

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

Board members present: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone
Board members absent: None.

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Brough, Human Resources Specialist, Mrs. Quarato, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Development, Mrs. Siegel, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Accountability, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology, and Mrs. Murray, Principal of Brewster School

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the special meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Dahlheimer added item 3B, Dedication of the Coginchaug Regional High School Band Room.

Ms. Betty made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the agenda, as amended.

In favor of approving the agenda, 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.

Presentation and Recognition

A. Brewster Presentation: Durham Fair Shares

Mrs. Murray, principal of Brewster School, explained that she had previously sent a slide show of all of the exhibitions that were at the Durham Fair. A group of second graders were present at the meeting to present their exhibits. Avery Zettergren presented a picture of her dog for which she won a second-place ribbon. Charles Barnett presented his art project and explained that he won a second-place ribbon. Nate Checko presented his art collage and won a first-place ribbon. Laughlin Spiro presented his cinnamon stick figure and won a first-place ribbon. Caleb Trowbridge presented his bald eagle sculpture and he won a first-place ribbon. Carly Hansen presented her painted cow and she won a blue first place ribbon. Clark Fleming presented his pictures and noted he won a first-place ribbon and a second-place ribbon. Maddox Cook presented his project and won a first-place ribbon. Zachary presented his project and won a first-place ribbon.

B. Dedication of Coginchaug Regional High School Band Room

Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that the dedication of the band room came from many community members, with Mr. Moore as a big advocate as well. Bruce Schmottlach was the first band director at Coginchaug and laid the foundation of the music program in the district. He is incredibly well-loved in the community.

Mrs. Dahlheimer presented Mr. Schmottlach with a plaque that was made by Nick Planeta and will be going into the band room.

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

A. In-person public comment

None.

B. Remote public comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education Meeting - September 13, 2023

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education meeting of September 13, 2023, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education meeting of September 13, 2023, 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.

Superintendent’s Report

A. Grade Level Reconfiguration 2024-2025 Update

Dr. Schuch reported that they meet each Monday with the elementary principals and, at the last meeting, they laid out some broad areas that they need to work on. They are working on areas of communication, staffing, budget and logistics. One of the immediate steps they felt was important in the communication area was to get people’s feedback about how to best make this transition. They met with the PTOs at Memorial on September 18th, Brewster on September 19th and Memorial on October 3rd. Several board members attended as well. In summary, Dr. Schuch felt they got some really good suggestions, but he thought it was fair to say that some people are still processing the decision and others are very much struggling with it. They did get a suggestion that we might even create a combined committee of the PTOs from the three schools to talk about moving this forward. Parents he has spoken to have had questions, thoughts and ideas about the decision itself.

Dr. Schuch also reviewed that he engaged with teachers and staff in small groups last Fall and had really good conversations. He will do that again this year and this decision is at the top of their minds. There is a mixture of people still processing the decision as well as a lot of good suggestions about how to do this well, including some people who have moved multiple times. He also hears from staff as he is in the different schools. He also noted that it is their intention to go ahead and survey the K-5 staff in terms of preferences for assignments for the next school year, knowing that these configurations are going to happen. The goal would be to give people the staffing information a lot earlier than normal. Dr. Schuch does get a sense that the staff is troubled by not knowing what will happen.

Mr. Brough added that this is somewhat of an annual process where they reach out to both certified and noncertified staff. This year, the dynamic is different and the process will be bigger, but it sends a message

that the district is listening and will do the best they can. He reiterated that they will not be able to guarantee every request and preference will be granted.

Mr. Roraback asked if the union had any say in this, with seniority provided preference. Mr. Brough did not think it will be an issue with the union and he did not feel the union needs to be a formal part of the process. The contract is clear that the district has the ability to staff buildings as they see most appropriate. Dr. Schuch added that the contract speaks to any type of reduction which would come through the budget process. He added that there may be people who intend to retire at the end of this year.

Ms. Betty asked if they foresee that they will change grade level teachers and Dr. Schuch did not think so. He noted that the Board has class size guidelines and that is what they use when they build the budget. They do have to wait and see what everybody wants to do. They don't want to assume that people want to continue at the same level. Mrs. Keane reviewed that teachers do move because of a district need as well. Dr. Schuch acknowledged that it is best for the learners to have stability, but there are times when people get moved either by choice or by need.

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that she has heard an overall theme of wanting to engage in a community forum and she asked that there be some sort of structure of moderation if they were to do that. She knows that the conversations can be uncomfortable when talking about emotions and several of the board members did not feel comfortable during some of the prior conversations. She did not feel that they got any real feedback from the Lyman meeting about how to move forward because they are struggling with the why and how.

Mr. Moore reviewed that the last time they were looking at closing Lyman, they had a forum to look at all of the options. There was a panel of selected board members and a moderator and it was very congenial. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that people are specifically looking to talk about the board's reasoning for the interim plan, but they could have forums on that and the long-term options as well. Mr. Moore felt that if they want to move forward, they need to talk about it.

Mrs. Roy asked if they were still considering a transition plan for the kindergartners who are at Lyman. Dr. Schuch stated that they could do that for the current kindergarten at Lyman and second grade at Brewster, but the board would have to make that decision. He felt that the kindergartners at Lyman would stay there for one additional year of grade one and the second grade from Brewster would have more year of grade three at Memorial. He did ask that the board consider that option as soon as possible. Dr. Schuch felt that the positive for the learners is fewer transitions and the negative is that they would be missing out on the combined grade levels.

Mr. Mennone felt that a big part of this is when, and if, the community supports any of the long-term options and the longer that takes, the more difficult the process is for everyone to absorb. If they were moving forward on a K-5 school in two years, it would be easier. He is confused about why everyone is up in arms about this when the long-term goal is to have K-5 with everyone together.

Mrs. Roy asked if this is going to delay a K-5 and Dr. Schuch reiterated that they are able to implement the interim plan, but hoped that the long-range plan would be set first. He has also heard that at some of the parent meetings. He would not want to have a forum about the interim plan without talking about the long-term plan. He added that he would like a decision as soon as possible as it will impact budgeting.

Mrs. Caramanello mentioned that she heard that people wanted a phased-in approach which would prolong the project. Dr. Schuch felt that the different scenarios change how that will look, including occupied or unoccupied and the actual design of the project. The board will hold a special work session on November 8th at 5:00 to discuss this further. They hope to have a community forum after that date and Mrs. Neubig noted

that Rusty Malik would be willing to attend. Mr. Mennone added that Building committee members have a lot of experience with these types of projects. Dr. Schuch suggested they talk with Mr. Malik to see if he has any suggestions about this. Mrs. Caramanello felt it was important to not have it be separated by school as parents need to hear each other.

B. Merwin Fund Learner-Centered Grants 2023-2024

Dr. Schuch stated that they received \$10,000 from the Merwin Trust and are very grateful for that. Teachers and staff have applied for ways to use these funds, all from the middle school and high school. The winners at the high school include a conservation and sustainability outreach program through the Eco Club by Mrs. Mann and Mrs. Fisher, an innovative art display system for project-based learning, Capstone presentations and art shows by Mr. Bothamley, and robot sensors to support more individualized learning by Mrs. Walsh. At Strong, the winners were for education and exploration and career experiences by Mrs. Sinusas, science-based off-campus experiences by Mrs. Broggi, and video equipment and software to support Spartan News by Mrs. LaRosa.

Mr. Mennone asked if anyone had requested a grant, but didn't get one and Dr. Schuch stated that there was not. Mrs. Siegel explained that they did have to reduce the last grant request slightly.

C. Update on CRHS Stadium Upgrades

Dr. Schuch thanked the board and the members of the Building committee for their work on the field house as well as the staff and community for coming together to make this happen. He also reported that they received official state approval for \$430,000 to install restrooms and stadium lights. He thanked the governor, the General Assembly and specifically the local legislators who championed the efforts to obtain the state funding. An update video was then played for the board.

Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that the plumbing is laid out at the bathroom locations. Mr. Moore heard a great deal of happiness about the building. Mrs. Dahlheimer acknowledged the men who did the installation and the Building committee as well. They are also a little under budget.

D. Other Updates if applicable

None.

Staff Reports

A. Director of Finance Report - Kim Neubig

Mrs. Neubig reported that the general fund is 19 percent expended and 94 percent encumbered. The district has received 21 percent of budgeted revenue.

Mrs. Neubig reported that auditors are here this week and next to finish off the field work for the audit. The audit is due to the state by December 31, 2023 and they will report to the board sometime in January.

Mrs. Neubig proposed a budget calendar and reviewed that with the board. She plans to have the budget ready for presentation to the board on February 7, 2024, with a Finance committee meeting in March and the public hearing on April 3, 2024. The district meeting will be on May 5, 2024 and the referendum on May 7,

2024. She asked that board members let her know of any proposed changes. Dr. Schuch added that they will also propose a draft of board meeting and committee meetings for 2024 at the next board meeting. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked everyone to check if they can attend the retreat on January 20, 2024. Dr. Schuch added that Shipman recommended that the board calendar for the following year be set prior to new board members taking office so it is not something they need to weigh in on.

Mrs. Neubig also reported that in accordance with the Clean Air Act, all school buses have to be electric by 2040 and, after the year 2035, no purchases can be made for gasoline-fueled school buses. Mrs. Neubig has had discussions with Dattco surrounding grants as the buses are triple the cost of diesel buses. The grants are giving priority to non-rural areas. They have also had discussions about propane and Dattco has offered a new fleet of propane buses as a stepping stone to get to electric. The district would lease the fleet through a municipal lease and noted that the district's contract is up in June of 2024. Municipalities do not pay sales tax or property taxes. At the end of the lease, Dattco will purchase the buses back at 30 percent of the purchase price resulting in an overall savings for the district. Propane is also a lot cheaper than diesel fuel, at \$.92/gallon with diesel at \$3.17. Mrs. Neubig explained that each propane bus is \$114,000, with 30 percent being \$34,000 x 18 buses. She estimated the district would save about \$195,000 in fuel costs over five years. The district would see a net savings over the five years of about \$400,000, not realized until the end of the 5th year.

Mrs. Neubig queried her CASBO group colleagues and most are seeing a 9 to 14 percent increase. Over the five years, this would be an estimated 6.04 percent increase over what the district pays now. That does not take into account the buy-back of the buses or the fuel savings. The district does have a 35-year history with Dattco and with the contract expiring in June, we need to take action. New diesel buses are \$125,000 each and electric buses are about \$350,000 each, not including infrastructure costs. She added that the district can keep its existing fleet and not get any new buses at all, but they are older and there will be maintenance costs and buses off the road.

Mrs. Neubig wanted to let the board know of the opportunity and reviewed that the savings will not be seen until the final year of the five-year contract. She does believe the municipal lease with a 30 percent buyback makes it worthwhile. Her recommendation is that the district takes this opportunity for new 2023 propane buses.

Mr. Stone asked if the district would be allowed to sell the buses to someone else at the end of the lease or if they are locked in to selling them to Dattco. Mrs. Neubig explained they would be locked in with Dattco.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if any incentives were being offered to go along with the electric bus mandate and Mrs. Neubig confirmed that nothing has happened as of now. Volkswagen has offered a grant and there is state money, but that is going to economically injusticed areas first. Charging stations will also be necessary.

Mr. Moore stated that the last time the district went out to bid for buses, only Dattco bid. Mrs. Neubig added that this will keep the majority of the same drivers and the bus terminal is close. Staffing is better this year and they are always willing to try to fix any issues. Mrs. Neubig asked the board to think about this as it is a \$1 million per year contract but added that, if they go out to bid, they may not have the opportunity for the propane buses unless we specifically request that in the RFP or as an alternative. It is difficult to get propane buses now, as the largest manufacturer is focusing on electric buses now. Mrs. Neubig added that there is some push-back in the legislator about the mandate, so it could change.

Mr. Mennone asked if anyone else was interested in the propane buses from Dattco but Mrs. Neubig wasn't aware if any other districts had inquired. Mrs. Neubig stated she specifically inquired about propane buses with Dattco. If the district were to go out to bid, it would need to be in the December/January timeframe.

Dr. Schuch added that he and Mrs. Neubig have talked about this a lot and it is his recommendation to go with this as well. Mrs. Neubig stated this would not cause a significant increase in next year's budget.

Mrs. Neubig reported that she had heard from some parents who were not happy with the riding time and they were able to get a driver for another bus route. This is in the budget, but was not routed at the beginning of the year. They have also changed the order in which they line up at the schools. She believes that has resolved most of the issues.

Mrs. Neubig added that the district received a school security grant for multimedia. This will provide the Mutualink software with real-time cameras. They only chose four out of the five schools and did not approve Coginchaug. Mrs. Neubig asked why that was the case and there was no specific reason. The district was awarded \$119,000 and has until 2026 to use the funds, with the local match being \$56,000. Coginchaug would be another estimated \$40,000.

Mrs. Neubig has also emailed the state about accessing the funds for the field house. Mr. Petronio has been emailing vendors for an athletic trainer and has not had any luck. They are still receiving coverage by ATS, but at games only. She added that other districts are in the same position, but others have created full-time positions for \$65,000 to \$75,000 that have attracted people. The contract with Select PT was \$36,000.

New Business

A. Policy review:

- 1. Second read and possible vote on series 4000 policies (part 2):**
 - a. Bloodborne Pathogens – Shipman**
 - b. Bloodborne Pathogens 4160/4260**
 - c. Employee Protection 4148/4248**
 - d. Hiring of Non-Certified Staff - Shipman**
 - e. Nepotism – Shipman**
 - f. Nepotism 4112.8/4212.8**
 - g. Non-Discrimination – Personnel 4118/4218**
 - h. Non-Discrimination – Personnel – Shipman**
 - I. Non-School Employment 4138/4238**
 - j. Personnel Records 4112.6/4212.6**
 - k. Private Tutoring 4134**
 - l. Psychotropic Drugs – Shipman**
 - m. Psychotropic Drugs 4161/4261**
 - n. Section 504 ADA – Personnel 4142**
 - o. Section 504 ADA – Personnel – Shipman**
 - p. Sex Discrimination and Harassment – Personnel 4118.11/4218.11**
 - q. Title IX Sex Discrimination and Harassment – Personnel – Shipman**
 - r. Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness – Shipman**

Mr. Moore noted that this is the second read for this series and he reviewed them for the board.

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to adopt the 4000 series policies outlined above.

In favor of adopting the 4000 series policies outlined above: 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. Student Achievement Committee Meeting - September 27, 2023

Mrs. Petrella reported that most board members were at the meeting and reviewed that one of the items was an update on the EL curriculum. They had professional development in May and over the summer. The coaches will meet with teachers who have any questions. The district will also become part of a professional learning cohort of schools across the state. Some of the issues that have surfaced are that there is no previous year data available for comparison and lower grade benchmarks are being used for grades 3 and 4. Some teachers are looking for Foundations to help address the phonemic deficiencies. The board will get an update at the November meeting.

The committee also discussed the teachers' and administrators' evaluation plan which needs to be updated. The state will put forth a model. They also examined the Next Generation Accountability Measures, particularly SBAC, NGSS and SAT scores. Scores are improving overall, but have not yet reached pre-COVID levels, but this is not unique to the district. Students' growth tells more about a student's progress than the raw scores. The Next Generation Accountability system examines 12 different aspects of student growth and can be found in the committee's minutes.

Legislation for changes to kindergarten age was also discussed. The state is recommending that all kindergartners be five years old by September 1st to align with the rest of the country. A draft of competencies, that align with both the current strategic plan and the Portrait of a Citizen work from several years ago, was distributed. These competencies will now be expanded to reflect how they can be applied for different age spans. The committee will discuss current student-centered learning practices at their next meeting. Lastly, they discussed the fifth-grade social studies curriculum and the EL social studies scope and sequence. Mrs. Dahlheimer encouraged everyone to look at the minutes from the meeting.

Ms. Betty noted that her fifth-grade daughter is not learning any of the items on the pacing guide for social studies. Mrs. Petrella believed that there is time for social studies in the EL curriculum and explained that Mrs. Durkin can explain it better. Mrs. Siegel explained that the social studies inquiry standards are aligned with EL and can be covered through that program. The content standards are being covered during Open Studio. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that Mrs. Durkin had explained that it will be covered more with projects that they will present to their peers. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it might be a good idea to track this grade level and receive updates.

Communications

Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that she had no communications that have not been forwarded to the board.

Mrs. Dahlheimer reported that she, Mrs. Petrella and Mrs. Roy received another anonymous letter to their homes this week from someone who claims to be staff. She forwarded the letter to Dr. Schuch. Mrs. Dahlheimer wanted to publicly state that she felt it was inappropriate and it is concerning. This most recent letter was an attack on a board member and no volunteer should be attacked or vilified for wanting to serve. They dedicate a lot of time to the board and she was incredibly disappointed in this letter. She offered to send the letter to the full board, if they would like to see it, but hoped that everyone can let the community know this is unacceptable.

Mrs. Caramanello added that it is not only outright lies, but is a perfect example of what happens in the two towns. There are several people who are afraid to speak up because of backlash and this is a perfect example of that. She, too, was very uncomfortable with it and felt it was inappropriate.

Mrs. Dahlheimer would also like to figure out a way to have athletic teams and clubs attend board meetings to provide updates. Mr. Moore felt it helped the students as well. He also went back to Mrs. Roy's question of having students on the board.

Ms. Betty added that she has been volunteering for GoFar at Brewster and all of the students have been polite and adorable. There is a Unified Sports Soccer tournament tomorrow from 3:30 to 5:00 at the high school.

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

A. In-person public comment

Patrick Holden, from Durham, was encouraged about the conversations that were had about the interim plan and keeping a long-term goal in mind. He hopes to hear more about that at the next meeting. If the board wants to go with K-5, he would like to see a decision be officially made. He added that he felt a community conversation is very important. He does not feel that the community will support a K-5 school. He hoped that there can be several forums to provide for smaller, more intimate conversations. Mr. Holden also hoped that the board and the community can continue to come together, be civil and have meaningful conversations. He thanked the board for their work.

B. Remote public comment

None.

Adjournment

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, 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 7:49 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First