teachers, racism and other things. Mrs. Keane stated that they do follow up with the students if they left their name or email. She also noted that there were a lot of positive comments as well.

Mrs. Caramanello felt that that is exactly why they do this survey. She agreed with Dr. Darcy that the amount of neutrals didn't provide a lot of information and it should be a yes or no. She also felt that most of the older kids don't believe the survey is anonymous if it's being done on school-owned technology.

Mr. Moore asked if Mrs. Keane saw any trend in this yet and she noted that the last survey at the high school had many, many comments about the bathroom doors being locked. The trends are pretty consistent otherwise. Mr. Moore felt that it seems that Strong School is the most moody and Mrs. Keane agreed that middle school is usually a time of angst and change. Mrs. Dahlheimer pointed out that only 4 percent of the students at Strong disagreed with feeling safe at school.

Mr. Moore found it interesting that the race question generated the input that it did and it seems to be a pretty significant issue. Mrs. Dahlheimer questioned the wording of some of the questions, specifically using the word “experienced.” Any other questions from the board members will be submitted to Mrs. Keane.

Mrs. Petrella had sent out a suggestion that she felt it was important to keep the Google form simple and that the student needed to submit their name as well. She would like the students to explain in detail what they are reporting. Mrs. Keane, Mrs. Gonzalez and Mrs. Stone vetted the form to make it a real usable document. They wanted to make sure that both bullying and discrimination are included. Dr. Schuch added that the purpose of the form is not to be anonymous, but to allow learners to report discretely.

Mrs. Dahlheimer wished that this issue hadn’t come to board as there is very capable staff that could do it. They have gone so many months now without knowing and she would like to see it go forward as it is and make changes, as necessary. Mrs. Roy agreed and was glad that student input was included.

Dr. Darcy also felt that the board slowed down this process and they need to be mindful that they don’t get lost in the weeds. Mr. Mennone agreed that this was an administrative decision. Mrs. Petrella felt that the board had an obligation to at least show that they were interested in it and had some involvement in it. Mrs. Dahlheimer reminded everyone that when this began, it was a budgetary item and thus came to the board. Mrs. Caramanello agreed that the district needs something, but she felt that there was a tone to it that may scare kids away. She asked if there was a way to remove the question about agreeing to the terms. Mrs. Caramanello also felt that there will still be a majority of kids who will not say anything unless it’s anonymous. She wondered how they let the part of the population that wants to remain anonymous be able to bring issues forward.

Mrs. Keane agreed about the terms issue and will definitely look at that. In terms of the confidentiality piece, Mrs. Keane is aware that kids want to remain anonymous and safe, but the issue is that they cannot follow up if it is anonymous. Dr. Schuch agreed with Mrs. Caramanello as well, but anonymity makes it very difficult to investigate.

Mr. Mennone believed that the reporting student does need to be identified because the administration does need to verify the complaint, but that student needs to be protected as well. Mrs. Dahlheimer encouraged the district to teach its kids to speak up if they see something. Mrs. Roy agreed and explained that that continues on into adulthood as well. She thought that maybe a teacher/advisor or another student would be willing to help those students who are afraid to come forward. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it would be difficult to make a minor a liaison because they would be put in a difficult position.

Dr. Schuch summarized that this is still not perfect, but is certainly better than having nothing. Mrs. Stone added that there are trusted adults in the schools who do bring things to the attention of the administration and her office is always open as well. Mr. Mennone felt it was important that the kids know there are several different ways they can report. Mrs. Caramanello felt that it’s important to remind students to stand up against things that are wrong. Mrs. Keane added that they are also thinking about putting the form in a prevalent location on the district’s website.

**New Business****A. Vote to accept 2023-2024 District Calendar**

Dr. Schuch explained that Mr. Bradanini has reviewed the calendar and there is general consensus with the proposed calendar. August 28<sup>th</sup> is proposed to be the first day of school, with June 12<sup>th</sup> the last day of school. The board will decide the graduation date once the school year starts.

Dr. Schuch explained that there are three snow make-up days proposed which would become days off if they are not used. The biggest change proposed in the calendar is fewer designated in-house professional learning days and instead two days, June 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, that are technically professional learning days. They do hope that nobody comes in on those days for professional learning as the idea is to have teachers come up with their own professional learning activities throughout the year. They have also not included any early release professional learning days because the district's schools do not all start and end at the same time, but also because those days tend to not be great learning days.

The professional learning days are proposed to be held on August 24<sup>th</sup>, Election Day and February 16<sup>th</sup>. They did do away with the day after the Durham Fair.

Mrs. Petrella stated that Mrs. Caramanello has brought up closing school on Veterans Day in the past. Mrs. Petrella likes the idea of the students being in school. Mrs. Caramanello stated that she is aware that it is on a Saturday this year and likes the idea of showcases at the schools. She does hope that every school uses that day for recognizing and honoring veterans.

Mrs. Petrella was not in favor of changing or renaming Columbus Day as the accomplishments of Columbus should not be ignored. She noted that Veterans Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Independence Day, Presidents' Day, Juneteenth and Black History month are all celebrated, either in school or as a day off. Mrs. Petrella agreed that indigenous people also need to be recognized as do the different classes of immigrants. She suggested that these all get celebrated during the school year, without replacing one recognition for another.

Mr. Moore stated that Coginchaug is one of a few schools that have a Native American name and he felt it was important to recognize indigenous people as well. He didn't see why Columbus and indigenous people can't both be recognized. Dr. Darcy added that many districts have made the step to have October 9<sup>th</sup> be Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples' Day. Only 23 states continue to observe Columbus Day and 19 states observe Indigenous Peoples' Day. She understands that what Columbus did was brave, but it also triggered a genocide and he committed some atrocities himself. Dr. Darcy felt that the compromise and a step in the right direction would be to have the day recognize Columbus for his bravery but also recognize the grave consequences and the people on whose land we continue to live.

Mrs. Dahlheimer would expect the district, as a public school system, to follow state guidelines and look at it if those guidelines change. She would not want to do it backwards. Mrs. Dahlheimer has looked at different towns and it seems that all of the regional districts have kept it as Columbus Day with just a few outliers. Both Hartford and Bridgeport have changed. Mrs. Roy would be in support for celebrating both on that day. She felt that our district could be the one to push the surrounding area to do that. Mrs. Caramanello agreed on combining the two, but felt it would be a fine line for the district to decide on their own. She felt that the district needs to be careful not to rewrite history. Dr. Darcy noted that the federal

government does recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day, with some exceptions. Mrs. Petrella felt that indigenous peoples should be celebrated on their own day as opposed to coupling it with Columbus.

Mr. Mennone felt that they could continue to belabor this point and it comes down to whether they are going to do something or not. He would be in favor of keeping Columbus Day as it is, but would support something to educate kids on indigenous peoples. Dr. Schuch asked if the other parts of the calendar are okay as proposed. Mrs. Petrella wanted to be sure that something is included for the kids on indigenous peoples as well as other cultures. Mrs. Caramanello agreed with Mr. Mennone and would want to see indigenous peoples recognized as well. She felt that, as a state public school, they need to follow what the state does. Dr. Darcy reiterated that recognizing Indigenous Peoples' Day is not against state guidelines and many districts and towns do it. She would also not want to see them recognized on the same day. Mrs. Roy suggested just adding Indigenous Peoples' Day on the same day as Columbus Day.

Mrs. Dahlheimer mentioned that they got a lot of kickback about starting the school year on a Monday and asked if that had to happen. Dr. Schuch stated that both the administration and the teachers' union liked being able to give everyone December 22<sup>nd</sup> off, but they could move the start of school to a Tuesday and have school on December 22<sup>nd</sup>.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to adopt the 2023-2024 District Calendar, as presented.*

*Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Roy, to amend the motion to add Indigenous Peoples' Day to Columbus Day on the calendar.*

*In favor of amending the motion to add Indigenous Peoples' Day to Columbus Day on the calendar: Dr. Darcy, Mr. Moore and Mrs. Roy. Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone voted against. Motion failed.*

*In favor of adopting the 2023-2024 District Calendar, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Dr. Darcy and Mrs. Roy voted against. Motion carried.*

## **B. Vote to accept Merwin Fund Donation**

Dr. Schuch explained that they have generously been awarded \$10,000 from the Merwin Fund. They feel like the best use of the funds would be to offer the opportunity to teachers to apply for a portion of that donation. The Merwin Fund trustees visited and saw how their funds had been put to use. Mrs. Dahlheimer commented that the Open Studio at the high school and Strong has been amazing for the kids and she is very proud of what Mrs. Hurlbert has accomplished. She hoped more teachers will apply.

*Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, to accept the Merwin Fund Donation of \$10,000.*

*In favor of accepting the Merwin Fund Donation of \$10,000: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

**C. Vote to approve CRHS Senior Class field trip to Washington, DC**

*Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to approve the CRHS Senior Class field trip to Washington, DC.*

Mr. Mennone wondered if there was a way to change the dates of the trip to accommodate the sports teams, if possible. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that there are kids who have to skip their trip to play a sport. Mr. Mennone thought that there could potentially be 18 kids.

Mrs. Stone explained that somebody will be affected, no matter when the trip is held. The issue this year was that kids felt the responsibility to come back for football practice. They are going to work to be sure it will be a bye week. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if the trip could rotate every other year, from fall to spring. Mr. Moore explained that this trip has always been designed to bring the kids together at the beginning of their senior year, not at the end. He felt that the idea of the trip is not so much to experience Washington, but to bring the kids closer together.

Mrs. Stone added that it brings a bigger academic impact in the spring because it would have to be after April break which bumps into AP testing along with a sports' impact. Mr. Bradanini explained that earlier in the spring is cherry blossom time and there would be substantially more people in the area which makes logistics difficult. He, too, agreed that the point of the trip is to bring the senior class together. Dr. Schuch felt that other trips involving a lot of kids are done in the Spring. Mrs. Stone added that the musical is held in the Spring as well. She also noted that volleyball and soccer both had plans for how to handle the trip this year. Dr. Schuch applauded the district for even trying to continue trips like this because a lot of other districts have discontinued doing them. Mrs. Stone explained that there are eight senior boys on the football team this year and she applauds their responsibility to the team, but sometimes choices have to be made. She added that the coach could have given them Friday off and had practice on Saturday and Sunday, but there will be a new coach this year.

Ms. Betty asked if the trip could be pushed back a few weeks until football is finished. Mrs. Stone noted that they would then have the same problem with basketball. Ms. Betty agreed but suggested it be put on a different sport. Mrs. Stone explained that she was looking for the timing that would impact the least amount of kids. Mrs. Petrella felt that a Spring trip also feels like a culmination of their senior year. Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that there really wasn't a good solution.

Mr. Bradanini explained that he has been in charge of this trip for about 10 years and they have looked long and hard to find a solution and it always falls back to this time of year. Todd Petronio has always said they can make it a bye week for football. Dr. Darcy commented that it's a great life lesson because things happen and kids might have to choose.

Mrs. Dahlheimer wanted to be sure everyone has also looked at the activities happening during the trip, but no one had any questions.

*In favor of approving the CRHS Senior Class field trip to Washington, DC: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Mrs. Dahlheimer abstained. Motion carried.*

**D. Vote to approve the CRHS DECA field trip to Orlando, FL**

*Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to approve the CRHS DECA field trip to Orlando, FL.*

Mrs. Stone explained that DECA is the business, entrepreneurial, marketing, finance and hospitality club run by Ryan Donecker. She added that they found out they were one of 1,300 clubs recognized for community service and won three spots at the DECA conference in Orlando. They do student development in the areas of hospitality, finance and business management. The costs are not set in stone because the trip hasn't been approved as of yet, but they have gone every year. Mr. Mennone noted that his boys have been involved in DECA and Mr. Donecker does a phenomenal job. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if there was anything that conflicts with this trip and Mrs. Stone did not know of anything.

*In favor of approving the CRHS DECA field trip to Orlando, FL: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

**Committee Reports****A. Building Committee Meeting - January 4, 2023**

Mr. Moore reported that the Building Committee held off any further discussion on reconfiguration until the project is brought back for action. A quote has been received for replacement of the turf at the high school with new crumb rubber which is more than what is in the reserve. They are looking at options for paying for that.

The work on the Memorial roof and mechanics has been completed and they are just waiting for paperwork. They are waiting for a pump test from the water supplier for the pumphouse. The culvert has been completed and they realized around \$400,000 in savings due to a grant. Pickett Lane Phase I is complete at the top of the hill. Some of that \$400,000 savings can be moved to the second phase of the Pickett Lane project. They are working hard to get a proposal for reconditioning and reclaiming materials which will hopefully be ready for budget consideration.

Mr. Moore stated that a decision was made to go through a sole source provider and the building will need to be smaller to fit on the current slab. A proposal is coming in and the price will be under the \$180,000 that was budgeted. They will hopefully go out to bid in March so that it can be done this summer.

Mrs. Neubig explained that they will not go out to bid a second time for the field house because they are going to a sole source vendor. A purchase order will hopefully be issued soon for that. There are still some questions about electrical work.

Mrs. Neubig explained that the savings on the culvert could be a bit more than \$400,000. Because that was paid for under the \$6.9 million bonding, that savings will go back into the bonding pot and can be used for other projects that had been under the bonding umbrella or used to pay off the debt service. Pickett Lane paving was included in that bonding project. The HVAC grant that Mrs. Neubig submitted is still unknown at this time.

Mrs. Petrella complimented the Building Committee. Mrs. Neubig stated there will be another phase to the paving project. Mr. Mennone spoke with Howard Weisberg yesterday and he felt that everyone is going to be very pleased with the field house.

**B. Finance Committee Meeting - January 11, 2023**

Mrs. Petrella stated that they received reports from both Durham's and Middlefield's Boards of Finance regarding issues the towns are dealing with. They reviewed the budget meeting dates and Mrs. Petrella invited the Finance Committee and the chairs of the Boards of Finance or their representatives to the February 8<sup>th</sup> Board of Education meeting to hear the proposed budget.

**Communications**

Mrs. Petrella noted that any communications she had received were copied to all board members. She did receive one from Candace Burritt about food service issues and it was referred to Mrs. Neubig and Dr. Schuch as well as Mr. Basil.

Mrs. Roy mentioned that they had received communication about discussing the possibility of a student board member back in December. Due to the time, she did not want to discuss it then but Mrs. Petrella noted that they will discuss it at the retreat on January 21<sup>st</sup> being held from 8:00 AM until 12:00 PM.

Mr. Mennone had received communication about the football team and the Washington trip. Mr. Roraback wanted to give a shout-out to Tim Fisher and Parents of Performers for the trip to Quinnipiac University where they represented the district very well.

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

**A. In-person public comment**

Josh Eddinger, from Durham, stated that he had made a big push last year for the field house and commended the Building Committee for their work. He has always viewed this as step one and felt that there are two more steps to complete the facility: bathrooms and lights. For better or worse, this facility is not only used by the school. It is a staple of the community. The football games and other outdoor events held there are some of the best-attended events that the school holds. He felt it would be nice to utilize the facility at any time of the day. He asked that the board at least consider putting some money aside for the continued progression of that facility.

**B. Remote public comment**

None.



**Adjournment**

*A motion was made and seconded 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. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

Meeting was adjourned at 10:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First