

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, November 8, 2023 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

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

Board members absent: Mr. Stone

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, and Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology, Mrs. Stone, Principal of Coginchaug Regional High School

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the regular meeting to order.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Dahlheimer added item 3B, Recognition of Outgoing Board of Education Members.

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to approve the agenda, as amended.

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

Presentation and Recognition

A. CRHS: Fall 2023 Student Updates

Mrs. Stone, principal of Coginchaug Regional High School, brought a learner from each grade level to report to the board. Charlotte Garrett, a senior, reported that she has been a cheerleader for almost a year. This year, she has learned a lot about college and where she wants to go after school. She has appreciated talking with teachers and administration about her direction. She looks forward to seeing what her future holds and finishing school here. Ethan, a junior, reported that he participates in soccer, baseball, basketball, Class Council and Spanish Honor Society. He now knows a lot more people and is more comfortable. He is looking forward to prom and the possibility of junior privilege. Ethan reported that 19 band and choir students participated in the Shoreline Music Festival this year. On Monday, eight band students will attend the American School Band Directors Association Honor Band Festival in Meriden. Various musicians will audition for the Southern Region Music Festival. The holiday concert will be held on Wednesday, December 20th at 7:30 PM. Ethan also reported that Cog Carnival, Fog Con and the Homecoming Dance were held this quarter. They were all fun and went smoothly. The first pep rally will be held during the week of Thanksgiving and the Powder Puff game will be held on Tuesday. CRHS football will play their annual Thanksgiving game on Wednesday evening.

Ethan Kane, a sophomore, transferred to Coginchaug from Xavier and one of the reasons he did so was the Coginchaug community. He found it hard to get to know people at Xavier. He gave an example of talking to a friend more in the first week at Coginchaug than he did the whole year at Xavier. Another

reason he transferred was the teacher to student respect, with more of a mutual respect at Coginchaug. Electives are a big thing at Coginchaug and they only had two at Xavier. Unified Sports is also a great program that Coginchaug offers as it helps unite kids from all levels. Allison Bradanini, a freshman, reported that she is part of the volleyball team and freshman Class Council. She finds more freedom at CRHS compared to Strong. She also reported that fall sports included individual accomplishments throughout the season. Cross country girls' team placed second at Shorelines and the football team is currently 6-1.

Mrs. Stone added that a group of visitors from the Soviet Union will be visiting the Unified Sports program tomorrow. The visitors are actually from Russia. Mr. Roraback asked how junior privilege is earned and what privileges are afforded. Mrs. Stone explained that they have been talking about ways juniors could earn some junior privilege, but it has not been ironed out yet. Mr. Moore asked Charlotte if she was looking forward to the senior trip and she stated she was excited to go to D.C. and see the historical monuments.

B. Recognition of Outgoing Board of Education Members

Dr. Schuch thanked Mrs. Roy for her service to the board, district and community. Mrs. Dahlheimer added her thanks as well.

Mrs. Petrella read the following recognition from Regional School District 13 Board of Education, Durham and Middlefield, Connecticut. "Be it known by all those present that, on this date, Moriah Roy, distinguished Board of Education member since 2022, is duly recognized and acknowledged for her dedication to the children and citizens of Regional School District 13. And whereas Moriah Roy, having served with honor, hereby concludes this challenge for the responsibility of educating our youth, be it known by these words that her deeds, her positive manner and enduring good sense will be long remembered and cherished by her peers, the towns of Middlefield and Durham and, indeed, our children. And, whereas, Moriah Roy served this district as a Board of Education member, her commitment and dedication to special education families, diversity, equity and inclusion as well as her advocacy for the well-being and safety of all students will long be remembered by her peers and a positive influence on the board. And, whereas, Moriah Roy, having shown a strong commitment to the students of Regional School District 13, as shown by her attendance at so many student activities with her children and despite a complex work schedule, numerous professional development conferences through CABA and, whereas, Moriah Roy demonstrated a strong attendance and thoughtful work ethic on the Student Achievement committee and all board meetings; and, whereas, Moriah Roy is a respected and admired leader of the Regional School District 13 Board of Education whose dedication, intelligence and education have strengthened this school district and elevated the work of the entire district. Therefore, be it resolved that we, the members of the Regional School District 13 Board of Education, on this 8th day of November, 2023, celebrate Moriah Roy and encourage others to do the same and join us in recognizing Moriah, a leader who made an extraordinary difference in the success of this school district and the advancement of its mission. All this is with our sincere gratitude for your unselfish service. By your actions, you have distinguished yourself and brought great pride upon your community, our schools and hundreds of children that will love and remember you for all the good work you have done."

Mrs. Roy congratulated the elected and re-elected board members and noted that it's been an honor to serve with everyone.

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

A. In-person public comment

Donia Viola stated that they could have a mic for everyone for just \$50 apiece. She felt that not everyone speaks in the same tone and yet the public has to come before a mic to speak out. She felt that the board can always hear the public, but the public can't always hear the board.

Bruce Eiding, from Middlefield, asked if the existing transition plan is being affected by what was just discussed in the Work Session. He asked if Dr. Schuch would give an update during this part of the agenda. Mr. Eiding felt that this transition is being planned while a project hasn't been decided on yet.

B. Remote public comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education Special Executive Session Meeting - October 11, 2023

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Ms. Betty, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Special Executive Session meeting of October 11, 2023, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education Special Executive Session meeting of October 11, 2023, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mrs. Roy. Motion carried.

B. Board of Education Regular Meeting - October 11, 2023

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Ms. Betty, to amend the minutes of the Board of Education regular meeting of October 11, 2023 to include a correction on page 1 that it was a regular meeting, not a special meeting and, on page 5, to change the word legislator to legislature.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education regular meeting of October 11, 2023, as amended: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mrs. Roy. Motion carried.

Superintendent's Report

A. Grade Level Reconfiguration 2024-2025 Update

Dr. Schuch reported that they continue to meet weekly with the elementary principals and other key staff regarding communication, staffing, budget and logistics. He also continues to meet with small grade-level groups and continues to receive good feedback about how to best make the transition work effectively. Dr. Schuch felt that the show stopped is the staff having knowledge of where they will eventually end up and what they will do. Mr. Brough has been working on a survey that will go out prior

to Thanksgiving to certified staff. Dr. Schuch felt that there is a level of anxiety about not knowing where they will be. They will make other decisions through the budget process. They are also in the process of thinking about how the buildings will be laid out as staff is concerned about moving, either to another building or another room.

Regarding the public comment, Dr. Schuch added that the board made its decision in September and that is what is being planned for now. Mr. Moore added that if the Building committee recommends an option and swing space is needed, they will need to consider those actions sooner rather than later. They would not want to have a configuration for one year and then have to change it again.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if Dr. Schuch had any thoughts on possible focus groups. He stated that he would hate to do something based solely on the interim plan while they are trying to engage the community on the long-range plan. Dr. Schuch felt that once the Building committee and the Board have a consensus, then it would be time to schedule that type of thing. He added that Mr. Malik will also hold those events as well. Dr. Schuch asked if they will be waiting until the next board meeting to discuss the Building committee's recommendation and Mrs. Dahlheimer felt they could hold a special meeting. Mrs. Petrella added that she felt they need to move things forward as quickly as possible.

Dr. Schuch asked when the board felt it would be an ideal time to go to the first referendum. He and Mrs. Neubig think that February would be ideal. Mrs. Dahlheimer suggested keeping a placeholder open for December 13th from 4:30-6:30 p.m. for another joint work session with the Building Committee before the regular board meeting. After that meeting the board could consider possible dates for community forums. Mr. Moore explained how they did this type of thing before, with a single board member at each table.

Mrs. Petrella asked if they will look at the possible long-term configuration vs. the temporary configuration to see if it fits. Dr. Schuch felt that it would be his recommendation that the board reserve the right to do that.

B. Other Updates, if applicable

Dr. Schuch congratulated Mr. Moore, Mr. Stone and Mr. DelVecchio for the election to the board and wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Staff Reports

A. Director of Finance Report - Kim Neubig

Mrs. Neubig reported that the general fund is 28 percent expended and 95 percent encumbered. The district has received 31 percent of budgeted revenue.

By state statute, Mrs. Neubig has to compute the town allocations based on October 1st enrollment. The district lost 37 students in the past year, 10 from Durham and 27 from Middlefield. Durham has increased their budget percentage by 1 percent (from 64.65 percent to 65.65 percent) and Middlefield has decreased by 1 percent (from 35.35 percent to 34.35 percent). She has communicated that information to both towns.

Mrs. Neubig has applied to the State for two security grants, one to replace the PA systems in the schools which are at end-of-life and could potentially be a security issue, but they were not awarded that grant. The district was awarded a matching grant for multimedia which would be for Mutualink in four out of the five schools. Coginchaug was not awarded. Mrs. Neubig has to accept or reject this grant within the next few days. She can accept the grant and the district would have until June of 2026 to do the work. If the work doesn't get done, they just don't invoice the State. The cost in the first year would be \$76,000 and would include Coginchaug (\$40,000). Mr. Pietrasko explained that they would not be able to take the equipment from Brewster or Lyman and move it elsewhere. Mrs. Neubig explained that if they accept the grant and then do not take the money, the state will look at that for future grants. Mr. Mennone felt that is not financially good. Mrs. Neubig agreed to reject the grant.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that the district was awarded \$430,000 for the field house lights and bathrooms. She has been working with the Department of Economic Development and they have very specific bidding requirements. Mrs. Neubig was told they would be lucky to get the approval within three to six months and then they need to review the bids before they go out which could be another three months. They may be able to use the bids that were done in the past.

Mrs. Neubig reported that Mr. Petronio did find Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine in Middletown who may be a potential vendor for the athletic trainer position, however the price is double what Select was at \$75,000 per year. That would be prorated for this year. She will get references from them. The trainer does cover Unified Sports as well.

A Pension committee meeting was held last week and Mr. Stone's and Mr. Armstrong's terms expired in September. She asked for any volunteers. Morgan Stanley will hopefully be coming to a meeting in January to give a history and performance of the pension account.

Mrs. Neubig added that the audit is just about finished and they will meet the timeline.

B. Climate Committee Update - Jen Keane

Mrs. Keane reported that they met on September 26th and reviewed the climate initiatives that were developed over the summer. They reviewed attendance and behavior data and she reported that state and national statistics are still disclosing significant increases with concerns in regards to absences, truancy and social-emotional behaviors across the board. Every building has made a concerted effort to reboot the core ethical values and each principal reported a laundry list of what the teams are doing in each school. The district has started a partnership with Partners for Educational Leadership and training was held over the summer. She will also be leading the equity professional learning group of 14 members. There is also a climate professional learning group with 17 members. There has been a significant amount of training, both on physical school safety and social-emotional-behavioral in terms of threat assessments and risk assessments.

Mrs. Keane also reported that the district received two mental health specialist grants. One was for three years to hire a mental health specialist and a social worker was hired, at a total of \$290,350. They also received a summer mental health grant for three years to hire someone to work over the summer, at a total of \$75,006. There has been a recent uptick in youth suicides in Connecticut and the Department of Public Health issued an alert on what to look for and how to support youth who are struggling. There continues to be a great deal of discussion on the national increase in mental health crises in children and adolescents

and they continue to share resources with staff. They are also talking about the importance of connection and support for both students and adults.

Staff is continuing to use the Aperture software system and DESSA reporting system as a tier one approach for taking the pulse of mental health of every student in the district. Over 90 percent of the students have been rated by their advisors. After the pretest, there were 4 percent of the students with a need for instruction on social-emotional learning and strategies, 73 percent were in the typical range and 23 percent of the students were at the strength level. This system continues to be supported by the state.

Mrs. Keane has attendance, office referrals and behavioral referrals as well as in-school and out-of-school suspension updates which she will share via email. There are some pockets of concern in terms of behavioral referrals and she assured everyone that they are being looked at for intervention and support. The vast majority of the district's students are in school, doing what they should be doing and using the core ethical values.

Mr. Roraback asked how many teachers fill out the Aperture questions for each student and Mrs. Keane explained that the kids in middle school and high school are assigned to an advisory teacher who might have 10 to 15 students. The elementary school teachers do their own classroom. Mrs. Keane has received feedback that it is worth their time. Mr. Roraback asked if they have seen positive impact by the changes made at Strong and Mrs. Keane felt that the changes in programming have been very well-received. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that the outreach to parents has been very good.

Mr. Mennone asked if they have determined what the issues are with the students who are frequently absent and if they have been offered services. Mrs. Keane confirmed that they have, especially at the high school. They reach out to parents and services and interventions are offered. Loss of credit may also happen, if necessary. Mrs. Keane added that there will be coffee with the admins at the high school on November 13th from 7:00 to 8:00 AM.

New Business

A. Vote to amend July 5, 2023 Board of Education minutes

Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that they needed to amend the July 5, 2023 Board of Education minutes to state that the motion made to eliminate kindergarten school choice in the 2024-2025 school year as well as allowing the administration to explore the options of a reconfiguration of a possible preK-1 at Brewster, 2-3 at Lyman, 4-5 at Memorial, 6-8 at Strong and 9-12 at Coginchaug was made by Ms. Betty, not Mrs. Roy.

Mrs. Roy made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to amend the minutes of the July 5, 2023 Board of Education meeting, as above.

In favor of amending the minutes of the July 5, 2023 Board of Education meeting, as above: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mrs. Roy. Motion carried.

B. Vote to accept proposed 2024 Board of Education and Committee Meeting Schedule

Dr. Schuch reviewed that they had emailed the proposed calendar which mirrors what was done this year. He noted that a retreat is scheduled for Saturday, January 20th and asked everyone to check the date. He also noted that the July meeting is proposed to be held in the second week because of the timing of July 4th.

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Ms. Betty, to accept the proposed 2024 Board of Education and Committee Meeting Schedule.

In favor of accepting the proposed 2024 Board of Education and Committee Meeting Schedule: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mrs. Roy. Motion carried.

C. Policy review:

- 1. First read 4000 policies (part 3):**
 - a. Code of Ethics – Shipman**
 - b. Increasing Educator Diversity – Shipman**

Mr. Moore noted that these are new policies from Shipman and no action is needed tonight.

Committee Reports**A. Policy Committee Meeting - October 18, 2023**

Mr. Moore reported that they met last week and worked on the policies listed above. There was a large debate on funding issues for school-sponsored activities and Dr. Schuch will meet with the attorney to get more clarity on that. The committee also decided to work on the 9000 series as a group. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that the next Policy committee meeting was canceled at Dr. Schuch will be at the Teacher of the Year celebration. They do have a December meeting scheduled. Dr. Schuch suggested they discuss any issues at the retreat.

B. Building Committee Meeting - October 18, 2023

Mr. Moore reported that the Building committee accepted the Pickett Lane phase 2 work and authorized payment. They are looking at a drainage plan for phase 3. They also talked about putting in crosswalks and speed tables. The committee looked at Durham's proposed sidewalk plan and will meet with Brian Curtis. The committee felt that the biggest challenges are getting around Strong School and people driving over the sidewalk to park. The field house cost \$95,246, leaving a balance of \$52,000 in the budget account. The Building committee suggested using the surplus for the design of restrooms and electrical services.

Mr. Moore also reported that the district had put aside \$600,000 for the pump house which is no longer needed because the pressure in the public water system is enough to meet the demands at Strong School and Cuginchaug. That money will need to be repurposed to something else listed in the bonding or eliminated. Mr. Mennone commented that this just shows the value of that committee and the money

they save the district. Mrs. Neubig explained that some of that \$600,000 still needs to be spent for upgrades on the fire system.

C. Student Achievement Committee Meeting - October 25, 2023

Mr. Roraback reported that they met via Google Meet and discussed learner-centered practices in the district with Mrs. Heikkila who gave examples of projects being worked on. They also talked about new teacher evaluation updates which are changing at the state level. They received an update on the EL program and SBAC. They also talked about the high school Capstone presentations. Dr. Schuch added that Mrs. Stone and Mrs. Trainer will attend the next committee meeting to discuss some exciting work around career pathways. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that they have also reached out to other districts about the EL program. The committee asked for a little more data on SBAC and an improvement plan.

Mrs. Siegel reported that the pathways program is being funded by a grant from the state and they are working with Goodwin to help direct the pathways. They are looking at currently available courses as well as what courses can be brought in and be at dual credit. Mr. Roraback noted that Dr. Darcy was a bit concerned about the connection with Goodwin. Mrs. Siegel explained that they looked further into that and Goodwin is not a for-profit university. The fees are the same that UCONN charges as well. Dr. Schuch added that they are also looking at different institutions for dual enrollment, but Goodwin is helping us find the courses. Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that she has received questions from the community about getting away from UCONN altogether and that information needs to be communicated. Dr. Schuch explained that UCONN has a higher standard for teacher certification than some of the other universities, so this will hopefully add to the current offerings.

D. ACES Update - Lindsay Dahlheimer

Mrs. Dahlheimer reported that ACES is currently buying and renovating a new building for one of their major programs. She has asked the Executive Director if she can share their information with the board, but hasn't heard back yet. Mrs. Dahlheimer is the current Policy chair for ACES and noted there is a grace period for adopting the policies dictated by the state.

Communications

Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that she received a very nice message from Bruce Schmottlach and read it into the record. "Dear Board of Education members, last Wednesday evening was an overwhelming one for me. Receiving that beautiful, hand-carved plaque was humbling and deeply appreciated. I'm pleased that you recognize the importance of music in our young people's lives. Please continue supporting the program. I wish I could have verbally expressed my feelings, but I was emotionally overcome and the tears got in my way. What a night! Thank you. Sincerely, Bruce Schmottlach." Mrs. Dahlheimer suggested they send Mr. Schmottlach a picture of the plaque on the wall. Mr. Roraback noted that Mr. Schmottlach was the mentor to the previous band directors and continues to be.

Mrs. Dahlheimer also had a great conversation with an education reporter from the Connecticut Mirror last week. She will let us know if an article will be published.

Mr. Moore reported that they will start doing mock interviews on Monday with the seniors. Mrs. Dahlheimer would also like to participate.

Mrs. Dahlheimer also reported that Channel 8 was present at Strong School for the Unified program, but no one has seen the segment yet.

Mrs. Keane asked if everyone received the communication the district receiving a \$95,000 grant from Special Olympics International to do an exchange program with Panama. It would mean students go to Panama and their students come here during this school year, but she wasn't sure of the timing. Mr. Moore thought it was great that both Russia and Panama want to come to the district and it should be covered by television.

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

A. In-person public comment

Donia Viola, from Durham, had an article from the Middletown Press on October 27, 2023 which referred to the 2019 CARES Act. These monies are set to expire in September of 2024. Every town and city will be impacted. The information was gathered from various schools. Mrs. Viola asked if the district would disclose the number of dollars already expended from both state and federal funding and submit it in writing so that it becomes part of the public record relative to the upcoming budget and the projected spending on renovations, etc.

B. Remote public comment

None.

Adjournment

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

Meeting was adjourned at 8:13 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First