

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 2024 at 6:30 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone

Board members absent: Ms. Betty

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Brough, Human Resources Specialist, and Mrs. Quarato, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Development

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the regular meeting to order at 6:37 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Presentation

A. MTA - the college bridge experience

Samantha Winkler, program coordinator for the Middlesex Transition Academy, introduced herself and reviewed that the program serves 18- to 20-year-olds with special needs. She then introduced Sam and Kathleen, two students in the program.

Sam explained that MTA takes them to various jobs, including Price Chopper, CVS, Bob's Stores and even to Memorial School. MTA also allows them to take courses at Middlesex Community College to get a sense of what college is like. Sam loves Middlesex Community College and has made many friends there. The students at MTA also go on outings, including shopping at Target, Perk on Main and Brew Bakers. They also go to the gym. The best part of MTA for Sam is when they go to the Wesleyan campus and homes of students. Once a month, some students have lunch with the Wesleyan students. Sam does wish they would offer driving classes at MTA. Sam is currently working on finding a career. Sam summarized that MTA has done a lot for her, but can be a little intimidating sometimes.

Kathleen explained that MTA helped her with the admissions process and time organization when she also started taking courses at Middlesex Community College. There are a bunch of social opportunities at Middlesex, parties for holidays, a seasonal dance and many interesting clubs. There are also leadership opportunities and Kathleen was part of Student Senate and she just today got a job there in the Financial Aid Services. She also has a perfect GPA and has joined the Honor Society, Phi Beta Kappa. Kathleen now takes two courses, has a part-time job and maintains her MTA schedule. She graduates MTA in June and will start a full-time course load at Middlesex Community College in the fall.

Mrs. Winkler noted that the bridges program with the colleges really shows that students who have some executive functioning issues or concerns about being ready that support is available. Mrs. Dahlheimer was impressed with the confidence of the two students.

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 Special Executive Session - November 21, 2023

B. Board of Education Regular Meeting - December 13, 2023

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Special Executive Session of November 21, 2023, and Board of Education Regular Meeting of December 13, 2023, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education Special Executive Session of November 21, 2023, and Board of Education Regular Meeting of December 13, 2023, as presented: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried, with Dr. Darcy abstaining.

Superintendent's Report

A. Grade Level Reconfiguration 2024-2025 Update

Dr. Schuch did not have a lot to update on the grade level reconfiguration. They now have completed surveys from all employees and will begin to develop preliminary class assignments. They are continuing to refine the layout of the three buildings. They will then marry the preliminary staffing to the preliminary building layouts and hope to notify all employees sometime in mid to late February of what building they've been assigned to, what their specific assignment is and, for certain staff, what changes would be made. All of those assignments would be linked to the superintendent's recommended budget which is subject to change. He added that those assignments will not include retirements or resignations that they don't know about yet.

Once the employees have been notified, anyone who has been reassigned to a different building or room will want to know the process for packing, moving, etc. Dr. Schuch does want to get that information out as soon as possible. Mr. Brough concurred that they want to be proactive and provide the information as soon as they can. Dr. Schuch reviewed that the teachers' union has asked that these updates be provided to them in an email.

Mr. Roraback thought it would be helpful to provide the teachers with a forecasted time frame of how long they would be in that room. Dr. Darcy felt it would be less of a problem with elementary teachers. Mr. Brough explained that teachers, teaching assistants, ABA staff, coaches, and interventionists have all been surveyed. Dr. Darcy felt it would be helpful to reach out to everyone, including custodians and secretaries. Mr. Brough reported that the majority surveyed chose to stay in their respective buildings, with a percentage of them choosing to follow the people they work with.

Mr. Moore asked if the surveys showed support for keeping the grades together and Dr. Schuch noted that they did not specifically ask that question. There was an open-ended question about anything else they wanted them to know and they received good input on that, including start times, childcare and questions around stipended positions. Dr. Darcy felt that it sends a negative message when they don't ask non credentialed employees that says there is a level of importance. She felt that they should reach out to anyone who gets a paycheck and Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed.

Dr. Schuch explained that they have not been told that someone would leave the district if they didn't get their choice and they hope that doesn't happen.

B. Strategic Plan Update

- a. RSD 13 Strategic Initiatives Draft**
- b. Action Team Newsletter - January 2024**

Dr. Schuch reviewed that they had had conversations about longer-range initiatives, some of which they are already doing, and have also gone to some trainings. If there are a handful of strategic initiatives that everyone can agree upon, that is important to move the organization forward. He explained that the draft chart does not include everything, but tries to capture what they think might be top-of-mind.

Dr. Schuch reviewed each of the items on the RSD 13 Strategic Initiatives draft, including reconfiguration, designing pathways (including implementing health and human services pathway, implementing the business pathway, implementing the engineering pathway), implementing expeditionary learning grades K-5 (including implementing expeditionary learning grades 6, 7 and 8), designing and implementing ELA and math competencies, implementing personalized professional learning, redesigning and implementing the teacher evaluation system, designing and implementing personalized readiness tool and designing core competencies.

There was discussion around the EL program in the middle school and Mrs. Quarato explained that teachers have reached out to her about that, recognizing this is where they need to be. Dr. Schuch reviewed that no decisions have been made, but Mrs. Dahlheimer added that she wants to see progress from the grades that currently have the program to say what's working and improving scores. She agreed to send this issue to Student Achievement.

Mrs. Durkin noted that scores are difficult to look at and asked if the board would be okay to see student work sample comparisons. She felt that so much of the growth is embedded in the discussions the students have, their insight and use of vocabulary. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the more they see, the better.

Dr. Schuch noted that until they can define competencies, it is very difficult to get people on board with having the environment be more student-centered. Competencies will always be tied back to state standards. He added that it seems that no one feels like the current teacher evaluation system is beneficial

to anyone. A plan needs to be implemented by 2024-2025, but they do hope to refine it over several years. Mrs. Quarato added that they are planning to meet the required guidelines this year. Mr. Moore asked if the union contract will have to be amended, but no one thought that was necessary. Dr. Schuch gave kudos to everyone involved in this. Dr. Darcy explained that the state is supposed to have a model by November, but nobody can agree on it. A lot of districts are making sure they are in compliance, but further refining it after that.

Dr. Schuch explained that the personalized readiness tool is a mandate and they are finding what is currently there is between lacking and almost nonexistent. Dr. Schuch summarized that all of the items are really important, will all take multiple years and it would be helpful if they can reach agreement on some or all of them. He did feel that the grade reconfiguration really needs to be worked out before the other things can be done. Mr. Moore asked if actual goals can be set for each of the items on the draft and Dr. Darcy added that she wants to see deliverables on at least a yearly basis. Dr. Schuch felt that everyone needs to commit to the concept before doing the action plans. He personally feels that accountability is key. Dr. Schuch explained that his budget proposal will get the district to what they need to do for the next school year. He added that most school districts do not want to lay out multiple year plans regarding budget dollars, but Dr. Darcy stated that many districts do strategic planning of three to five years. Dr. Schuch stated that if there isn't true buy-in from the board, it won't go anywhere. He noted that budget processes will get easier if they can just point to the strategic initiatives.

B. Other Updates, if applicable

None.

New Business**A. Accept Administrators' Bargaining Agreement - July 2024-June 2027**

Dr. Schuch stated that the committee (Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Schuch, Mr. Brough, Mrs. Neubig and Mr. Martinelli, from Durham's Board of Finance along with the attorney) had three or four different sessions with representatives from the administrative bargaining unit. They reached agreement on both sides and the bargaining unit approved it on Friday. Once the board approves it, the agreement goes to both towns for 30 days and then becomes the contract.

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to accept the Administrators' Bargaining Agreement - July 2024-June 2027.

Mr. Moore asked what the average percentage was for raises and no one had that information available. Mrs. Neubig will send that information out when she returns. Dr. Schuch felt that the general wage increase may look a little on the low side, but some other things were done as well, including step movements, etc.

In favor of accepting the Administrators' Bargaining Unit - July 2024-June 2027: Mrs. Caramanella, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

B. Approve CRHS Field Trip Request - Washington, DC

Mrs. Stone stated that the Washington, DC trip is a great trip for the students and a real bonding experience. They work hard to schedule the trip around athletics. They may change the dinner cruise this year as it has really become more of a middle school event. Otherwise, the trip will be as it was in past years and Mrs. Stone intends to accompany the group.

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to approve the CRHS Field Trip Request - Washington, DC.

In favor of approving the CRHS Field Trip Request - Washington, DC: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

C. Approve 2024-2025 District Calendar

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to approve the 2024-2025 District Calendar.

Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that everyone should have a copy of the proposed calendar. Dr. Schuch explained that they included the teachers' bargaining unit into the discussion on the calendar and he felt that was helpful. The calendar hits most of the priorities that came out of the discussions. There was a strong desire for the first week of school to have teachers report on Monday and the children on Thursday. They also wanted to start a little later due to the reconfiguration. All existing breaks were honored. They were also very interested in maintaining the snow make-up days to be given back and two are included in the calendar. The high school asked to have graduation on a Friday as it would be preferable for a lot of families. Personalized professional learning is supported with two days at the end of the year. Dr. Darcy asked how those two days of professional learning have to be done and Dr. Schuch explained that it needs to happen in off-contract hours which is included in the bargaining agreement. He also noted that they piloted this program and they didn't have anyone who did not take advantage of it.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked about Valentine's Day and Dr. Schuch stated that that did not come up, but it was not designed around that. Mr. Moore suggested they rename the day after Thanksgiving Day as Indigenous Peoples' Day. Dr. Schuch asked if they could consider that at a future meeting because they can always rename something. Dr. Darcy reviewed that they have had constituents ask for over a year for them to discuss it and it has been constantly put off. She would like the board to discuss this issue. Mrs. Dahlheimer reviewed that they did vote on it and it did not pass. Dr. Darcy stated that every time it has been requested, it has not been put on the agenda. Mrs. Caramanello felt if they were going to include Indigenous Peoples' Day in the calendar, it should be on October 14th as Columbus Day/Indigenous People's Day. Mr. Stone agreed and felt that they should observe it on the actual date. Dr. Darcy agreed with combining the two. Mrs. Dahlheimer reviewed that they had agreed to revisit once the state aligns with that, but will put it on the agenda for February meeting.

Dr. Darcy also felt that labeling April 18th as Good Friday is inappropriate as it is a Christian holiday, though they can just say the district is closed. Mrs. Caramanello agreed that they should just state that the district is closed instead of individually labeling everything and Dr. Darcy agreed.

Dr. Schuch stated that they will not publish the calendar if it is voted in until the board addresses the proposed changes. Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that people are confused about how snow days were labeled in

the past. Dr. Schuch explained that people like to think that if there are no snow days, there is a payoff in the spring and the school year doesn't get extended.

In favor of approving the 2024-2025 District Calendar: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Committee Reports

A. Building Committee Meeting - December 20, 2023

Mr. Moore reported that people are happy with the speed tables on Pickett Lane and they have been paid for. All of Pickett Lane phase 2 has been completed. Drainage and sidewalks remain for phase 3. The committee also talked about the access that was built from the former chicken farm to Pickett Lane without permission from the district and Mr. Proia has installed some barriers.

The field house survived the big rain storms. Some fencing has been put up and has been paid for. Mrs. Neubig has filed everything for the grant, but hasn't heard back yet. A firm has been hired to begin the architectural design work for the bathrooms. They are planning for men's, women's and parent bathrooms for now. The hope is to have that ready for when the grant is awarded to get a contractor in quickly.

Mr. Moore reiterated that the district will not have to install a new pump station which results in about a \$500,000 savings. The turf will be replaced starting the day after graduation. The Building committee wants the board's input on what the logo should be on the new turf. Mrs. Dahlheimer would like to put this out to the kids. The Building committee felt that the Blue Devil would make more sense since it's a co-op football team, but soccer and track are not.

The Building committee also questioned what will be done with the revenue from the field once the lights are installed. Mr. Moore feels this will be a policy question as to whether the revenue goes to the facility or to the General Fund.

Board Communications and Professional Development

Mrs. Dahlheimer stated there have been a lot of concerns about kindergarten and helping the families of kids who fall in between the new dates. She would like information to go out as soon as possible to help put parents at ease. Dr. Schuch added that Mrs. Murray has been sending parents emails to document their requests to start early under the new rules, but they are not yet at the point of assessing. He added that the state statute puts that on the school principal. Mrs. Keane stated that she and Mrs. Murray have worked on a draft letter this week and have also reviewed the policy.

Mrs. Dahlheimer reported that the State Relations Committee has a meeting with the co-chairs of the Education Committee on January 23rd and they will review the CAFE priorities, including more ESSER funds for counselors, allowing a phase-in option for kindergarten, investing in programs that promote hiring educators of diverse backgrounds and allowing flexibility in the implementation of the reading program mandate. District 13, Westbrook and Madison will host a legislative breakfast on January 25th in Westbrook.

Mrs. Dahlheimer added that a few board members jumped in Lake Beseck this past weekend to support the Benchwarmers. She also noted that there had been an article in the Connecticut Mirror about reconfiguration.

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

A. In-person public comment

Nick Faiella, from Middlefield, and Doc Lema, both from the Benchwarmers, reported that the Benchwarmers raised \$24,000 from the advertising program this year, with a gross profit of about \$20,000 which is up from last year. Total expenditures were \$43,000 this year as compared to \$25,000 last year. There is also about \$11,000 pending that hasn't been processed yet. Mr. Faiella will send an email with more detail to the board members. Mrs. Dahlheimer thanked the Benchwarmers for all they do. Dr. Lema noted that he has been in the club for 38 years and they are approaching \$2.5 million given to the schools. Mr. Roraback added that the advertisements add a level of community spirit as well.

B. Remote public comment

Mike Heligmann stated that he attended the work session and thought it was great. He was very impressed with all of the work that has been done. He asked when the towns will actually vote on a proposal. Mrs. Dahlheimer will reach out via email with that information. Mr. Heligmann asked if the board has considered changing the current reconfiguration plan if an option was voted on in the Spring. He felt that, if a new school were to pass, the reconfiguration plans would be completely different. He is looking forward to the forums next week and hoped that the board could answer some of these questions at that time. Mr. Heligmann added that something needs to be passed as Brewster and Lyman are deteriorating and need improvements. He would like a clearer view on why the reconfiguration is being rushed to next year.

Adjournment

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of adjourning the regular meeting of the Board of Education: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First