

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, May 8, 2024 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Mrs. Caramanello (remote), Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Roraback

Board members absent: Mr. DeVecchio and 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; Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology; and Mrs. Quarato, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Development

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the regular meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Approval of Agenda**

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

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

### **Presentations**

#### **A. John Lyman Student Presentation**

Mr. Ford explained that several of Mrs. Sorenson's third-grade learners volunteered to present tonight on how they prepare for assemblies. Ann began by describing how classes prepare for assemblies. Amelia stated that the class talks about the topic they want to share. Lila explained how they decide on the different roles. Estella noted that the next step is to figure out what extras they need. Blake described how they rehearse for assembly shares. Parents are always invited to come watch when they share at assembly. The host class plans the agenda and then a script is written. They usually sing two songs during assembly. The hosts also try to come up with a clever way to introduce Mr. Ford at the end. The learners also announced that all of the third grade will be hosting or sharing at assembly on Friday, June 7<sup>th</sup> and invited the board.

Mrs. Sorenson explained that it was very easy for the learners to speak about this because they are really invested and it is a very important part of their time at Lyman. Mr. Roraback thanked Mrs. Sorenson for being a teacher and having a real impact on the kids.

#### **B. Pension Plan - Morgan Stanley**

Kevin Nichols, from Morgan Stanley, explained that his company has been advising the district's pension plan for decades. The asset value of the pension plan has never been higher and is over \$12 million right now. Morgan Stanley works to make sure the benefits can be paid and to make sure that it is invested in a way that provides the ability to budget. In 2022, this plan was down about 8 percent while the market was down about 20. Over the last five years, the plan has averaged over 8 percent net returns which is

higher than the 6.75 that is expected from the actuary. That results in less pressure on the district to put money in as part of the budget.

Morgan Stanley also works to protect the fund ratio. The district is just under 90 percent funded at this point and they are working to be at 100 percent or even a little over. Mr. Nichols had distributed some materials to the board and explained that they would like to make some changes to the portfolio. Right now, the portfolio is 70 percent high-quality stocks and 30 percent high-quality fixed income. Because the stock market has gone up so much and the funded ratio has maintained, they would like to reduce risk. They propose to take 5 percent of the portfolio away from U.S. stocks and put it into investment-grade short-term corporate bonds which would be about \$600,000 of the portfolio.

Looking at page 3, Mr. Nichols explained that the market has gone straight up since October, 2023. Earnings estimates have been flat. The economy is doing fine and the GP is actually contracting right now, with unemployment ticking up a little bit. Inflation is actually going up a little bit. People did expect the Fed to cut rates in the beginning of the year, with seven or eight more going into this year, but it has been less than two. There are two reasons that they don't want to take as much stock risk as they have in the past. One is that bonds are paying something, with about 5.5 percent on the bond portfolio. Right now, it is kind of a toss-up between stocks and bonds, at 53 basis points.

Moving to page 16, earnings estimates have come down for 2024, but remain relatively stable for 2025. Morgan Stanley's S&P 500 target is about 4,500 whereas the rest of Wall Street believes it will be around 5,500. Morgan Stanley would rather be cautious and wrong than risky. Finally, looking at page 31, the valuation of the U.S. relative to other places in the world, there is a much tighter range and, after COVID, the U.S. got a premium from the rest of the world that it has not relinquished since. The amount of earnings paid per dollar of investment is a lot higher than it is abroad. Morgan Stanley will continue to keep their international and emerging market allocation the way that it is and take the 5 percent from U.S. stocks because they feel they have gotten a little too far ahead of themselves.

Mr. Nichols explained that the portfolio does not own any hedge funds, private equity funds or anything liquid. Alternatives are for the tax structure of certain investments. He reiterated that the pension plan is over 70 percent in equity and around 30 percent in fixed income. As of yesterday, the fund was at \$12.21 million. Morgan Stanley works to be sure there are enough secure, reliable and growing streams of income to help with benefit payments. Between contributions from the school district and the employees, the total is about \$500,000 and the benefit payments that go out are about \$600,000, resulting in about \$100,000 coming out of the portfolio every year. Right now, the fund gets \$317,000 in income yearly.

Mr. Nichols explained that the proposed change to bonds includes treasury and corporate bonds only, not municipal. He summarized that the pension fund balance has never been higher and they are at 90 percent funded which is spectacular. The state average is around 70 percent and the national average is 55 to 60 percent. The pension fund earns more per year than what the actuary is assuming, which is great for the budget.

Dr. Schuch noted that board members should send any questions they have to Mrs. Neubig. Mr. Nichols encouraged everyone to reach out to him directly. There are currently about 140 participants in the plan, with more active than retired.

Mrs. Dahlheimer reported that the budget passed in both Middlefield and Durham last night. She also acknowledged Amanda Betty's retirement from the board. Mrs. Dahlheimer received an email from Durham's Town Clerk asking for their opinion on how to fill the vacancy. The district does not have anything to do with electing anyone to fill a vacancy, but the town needs to fill the vacancy at a town meeting within 30 days. The vacancy may then go on the ballot at the next election in November to fill out the term and the town's attorney is looking into that.

Mrs. Dahlheimer also acknowledged Teacher Appreciation Week.

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

**A. In-person public comment**

A member of the public hoped that plans were in place for fifth and sixth grade when it moves to Strong and that there will be scheduled recess in addition to lunch as well as playground equipment available for them. She also hoped that there will be enough time for everyone to eat, with four grades in the building. She hoped that the board would not sacrifice the kids' well-being in the short term for other kids' well-being in the long term. As they are also planning to ask teachers to move buildings possibly three times in four years, she also hoped there was a staff retention plan in place. Research has shown that teachers are the most important thing in a child's educational experience. She challenged the board to take all of this into consideration while planning the reconfiguration.

**B. Remote public comment**

None.

**Approval of Minutes**

- A. Board of Education Regular Meeting - April 3, 2024**
- B. Board of Education Public Hearing - April 3, 2024**
- C. Board of Education Special Meeting - April 17, 2024**

*Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the minutes, as listed above.*

*In favor of approving the minutes, as listed above: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried.*

**Superintendent's Report**

**A. Grade Level Reconfiguration 2024-2025 Update**

Dr. Schuch reviewed that they sent preliminary assignments to employees back in February and, hopefully, now that the budget has passed, the employees will have a greater sense of certainty. He does not expect them to change, but that could always happen, especially in Special Ed.

**B. Other Updates (if applicable)**

Dr. Schuch thanked all of the district's teachers and those that have made Teacher Appreciation Week so special. He also thanked the board for their hard work on the budget and especially Mrs. Neubig and her staff. Dr. Schuch added that, while they celebrate the budget passing, Mrs. Neubig then has to manage it throughout the year. He also thanked the 901 people who voted in the budget referendum and wished they could get more people to participate. Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that the numbers have been consistent for the past several years. She also noted that it looks like the 6:00 AM to 8:00 PM time frame will continue to be honored, but any special referendums will be from 12:00 PM to 6:00 PM. The plan amendment referendum will not be affected by that.

Dr. Schuch added that he went to a Chamber of Commerce meeting this morning and shared the district's accomplishments. He was asked a lot of questions about the three-school configuration but was not allowed to talk about that.

Dr. Schuch reminded everyone that the next board meeting will be held on June 5<sup>th</sup> when they will recognize retirees. Graduation is on June 12<sup>th</sup>, rain or shine, and Dr. Schuch invited all board members to participate.

Dr. Schuch asked Mrs. Keane to report on the Michaels Cup. The Michaels Cup was presented to the Unified Sports Team, led by Rob Bajoros, last week at the CIAC Unified banquet. This is the most prestigious award that Special Olympics Connecticut presents to honor those teams that exemplify the qualities of inclusion, participation in unified sports with other teams, development of student leadership skills, supporting entire school communities and programs that serve as examples to other schools. The trophy will be in the district until it is awarded to another district next year, but they also gave the district a banner to hang in the high school gym.

Mrs. Keane added that the Unified team from Panama will arrive on May 28<sup>th</sup> and staying until June 1<sup>st</sup>. She invited the board members to join them for their events. She did hope to get some press coverage.

Mr. Moore asked Dr. Schuch if he has had a chance to talk about his and Mrs. Dahlheimer's concerns about the sixth-grade curriculum. Dr. Schuch explained that Mrs. Gonzalez will attend the Student Achievement meeting on May 27<sup>th</sup> to give a full briefing. Mr. Moore stated that their issue was they had heard that study halls were back in and they wanted to make sure that that was appropriate and the curriculum was being changed so much that they would not be able to handle it. Mr. Moore felt that Strong School is the toughest school and the more they do to make it comfortable, the better. He hoped that adding extra classes on some technical stuff would be important. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that electives may still happen. The upcoming sixth graders had an orientation at Strong School and there was concern that the schedule had changed drastically because of math, ELA and social studies/science for the period of the day, with related arts, music and study halls at the end of the day. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it was important for Student Achievement to look at this to be sure the students are getting what they need and that electives are still happening. Parents will be meeting with Mrs. Gonzalez this week.

Mr. Moore and Mrs. Dahlheimer encouraged everyone to attend the Student Achievement meeting. They would like to be sure the sixth graders have a good experience next year so that fifth graders are excited to move up to Strong as well.

Mr. Roraback asked if Dr. Schuch has reached out to the administrators about teachers needing to use their own time to pack and move. He recognized that many teachers prefer to pack themselves, but asked if there was a way to get them some time to do this. Dr. Schuch stated that he has forwarded that information to the building administrators and they are working to address individual concerns. He added that if someone can't pack, they will do it for them but the majority of people do not want somebody else packing for them.

### **Staff Reports**

#### **A. Director of Finance - Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that the district is forever grateful for Mrs. Neubig's financial and business brain as well as her emotional support. Mrs. Neubig reported that the general fund is 78 percent expended, 99 percent of the budget encumbered and 81 percent of the revenue has been received.

Mrs. Neubig had a conversation with the state on April 23<sup>rd</sup> and a discussion with Howard Weissberg on April 25<sup>th</sup> about the state grant for the lights and bathrooms at the field house. The state has approved the lighting bid waiver for Musco and a purchase order has been issued. The district is on their calendar for August. In the past, the grants were broken up and prevailing wage was determined on the individual pieces, but the Department of Labor says it's prevailing wage based on the total amount. That increases the cost for both the lights and bathrooms and Mrs. Neubig is fearful that they will not be able to do all the bathrooms with the state grant. Mrs. Neubig proposed a phased in approach to the state, who approved it. Mrs. Neubig noted that there are funds in the capital reserve account for two bathrooms which would hopefully satisfy the agreement. Shipman and Goodwin are reviewing it and will advise. Any money left over from the lights can then be used to expand the bathrooms. She has reached out to the attorney and to Durham's Planning and Zoning Commission and is waiting to hear back. The Building committee felt that would be a good way to go. An alternative would be to fund the full bathroom project without prevailing wage and pay for it directly. It would be about \$150,000 without prevailing wage and is about \$220,000 with prevailing wage.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that would be a responsible way to get this project completed. Mrs. Neubig felt that there would be between \$80,000 and \$100,000 left in the grant to expand the bathrooms. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked how long it will take Musco to install the lights, but Mrs. Neubig was not sure though she did believe it will be ready before the first football game. Mr. Mennone reiterated that there will be increased revenue from the stadium once there are lights and bathrooms. Mrs. Neubig noted that there are some other things in the agreement with the neighbor that she needs to be sure are met or can be met. Mr. Moore felt that the Building committee needs to agree that the two bathrooms fit in with the final plan and Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that they did. Mr. Moore also noted that the building was used for the Marty Roberts Track meet and everyone was impressed.

Mrs. Neubig also noted that she got a call about property on Main Street, near Strong on the other side of Pickett Lane, that is potentially for sale. She did not believe the district was interested, but wanted to let the board know.

### **Committee Reports**

#### **A. Policy Committee Meeting - April 17, 2024**

Mr. Moore delayed his report until later in the meeting.

**B. Building Committee Meeting - April 17, 2024**

Mr. Moore reported that the driveway to the baseball field has been paved and is being well-used. Drainage along Pickett Lane needs to be addressed and they also talked about the drainage at the top parking lot. The turf replacement is coming up soon. They can meet the fire protection requirements at Cuginchaug without much change and they will look at Strong separately. They do feel that there will be funds available for reallocation from the pump house project which Mr. Moore hoped could be used for bathrooms, if needed.

**C. Student Achievement Committee Meeting - April 24, 2024**

Mrs. Petrella reported that they looked at math and literacy competencies and board members should have received copies. The committee will continue to look at the competencies and how they will be implemented in the classroom. They also looked at the career and college readiness platform problems. They have found that SchoolLinks is a better platform, covering college applications, career planning and self-discovery as well as helping with the Capstone projects and social-emotional learning. Lastly, they looked at current assessment data for assessment blocks and current SAT scores. The committee asked for more comprehensive data that covers multiple years, including all of the different testing and benchmarks. Mr. Roraback noted that he was concerned about students' security giving information about themselves, but Mrs. Quarato had stated that was not the case. Mrs. Keane noted that anything the district uses has to conform with the student data privacy.

**D. ACES Update**

Mrs. Dahlheimer reported that she is now the Policy chair for ACES and she has found their policy evaluation very interesting. Mrs. Dahlheimer is also ACES' liaison to the Early Headstart Program which meets once a month. She also noted that ACES has decided to close a building and build another.

**Board Communications and Professional Development**

Mrs. Dahlheimer reported that she, along with the Madison chair and the Westbrook chair, are looking to host a chair and vice-chair coffee a couple of times during the year. She noted that it has been amazing to work with both of those towns.

Mr. Moore stated that he hasn't seen any Friday updates from the high school and Dr. Schuch thought that Mrs. Stone had not been doing that. Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that she had been until a couple of weeks ago and it is really the only way to find out what's happening at the high school. They try to get to as many events as they can. Mrs. Stone does send out daily announcements, but Dr. Schuch will ask her to send events to the board. There was discussion about all of the events in the district at this time of year.

Mrs. Petrella related a story from her granddaughter who attended one of the community forums about the Memorial project and she was very impressed with the result. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that she did hear some confusion about whether yesterday's vote was on the Memorial project as well.

**New Business****A. Review of Board Goals and Objectives for 2024-2025 School Year - Discussion and Possible Vote**

Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that she and Mr. Moore brainstormed some upcoming goals and objectives, with a lot of it being retooling and rewording of the pillars, student achievement, well-being, engagement and fiscal oversight. She asked if the board would like to suggest any changes or take more time to mull it over. She then went through each proposed change, noting that the Student Achievement committee is considered the Curriculum committee. Mrs. Dahlheimer reviewed that there are pacing guides on the website and they should represent what students are learning. She will also ask a representative from CABE to attend a Student Achievement meeting to offer some advice.

Mrs. Dahlheimer moved on to well-being, adding that they need to look at safety issues as well. They propose to establish an action-based ad hoc committee for well-being, including staff and students. Mrs. Dahlheimer and Mrs. Petrella have been meeting with the district Climate committee and Mrs. Keane will report on climate at next month's board meeting. They would like to review rewards and recognitions as well as look at making reporting more anonymous. Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that a review of the district's extracurricular offerings to assure they appeal to a broad cross-section has been a goal in the past.

Looking at engagement, most of the information has been retooled. Mrs. Dahlheimer mentioned several ideas, including hosting a community conversation with members of the board, coffee with the principals, conducting an employee engagement survey, publish a community newsletter, invite community members to be part of board committees, communicate with PTOs and booster organizations. Mrs. Dahlheimer would like to leverage CABE resources and Mr. Moore added that CABE was passive prior to COVID but became the source of a lot of information during COVID. He felt that that changed their relationship with the state. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that they also want to establish enhanced communication with parents and the community. She felt it was very important that they engage the senior community. Mr. Mennone asked if there is any type of program where the high school students go to the Community Center and Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that Strong School's Edge program has served lunch there.

Fiscal goals are to establish a responsible capital budget plan, ensure thorough and accurate financial and tax assessments, develop a protocol for identifying budget items in relation to their goals and assure that spending aligns with the district's goals and objectives. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that these goals are being met currently, but need to be continued to look at. She added that she would also like to see science and outdoor education analyzed.

Dr. Darcy would like to see the board move away from referencing the DRG as it's a false equivalency and she doesn't want to compare the district to other districts, but instead wants to compare the district's data to the district's data. She wants to know if scores are trending upward. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked Dr. Darcy to elaborate on the word "growth." Dr. Darcy is opposed to establishing a gifted and talented program because historically they have been used to further separate the children of involved parents from the children of uninvolved parents. She felt that that should not be a priority in the district, but rather to make sure all kids are given what they need to excel. She was also concerned about how to define who is gifted and talented. Districts who are concerned about serving all students do not do gifted and talented programs. Mr. Moore noted that they regularly recognize kids who are gifted in sports and

provide avenues for them to highlight their gifts, but nobody knows about the student who writes a book or their own music. Mr. Moore asked if there was an avenue to be sure not to hold back the kids who are excelling. Dr. Darcy noted that another way to do a gifted and talented program is for everyone to participate as part of an elective cycle in middle school. Dr. Darcy was just worried that kids get left out. It was agreed to evaluate the need for a gifted and talented enrichment program.

Dr. Darcy asked if there is anything about professional learning opportunities for teachers to prepare them to have difficult conversations. Incidents are happening and teachers have to deal with them and she wasn't sure teachers are equipped to do that. Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed that it is very tough for some of the teachers to have those conversations. Dr. Darcy added that they need to prepare kids to leave the two towns. Mr. Moore felt that teacher support is critical. Dr. Darcy added that non-certified staff should be included as well.

***Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to accept the 2024-2025 Board of Education goals and objectives, pending the two language changes from Dr. Darcy on Student Achievement.***

***In favor of accepting the 2024-2025 Board of Education goals and objectives, pending the two language changes from Dr. Darcy on Student Achievement: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Roraback.***

## **B. Policy Review**

### **1. Second read and possible vote**

- a. Admission Ages of Attendance 5111
- b. Admission to the Public Schools at or Before Age Five - Shipman
- c. Nepotism 4112.8

Mr. Moore reviewed the minor changes they had made to the above-listed policies.

***Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to adopt the following policies: Admission Ages of Attendance 5111, Admission to the Public Schools at or Before Age Five - Shipman and Nepotism 4112.8.***

***In favor of adopting the following policies: Admission Ages of Attendance 5111, Admission to the Public Schools at or Before Age Five - Shipman and Nepotism 4112.8: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Roraback.***

### **2. Second read and possible vote on series 9000 policies (part 1)**

- a. Administrative Regulations 9313
- b. Adoption of Policies 9132
- c. Board Member Request for Information 9231
- d. BOE Code of Ethics 9271
- e. Committees - Standing Committees 9130
- f. Community Member Committee Participation 9110.1
- g. Conflict of Interest 9270
- h. Policy and Regulation Systems 9312
- I. Policy Formation 9311



- j. Requests for Information by Board Members 9325.5 CABE
- k. Role of Board and Members - Shipman
- l. Role of the Board and Members 9000
- m. Special Committees-Board of Education 9133
- n. Suspension of Policies Bylaws and Regulations 9314
- o. Suspension of Policies, Bylaws or Regulations - Shipman

Mr. Moore reviewed the changes, deletions and modifications to the above-listed policies.

*Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to adopt the policies listed above.*

*In favor of adopting the policies listed above: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Roraback.*

**3. First read on series 9000 (part 2)**

- a. Construction of the Agenda 9323
- b. Construction and Posting of Agenda - Shipman
- c. Duties of the Chairperson 9210
- d. Official Duties - Chairperson - Shipman
- e. Duties of the Secretary and Treasurer 9211
- f. Official Duties - Secretary - Shipman
- g. Official Duties - Treasurer - Shipman
- h. Official Duties - Vice Chairperson - Shipman
- I. Electronic Participation at Board Meetings 9327
- j. Meeting Conduct - Shipman
- k. Roberts Rules of Order 9320
- l. Quorum 9367
- m. Quorum and Voting Procedures - Shipman
- n. Actions by the Board 9325
- o. Meetings - Public and Executive Session 9322
- p. Public Meetings and Executive Session - Shipman
- q. Public Participation at Board of Education Meetings 9120
- r. Minutes of the BOE Meetings 9326
- s. Minutes - Shipman
- t. Notice of Meetings 9321
- u. Time, Place and Notice of Meetings - Shipman
- v. Regular Meetings of the Board of Education 9261.1
- w. Organizational Meeting of the BOE 9100
- x. Officers - Shipman
- y. Removal of Board Officers - Shipman
- z. Transaction of Business - Shipman
- aa. Filling Vacancies of Board of Education 9111
- bb. Filling Vacancies - Shipman
- cc. Limits of Authority Board Members 9010
- dd. Methods of Operation 9300
- ee. Number of Board of Education Members 9110
- ff. Oath of Office - Shipman

- gg. Orientation of Board Members 9230
- hh. Remuneration and Reimbursement 9250
- ii. Reimbursement of Board Member Expenses - Shipman

Mr. Moore reviewed all proposed changes, additions and deletions to the above-listed policies. Mrs. Dahlheimer commented that the policy on filling vacancies is from Shipman and follows state statute.

Mrs. Dahlheimer will put these policies on the next agenda and asked everyone to review the Vice Chairman policy and be prepared to vote on it.

**Public Comment**

**A. In-person public comment**

None.

**B. Remote public comment**

None.

**Adjournment**

*Dr. Darcy 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: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried.*

Meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First