

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

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

Board members absent: Dr. Darcy

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

Dr. Schuch called the regular meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to approve the agenda, as presented.

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

Election of Officers

Dr. Schuch opened the floor for nominations for the office of chair. Mrs. Petrella nominated Mrs. Dahlheimer for chair. Hearing no other nominations, Dr. Schuch closed the nominations.

In favor of Lindsay Dahlheimer as chair: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried, with Ms. Betty abstaining.

Mrs. Dahlheimer then opened the floor for nominations for secretary. Mrs. Dahlheimer nominated Mrs. Petrella for secretary. Hearing no other nominations, Mrs. Dahlheimer closed the nominations.

In favor of Lucy Petrella as secretary: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Mrs. Dahlheimer then opened the floor for nominations for treasurer. Mrs. Dahlheimer nominated Mr. Stone for treasurer. Hearing no other nominations, Mrs. Dahlheimer closed the nominations.

In favor of Jason Stone as treasurer: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Presentations

A. Memorial Grade 5 Share

Mrs. Durkin introduced Ms. Johnson, instructional coach, to share some insights about the EL literacy program at Memorial. Several students spoke about Esperanza Rising, noting that she was discriminated against because she is Mexican. They went on to discuss the Declaration of Human Rights. Describing ALL Block, the students explained that they normally start by reading for five to 10 minutes which grows every day. By the end of the year, they will read for 20 to 25 minutes. The reading is followed by tasks and sharing.

Mrs. Durkin thanked the fifth graders and noted that they were selected because they were very excited about the learning.

B. Recognition of Benchwarmers

Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that the schools in the district have made a significant effort to implement a reboot of the district's core ethical values. The district would like to recognize the Benchwarmers for consistently and thoughtfully applying the core ethical values of the district in their support of the athletic programs for over 50 years. Mrs. Dahlheimer gave examples of their acts in each of the core ethical values. She then read a list of projects that the Benchwarmers have implemented throughout the district. Mrs. Dahlheimer then recognized the Benchwarmers officers for this year and thanked them all for their dedication to the district.

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

Mike Heiligmann stated that he attended the presentation from the architect and has reviewed all the plans. He felt that two options made the most sense. He had been highly against closing John Lyman School, but has listened to everything and now fully supports moving to one K-5 school, even if that means closing John Lyman. He is still very against the reconfiguration. He felt that the best options would be removing all students from Memorial and getting the construction done as quickly as possible. He asked to focus the efforts on getting the school renovated and getting one K-5 school without shuffling the kids around in between. Mr. Heiligmann felt that the majority of the community as well as teachers are against the reconfiguration. He reiterated that he highly supports a single K-5 school.

Approval of Minutes**A. Board of Education Special Work Session - November 8, 2023**

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Special Work Session of November 8, 2023, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education Special Work Session of November 8, 2023, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried, with Mr. DelVecchio abstaining.

B. Board of Education Regular Meeting - November 8, 2023

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education regular meeting of November 8, 2023, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education regular meeting of November 8, 2023, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried, with Mr. DelVecchio abstaining.

Mrs. Dahlheimer welcomed Mr. DelVecchio to the board.

Superintendent's Report**A. Grade Level Reconfiguration 2024-2025 Update**

Dr. Schuch reported that the work session scheduled for earlier today was canceled as Mr. Malik had a family situation and was unable to attend. That meeting will be moved to January 10, 2024 at 4:30 PM and delay the start of the regular meeting to 6:30 PM.

They are also scheduling two community forums for Wednesday, January 17th, from 4:00 to 6:00 PM and Thursday, January 18th, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. They have not yet determined a location for the forums. Dr. Schuch added that the Policy and Building committee meetings that were scheduled for January 17th were canceled. He did ask the board to confirm that they would like a very short presentation from Mr. Malik and spend the rest of the time with small table conversations vs. a public hearing type of meeting. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the roundtables would be more informal and enable dialog. Mr. Moore agreed. Dr. Schuch will plan accordingly.

Dr. Schuch reported that they are now meeting weekly with the three elementary principals. They reached a consensus that they will not change any start/end times at the middle school or high school. The recommendation for the elementary schools is keeping all the start/end times the same as they currently are. He asked the board for their thoughts on that.

Mr. Moore asked how the bus company felt and Mrs. Neubig explained that they currently run three tiers, using 15 for Cuginchaug, Strong and Memorial and two for Vinal and Vo-Ag. After that, there are seven buses to Lyman and 10 to Brewster. If they were to go down to two tiers, they would need more buses, at a cost of roughly \$65,000 per bus per year. Dr. Schuch added that parents were concerned with drop-

off/pick-up times if the schools were all on the same schedule. The principals felt very confident that the current window of drop-off/pick-up times accommodates that. Dr. Schuch summarized that they will plan for this accordingly.

Dr. Schuch noted that the staff has all completed the survey and they have begun to analyze the results which will help with staffing decision for next school year. He acknowledged that not everyone will get what they want and they will make recommendations that are in the best interest of the children. They started with the certified staff as they felt there would be more changes in that area, but the survey for the non-certified staff has already gone out as well, with results due back next Wednesday. Individuals in special education or related services will probably see more movement as the children move.

Each principal has also drafted a proposed building layout and they have begun reviewing those. Once they have gone through the staffing and building layouts, they hope to publish that information to all staff. All of this will be subject to the budget and the normal transfer process.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked when the board will see that information and Dr. Schuch explained that the teachers' bargaining unit has reached out to their union with their concerns. They met at all of the schools and, today, Dr. Schuch met with them. The union has also asked for updates, so Dr. Schuch plans to put something in writing to provide to the union after the board meetings. Mrs. Dahlheimer suggested he email the board and the union at the same time.

Dr. Schuch added that they have also started talking about master schedules for each of the buildings. They need to be sure the schedules provide the optimal amount of time for the EL program. He knows that the master schedules will have to change since the grade levels are changing. Dr. Schuch noted that they need to provide more dedicated time for math and English and language arts in the upper elementary grades. They may want to make the sixth-grade schedule at Strong a bit different than the seventh- and eighth-grade schedules. Dr. Schuch added that they are exploring moving the EL program into the middle school and possibly into grade six as early as next fall. They also hope to look at math scheduling as well.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked when the math curriculum was last updated and Mrs. Quarato explained that that was before they arrived in the district, though they are always making modifications.

B. Other Updates, if applicable

Dr. Schuch congratulated the officers and welcomed Mr. DeVecchio to the board. He also reviewed that the board had asked them to look at more detailed action plans with multiple year looks at the strategic plan. He would like to work with Mrs. Dahlheimer about when to bring the board more information on that. There had been a discussion at Student Achievement about pathways and Dr. Schuch noted that this is part of a long-range plan. He felt it was important for the board and staff to agree on a handful of major initiatives and share those with the community. He suggested penciling that in for January 10th.

Dr. Schuch wished everyone happy holidays and noted that the high school band and chorus concert is Wednesday, December 20th.

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

Mrs. Neubig reported that the general fund is 36 percent expended and 95 percent encumbered. The district has received 38 percent of budgeted revenue.

Minimum wage is increasing on January 1st from \$15.00 to \$15.69. With that, noncertified substitute pay will need to increase to \$102/day. The 2022-2023 audit has been completed, with no findings. The auditors will hopefully present at the February meeting and she will send it out ahead of time. Mrs. Neubig noted that she will not be at the January meeting.

Unfortunately, they are only able to have games covered by an athletic trainer. Mrs. Neubig has signed a contract with PTMS out of Middletown and they have posted the position. Athletes from other sports can see the trainer during basketball games during this time. Many districts have hired a trainer directly, but that would result in an FTE increase as well as benefits. Dr. Schuch explained that trainers in Virginia are employed by the district and usually teach a class or two as well, but that could be a problem in Connecticut. Mr. Mennone felt it would be a benefit to have someone on staff that the kids can have a relationship with.

Mrs. Neubig has submitted all of the paperwork to the state for the grant for the lights and bathrooms and the board needs to accept that later tonight. She also reported that the schools have all submitted their budgets and proposals and they are reviewing those.

New Business**A. Vote to accept Merwin Fund donation**

Dr. Schuch thanked the Merwin Fund for their generosity over the years. The district has asked them for undesignated funds that the teachers can apply for and that has happened for two years now. In addition to that \$10,000, the Merwin Fund is giving a separate \$10,000 donation to the robotics program at the high school this year.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to accept the Merwin Fund donation of \$20,000.

In favor of accepting the Merwin Fund donation of \$20,000: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

B. Vote to execute an assistance agreement with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development

Mr. Mennone made motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to make a resolution to execute an assistance agreement with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and to authorize the acceptance of the DECD grant for bathrooms and athletic stadium lighting at Coginchaug Regional High School in the amount of \$430,000.

In favor of a resolution to execute an assistance agreement with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and to authorize the acceptance of the DECD grant for bathrooms and athletic stadium lighting at Coginchaug Regional High School in the amount of \$430,000: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

C. Policy review:

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

Mr. Moore explained that this was the second read of these policies, both of which came from Shipman.

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to adopt the above-listed policies.

In favor of adopting the above-listed policies: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Committee Reports

A. Building Committee Meeting - November 15, 2023

Mr. Moore reported that speed tables have been installed on Pickett Lane. Phase 3 is to review the sidewalk proposal with the Town of Durham. The Building committee did have questions about the parking layout. With the money left from the fieldhouse project, they hope to get a preliminary plan ready for the layout of the bathrooms. That would allow the district to go out to bid as soon as the grant is awarded.

Mr. Moore reviewed that the district had funded a fire protection system with a pump station, but that is no longer needed now that they get water from the public water system. There is still a need for upgrades, but on a smaller scale.

B. Student Achievement Committee Meeting - November 29, 2023

Mrs. Petrella reported that they had an extensive meeting. They discussed the high school pathways, what exists now and what the plan is moving forward. The district received a dual-enrollment grant which started work on these pathways. The goal of that is for everyone to have robust experiences in things they are interested in. Four pathways, with branches, have been decided on, including Technology/Manufacturing, Health and Human Services, Business and Marketing. The initial focus will be on health and human services. Music and arts pathways will continue to be available as well. This is all being done in the hopes to reduce study halls, give students options as well as the ability to accumulate college credit and provide robust offerings.

The committee also received an update on the personal finances courses at the high school. This course will be a graduation requirement for the current freshmen and will be offered every other year. A macroeconomics class is also being piloted this year. The committee also received an EL update, noting

that ALL block has been started in grades 3-5 and most grade levels are finished with module one. Mrs. Quarato also reported that the district had been accepted into the professional learning cohort, with their first meeting the day after the committee meeting. Vocabulary continues to be an area of concern. Writing is done in the content modules and during ALL block.

A PDEC meeting was held on November 7th where they reviewed the current teacher evaluation plan. The group then focused on areas they felt should be changed and smaller subcommittees will meet to work on those. They hope to finalize the document in April and bring it to the Student Achievement committee in May. The committee also discussed the Connecticut Accountability Report and slides and graphs were reviewed. Mrs. Siegel reviewed the indicators that have changed by 2 percent and those are included in the minutes. The district's total accountability index increased from 76 to 78.9.

The committee also discussed math practices and curriculum changes in grades K-5. Progress monitoring and assessment need to be improved and are being worked on. The district is moving towards a less traditional math class and becoming more learner-centered. Textbooks don't offer everything that is being offered digitally, so they are really only used as a supplement. Mrs. Dahlheimer suggested everyone take a look at the minutes for more details.

Board Communications and Professional Development

Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that she added Professional Development as a standing agenda item along with Board Communications. She and Dr. Schuch attended the CABE convention and it was very beneficial. They are working with CABE to find ways for the board to have some professional development outside of the regular workday. Mrs. Dahlheimer would like to be sure there is funding in the budget for that. She added that the state has an unenforceable statute to that effect. Mrs. Dahlheimer would also like to bring members of CABE in more often.

Mrs. Dahlheimer added that the newly-elected president of CABE appointed her the chair of CABE relations committee which works to advocate for legislation, concerns that board members across the state may have and many other issues. CABE also appointed Mrs. Dahlheimer as an area co-director for area 8, with the main objective to host a breakfast with state representatives in Westbrook. Mr. DeVecchio noted that he works in government affairs and legislation and if anyone had any questions, he'd be happy to help.

Mrs. Dahlheimer added that Brewster had their holiday concert today, Lyman had theirs yesterday and the high school is next week. Mr. Moore noted that they received communication from Tina Hurlbert, a former teacher, related to the pathways and she raised a number of issues that he would like to see addressed at a Student Achievement meeting.

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

A. In-person public comment

Bruce Eidinger, from Middlefield, noted that he was in support of the end goal of a K-5 school, but felt that the transition plan is a bit premature. He acknowledged that building a new school will not be easy and the transition plan seems to inject more change than necessary. He agreed that it is better to impact

people once significantly rather than many times. He also felt that the students from Memorial can overflow into Brewster and Lyman. He did feel that the roundtable discussions are a great idea, but suggested that there should be note keepers at each table and that they ask the parents to attest to those notes.

B. Remote public comment

None.

Anticipated Executive Session

A. Discussion of Superintendent's Evaluation

Mr. Stone made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to move into Executive Session for discussion of the Superintendent's Evaluation and inviting Dr. Schuch to that session.

In favor of moving into Executive Session for discussion of the Superintendent's Evaluation and inviting Dr. Schuch to that session: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Adjournment

Mr. Stone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, 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. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First