

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held the Annual Meeting of Regional School District 13 of the State of Connecticut on May 6, 2024 at 7:00 PM in the Julian Thayer Auditorium at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

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

Board members absent: Mr. DeVecchio and Mr. Mennone

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, and Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the Annual District meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

*Richard Parmelee made a motion, seconded by Chuck Stengel, to nominate Norm Hicks as moderator of the Annual Meeting. There were no other nominations.*

Norm Hicks began the meeting by asking Mrs. Petrella to read the warning of annual meeting and referendum vote and return of the call into the record.

Mrs. Dahlheimer welcomed everyone to the meeting and acknowledged the district's teachers for Teacher Appreciation Week. Looking at the proposed budget, Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that the gross budget is \$40,879,195 which represents a 3.68 percent increase. The net budget, at \$39,297,814, is a 2.9 percent increase. Mrs. Dahlheimer explained the difference between the gross and net budgets and noted that they were fortunate to be able to apply the interest and premium on bonding to lower the budget.

The towns' assessments are determined by the school population, with Durham at 65.65 percent and Middlefield at 34.35 percent. The proposed allocation for Durham is \$25,779,015, with Middlefield's being \$13,498,799. The government-proposed ECS grant for Durham was \$3,293,232 and \$2,100,359 for Middlefield. The proposed net costs to the towns are \$22,505,783 for Durham and \$11,398,440 for Middlefield. The proposed increase to Durham will be \$1,046,837, with Middlefield having a reduction of \$130,545.

Looking at the enrollment change, Durham lost 10 and Middlefield lost 27. This results in an increase in the allocation of 1 percent to Durham and a 1 percent decrease to Middlefield.

Mrs. Dahlheimer reviewed that they were able to keep the anticipated per pupil increase to only \$316 from the previous years. She then reviewed the potential annual decrease in the per pupil expenditures with estimated budget adjustments. Looking at ways to lower the PPE, a \$500,000 reduction in the budget would result in a \$25,889, a reduction of \$364. Reducing the budget by \$1.5 million would result in a \$25,159, a reduction of only \$1,094. If they were able to reduce the budget by \$3 million, the PPE would be \$24,065, a reduction of \$2,188. Looking at a \$5 million reduction, the PPE would be \$22,606, a reduction of \$3,647. Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that the \$3 million reduction can truly be realized with the closure of schools.

The biggest budget driver this year is salaries and benefits due to contractual obligations and vacancy factor. Purchased services has been reduced by \$75,517, facilities and grounds has increased, operating services has increased by \$265,254, the supplies budget has been reduced by \$238,250, capital and

equipment has been reduced by \$57,331, a reduction in dues and fees of \$15,912 and a reduction in debt service of \$375,213.

Many districts across the state and country have had large percentage budget increases this year, primarily due to the end of the COVID grants. Mrs. Dahlheimer was proud to say that the district did not use those funds for positions or increases in salaries. Districts find themselves in the position of not being able to fund positions because of that. They were able to reduce the debt service by \$338,000 due to utilizing the bond premium. Propane buses were budgeted with a lease and they were able to carry over the surplus on transportation and energy.

Moving to salaries, Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that there is a reduction at the elementary school level due to class size. There is an increase in grade six due to the size of the incoming sixth grade class. The athletic trainer is an addition under salaries, but is offset by the reduction in purchased services. An increased maintenance position is proposed to help support the district's facilities and grounds supervisor, but that is also offset by a reduction in purchased services and will allow the district to have more consistent preventative maintenance. There is a .5 increase in multi-language learners due to an increased caseload and is required by the state. There is also a .6 increase in the math department at Coginchaug which the Board of Education felt was necessary to support the math students.

Looking at capital reserve, Mrs. Dahlheimer reviewed that the improvements include replacement of the PA systems throughout the district to ensure safety, ongoing glycol replacement, unanticipated repairs and maintenance, maintenance upgrades to the athletic fields, including varsity baseball and softball drainage, tennis court replacements (year one of four), and the final appropriation of the turf replacement, as well as chiller and roof replacement funding for Strong School.

Mrs. Dahlheimer then reviewed a graph showing debt service.

Mr. Hicks then opened the meeting for public comment and questions.

Richard Parmelee, from Durham, thanked the Board of Education for providing a referendum for the budget which gives everyone an opportunity to participate in the process. He asked if the district is assessing a fee to students to participate in activities at school and Mrs. Neubig stated that they no longer have a pay-to-play fee. Mr. Parmelee stated that there are 240,000 illegal residents in the state and hoped that the Board of Education would be sure that the employees of various contractors are here legally and preferably US citizens. He felt that landscapers and painters are both vulnerable areas as well as the construction industry. Mr. Parmelee stated that he is not in the business of subsidizing the educational needs of other communities and felt that they should pay the full bore for football. He also noted that once this budget is adopted, it is fixed like concrete and they are unable to change anything which he does not feel is equitable to the towns.

Susan Michael, from Durham, stated that the district has been known for science and outdoor ed for a long time and she is concerned about the direction they're going. She recently heard that sixth graders will have a half year of science and a half year of social studies next year. She asked how they expect to do that; how does one teach a year of science in a half year and what will happen to the scores in eighth grade. While she has never been a test person, she knows that they will look at scores to see how the students are doing in science. Mrs. Michael added that when she retired, the district hired a long-term sub and now that's gone. She felt that they need to hire someone to do trail walks and things which is great

for the kids. Mrs. Michael felt that there has been a science loss in the district and, this year, the curriculum that she wrote is going away because they are integrating science into ELA. She explained that science curriculum contains five Es, including exploring, experimenting, explaining, which is done when kids do science, not just read science. She does not feel that is happening as much as it was two years ago when she was there to help the teachers try new things. Mrs. Michael hoped that her position would be brought back, but she didn't see it anywhere. She felt that the experiences that the children are having in science have weakened. She noted that Bill Nye has said if you don't have kids interested and experiencing science by the time they are 10 years old, they will not care about science. Mrs. Michael stated that she relies on science to be a good citizen and understand climate change, weather patterns, why places are burning, and why groundwater might be contaminated. She encouraged the board to rethink sixth grade science and social studies.

Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that there is no reduction in science in this year's budget, but she does take Mrs. Michael's concerns seriously.

Richard Parmelee, from Durham, added that the district needs to get rid of football and not be subjecting students to head injuries. He also believed that science teachers are necessary. He felt that priorities are backwards in the state, with the three highest paid people in the state are the football coach and basketball coaches at UConn. Science should take precedence over that.

At this point, hearing no further comments, Mr. Hicks declared the meeting over.

*Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, to adjourn the meeting until 6:00 AM tomorrow morning for the referendum.*

*In favor of adjourning the meeting until 6:00 AM tomorrow morning for the referendum: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone.*

The meeting was adjourned at 7:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First