

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session with the Building committee and Finance committee on Wednesday, January 10, 2024 at 4:30 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DeVecchio, Dr. Darcy (by phone, then in person), Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone

Board members absent: Ms. Betty

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Smith, Operations Manager and Mr. Proia, Supervisor of Facilities and Grounds

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the special joint work session to order at 4:37 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Approval of Agenda**

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

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

### **Joint Work Session with Building Committee**

#### **A. QA+M Discussion on Long Range Facility Planning - Rusty Malik & Carson Collier**

Rusty Malik reviewed that the board had asked them to come back to tweak option 2 and to relook at options 4, 10, 10A and 11. He noted that there have been some minor changes in the numbers and they looked at scheduling options. There has been a significant increase in labor costs in Connecticut and that is now incorporated into this information.

Starting with option 2, preK-K at Brewster, 1-5 at Memorial, 6-8 at Strong and 9-12 at CRHS, they verified enrollment and this scenario includes the work at Memorial to be done first, while using Lyman as swing space. At the completion of Memorial, the students would come back to Memorial, preK-K would move to Lyman and Brewster would be renovated. This helps keep the preK-K transition the shortest possible. This option also allows space for an expanded preK program at Brewster. Mr. Malik noted that they would receive a penalty for having more space than is allowable and that is reflected in the numbers. Other district programs could possibly move into that space as well.

Looking at Memorial, the size of the addition would be reduced and Mr. Malik reviewed the layout. He added that the district may not have to acquire the adjoining property in this case. He also reviewed the parking. Mr. Malik went on to review the use of Brewster and Lyman during the construction project at Memorial. Looking at the phasing, schedule and budget, the grant application would be done in June, 2024 with the design process starting at that time as well. Construction would start in June or July of 2025, being completed by February 2027. Once that is completed, work would be started on Brewster, to be completed by June 2028. It may be possible to expedite those dates. Mr. Malik broke out the financial

impact by all schools and Brewster and Memorial only. The numbers include furniture and technology and includes phasing as well. He explained that a lease for a portable would be \$250,000 for one year and using the swing space would be more cost-effective.

Mr. Weissberg asked what renovations would be needed at Brewster and Mr. Malik explained that all of the utilities and infrastructure would be upgraded. Code updates would be done at Strong and Cuginchaug. Mr. Malik explained that Brewster is not sprinklered and that would be required to get state funding. Both Strong and Cuginchaug are sprinklered and their systems are in much better condition. Mr. Weissberg didn't understand why Brewster needed to be renovated as new when it currently houses students. Mr. Cross felt that the renovations would make Brewster a state-of-the-art school as well. Mr. Malik added that reimbursement drops significantly if it was not renovated as new. Mr. Moore asked for the breakdown in costs at Brewster and Memorial, but Mr. Malik did not have that with him, but felt that Brewster was in the \$21 million range.

Moving to option 4, preK-2 at Brewster, 3-5 at Memorial, 6-8 at Strong and 9-12 at CRHS, they made sure to be within the allowable square footage. In this scenario, a gym and additional classrooms would be added at Brewster. Six classrooms would be added at Memorial and the rest of the building would be updated. High performance building standards would have to be met and the school would be energy efficient. Only ADA and code updates would be done at Strong and CRHS.

The phasing for option 4 includes students being at Lyman and Brewster while Memorial is under construction. When Memorial is renovated, students would come back to Memorial and stay at Lyman while renovations are occurring at Brewster. This option has the shortest time frame because the work at the two schools is more limited.

Mr. Weissberg asked if there was any opportunity for the schools to be occupied during construction. Mr. Malik would not recommend that because infrastructure will be upgraded and it will draw the schedule out from 12 to 14 months up to two years. Mr. Cross agreed that it would be very difficult to renovate with students in the building. Mr. Moore again asked for the breakdown between Brewster and Memorial as well as the mechanicals vs. the expansion. Mr. Malik reiterated that costs were calculated to include demolition of any unused buildings, but that could be changed.

Option 10 is a renovation project at Memorial alone, to include preK-5. It would include renovating the entire school as well as a significant addition. In this scenario, a larger gymnasium would be created as well as a media center. This project includes a public vs. academic zone. A bus zone would be created and the tennis courts would be moved to one of two sites. One option would require the purchase of the adjacent property. Code and ADA updates would be done at Strong and CRHS.

For this option, students would go to Lyman and Brewster for the duration of the construction at Memorial which would start in June of 2025. Once that is completed by July 2027, Lyman and Brewster would be either repurposed or demolished. Overall cost would be about \$89 million, but the Memorial project would be \$72,965,000 alone. After reimbursement and operating costs savings, the total project cost would be \$8.3 million. Mr. Moore felt that the debt service needs to be included in the projections as the budget may go up by \$3 million per year. Mrs. Neubig is working on that issue.

Mr. Roraback felt that they will need to address the cost of keeping Lyman and Brewster open. Mr. Cross asked if class size was a district policy or a state mandate and Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that it is district policy.

Option 10A includes demolishing Memorial and building a new building on the same site. Reimbursement rate for building new is 10 percent less than renovation. Students would go to both Lyman and Brewster during construction. The students all move to Memorial and the other two schools get repurposed or demolished. Construction would begin in June of 2025 and be completed by August of 2027. The budget for Memorial would be \$81 million and the total project cost after reimbursement and operating cost savings would be \$18,433,000. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that Option 10A would not have to include upgrades at Strong or Cuginchaug and Mr. Malik noted that those upgrades do not have to be done in any scenario. Mrs. Petrella felt that this information needed to show the lower reimbursement rate for the public.

The final option, option 11, basically leaves the configuration the same. Overall numbers are lower, but phasing is critical. Work would be done at Brewster first and students would be housed at Lyman and Memorial. Portables would need to be renovated for this. A couple of classrooms and a gym would be added at Brewster. Once work is done at Brewster, phase 2 starts which includes work being done at Memorial while using Brewster and Lyman as swing space. Phase 3 will include work at Lyman, with students at both Brewster and Memorial. Once work is completed, preK-1 will be at Brewster, 2-3 at Lyman and 4-5 at Memorial.

From a schedule point of view, one school is renovated at a time and the schedule goes out to 2028. The costs for this option, including just preK-5, is \$66.75 million, with a net cost of \$36 million. No operating cost savings would be realized, though all elementary schools would be state-of-the-art schools. Mr. Malik explained that they used the 51 percent reimbursement rate, but there will always be some things that are not eligible. There was also some concern that the state will not want to reimburse for schools that are not fully used. Mr. Malik noted that the state will want to know how many kids will be in each school. He added that there needs to be a caveat in this option that indicates that the reimbursement rate could be significantly lower, but smaller scale renovations could also be done.

Mr. Malik also felt that option 11 is the most disruptive option and it was also noted that the budget would not have the benefit of operating costs savings. Mr. Malik also explained that the state will look for the district's long-range plan that the board has voted on which anticipates future growth.

Dr. Schuch felt that this is a lot of information to share with people at the community forums and being able to allow for small groups. He recommended that they decrease the number of options before next week, if possible. If the group has already decided that the five-school option is not financially viable, it could be pulled off the table but that would not demonstrate the cost comparisons. He suggested three-school, four-school and five-school options and then have the small groups go through the pros and cons of each option. Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed, but felt that other options need to be presented for comparison. She thought they may want to highlight three or four, but need to show them all. Dr. Schuch asked if the group could choose between options 2 and 4 and 10 and 10A. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that these options are already out there, so it would be difficult not to present them. Mr. Malik felt they could show all of the options, but prioritize them. Dr. Schuch felt that they really need buy-in on the three-school option. Someone else felt that there would be three sets of folks coming in: (1) those looking at the price

tag, (2) those concerned about configuration and (3) those concerned about the possible disruption to their own children.

Mr. Weissberg felt that the criteria that the options were evaluated on needs to be included in the presentation. Dr. Schuch felt that it would be difficult to get people to rate a specific criteria and thought it would be better to ask what people like and don't like about each of the options. Mr. Weissberg felt that they would want to know what people are basing their decisions on. Mr. Cross added that the bottom line is that this is all about the elementary level, being either one, two or three schools.

The costs at Strong and Cuginchaug remain consistent across all options and do not necessarily have to be done now. Mr. Malik suggested they do a single update on those options up-front, noting that these are consistent. He also felt that option 2 costs more, is more disruptive and is very similar to option 4 so it could be taken off the table. All of this information will also be provided to the public ahead of time.

Mrs. Caramanello wondered if the information could be more concisely presented next week, possibly in chart form. Mr. Roraback liked seeing the maps and would like to see where they are now vs. where they could be. Dr. Schuch emphasized that Mr. Malik and Mr. Collier will be at the community forums to help answer any questions. Mrs. Petrella suggested taking the three options separately in the small groups and ask for pros and cons or questions from the community.

A member of the public noted that she did not know which option was which without the information in front of her. She felt that it was very confusing and felt that people need to understand that there is a cost to keep things status quo. Mrs. Caramanello hoped that the Building committee could help to narrow down the options. Mr. Weissberg didn't feel they could be unanimous on that as it depends upon what criteria is important to an individual. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that that is what she wants to learn from the small groups. Mr. Roraback felt that educational quality is of the utmost importance and they need to create a facility to facilitate that.

Mr. Overton would like to see a traffic study done to evaluate the impact of having three schools. He felt that the fewer buildings there are to maintain, the better buildings there will be. Mr. Overton added that everyone in the two towns is concerned about costs and finances and he felt that the most important factor would be having the most cost-effective, good education for all students. Mr. Weissberg added that he would rate option 4 significantly better in terms of transportation, but not that high in terms of overall evaluation.

Dr. Schuch hoped that the dialog in the small groups could change some people's minds, but not lead them to a specific conclusion. Dr. Darcy felt it was important that people understood that their input will help the board make a decision. Mr. Roraback also felt that some of the community may not be aware of the needs of the district. Dr. Schuch stated that they will reach out to board members, senior staff and principals to see who can attend the forums and then look at who is registered. As of now, there are about 65 people registered. They will try to mix people up in small groups. He would like to have board members at the tables to listen, if they are willing. They also hope to use staff for note-taking. Mr. Moore suggested having a picture of each option at each of the tables.

Dr. Darcy suggested having each option at a specific station and having people rotate. Dr. Schuch felt that would be how they would do it, but then give people a limited number of dots to vote on the options anonymously. It was generally agreed to present options 4, 10 and 11. Mr. Roraback asked if Mr. Malik

felt there would be a logical order to the presentation and Mr. Malik felt it would make sense to start with five schools and go down to three. Mr. Moore added that they need to explain what renovate-as-new actually means. Mr. Malik will give a little background on the current conditions of the schools. Dr. Schuch did not want to open it up to a large group Q&A as that will take up all the time.

Mr. Moore felt that they need to go through the same process with the faculty as well and allow them to vote as well. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that a cross section of juniors and seniors may be helpful as well. Mrs. Petrella suggested doing an exit poll as the community leaves the forums.

Mr. Malik summarized that they will focus on the three options and try to develop a set of slides with all of the criteria and simplify some of it. Mrs. Caramanello asked if the time frame could be moved up and Mr. Malik stated that it is already super-aggressive. Mr. Moore stated that they can't start until next January when the state awards the grant. Mr. Malik noted that the district will know if they are on the list sometime in November or December and they can be pretty much assured of the grant. This schedule has design started in July and Mr. Malik felt there would be very little risk. Dr. Schuch added that the grant application has to be submitted by the end of June, but they would still have to have a successful referendum by November.

Mrs. Dahlheimer encouraged everyone to send their comments or questions to her or Mrs. Petrella. Mr. Moore added that they will need an amendment to the Plan of Regionalization for options 4 or 10 in order to close any schools which may have to be done before the grant application.

**Public Comment**

**A. In-Person public comment**

None.

**B. Remote public comment**

None.

**Adjournment**

*A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the special joint workshop of the Board of Education, the Building committee and the Finance committee.*

*In favor of adjourning the special joint workshop of the Board of Education, the Building committee and the Finance committee: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

Meeting was adjourned at 6:22 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First