

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Study Committee met on Wednesday, October 26, 2017 at 7:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut. Committee members present: Dr. Friedrich, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Other Board members present: Mr. Moore.

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Business Manager and Mr. Sadinsky, Principal of Strong School.

Dr. Taylor called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None at this time.

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to amend the agenda to include public comment at the end of the meeting.

In favor of amending the agenda: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mr. Yamartino and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes - September 28, 2017

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the minutes with the amendment to strike the sentence "Dr. Friedrich will bring forward more analysis at the next meeting."

In favor of approving the minutes as amended: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mr. Yamartino and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Silver Petrucelli Proposal

Dr. Veronesi reached out to Dean Petrucelli at Silver Petrucelli to have them look at the available space in the high school and how existing buildings could be used with very little construction or renovation costs to accommodate different grade level configurations. She had a copy of Silver Petrucelli's proposal for the committee members to review which was \$19,500.

Dr. Friedrich asked about the prior contract and Dr. Veronesi explained that everything that was agreed upon in the prior contract has been completed. Mr. Yamartino asked if this additional cost had been planned for in the budget and Dr. Veronesi explained that it had not been. Mrs. Neubig commented that there were other areas in the budget that did not come to fruition or came in less than anticipated and this cost could be absorbed. Dr. Veronesi felt it was critically important to move forward with this study if the district is going to continue at a pace that includes the potential closing of another school building within a couple of years.

Dr. Veronesi reminded the committee that silver Petrucelli had originally looked at a renovation of Brewster School that included additional classrooms and a gymnasium and would now want Silver Petrucelli to determine what alterations could be done within the footprint of the building. Mr. Moore felt that they needed to look at the furniture. He also felt that they needed to find a way to make the schools that we have the most efficient and best for learning.

Projected Planning Approach for Building Usage and Academic Planning

Mr. Yamartino asked if it had been considered to add another grade to the high school and Dr. Veronesi reviewed the mission statement of the Utilization Committee which involves examining physical space while talking about the educational future. Looking at purely the physical plant, the administrative team has talked about moving eighth grade to the high school and discussed the pressure that high school students feel and there is a concern that this would start a year earlier if eighth graders were part of the high school. Consideration was also given to whether a five through seven configuration makes sense at the middle school in terms of curriculum and student needs.

Regarding the consideration of a one “program” model for the district, Dr. Veronesi cautioned against choosing one program over another, but did feel that a single best practice approach should be considered. She feels that the district should explore options including a district-wide pre-K-2, 3-5, 6-8. She also suggested that there may be the potential for municipal use for some parts of the school buildings. Dr. Veronesi explained that she and Mrs. Neubig have begun exploring the logistical consideration regarding physical plant capacity relative to projected enrollment.

Mrs. Neubig explained that, using current and projected enrollment through 2027, they looked at the capacity of the schools as well as the number of classrooms needed (using the higher end of the board-recommended class size). It looks as though the elementary level can be handled without extensive renovations. Dr. Friedrich asked if the pre-K-2 would be anchored at Brewster and Dr. Veronesi explained that that wasn't necessarily the case. Dr. Taylor commented that he didn't see a way to not utilize the high school space for additional students and end up spending an inordinate amount of money for additional space at another school. Dr. Taylor is severely opposed to having municipal use at the schools as it will impact the budget. Mr. Moore suggested that maybe pre-K could move to the high school.

Dr. Veronesi explained that pre-K students go to art, music, PE and library at their home school and many of the students in the program receive support from pupil personnel services. Dr. Taylor did not think pre-K would be the right option and felt that the only reasonable solution would be the eighth graders and possibly even seventh graders. Dr. Veronesi felt that no options were off the table at this point and that it is critically important to being the process of examining what will be best for students.

Dr. Taylor asked if the administrative team felt that moving to a one-program system would achieve programmatic needs as well as space needs. Mr. Yamartino felt that it would because enrollment numbers are different in each of the schools. Dr. Taylor also felt that going to one program and moving students to the high school would be a difficult situation, but he also felt that there just isn't money to spend within the system.

Dr. Taylor felt that the district would have to move almost two grades up to the high school in order to close two schools without significant renovations or additions as enrollment levels continued to decline. Mr. Moore agreed that there is no easy solution, but that over \$1 million in debt service will be coming off the books in the next year and a half or two years and there will be some capacity in the budget.

Mr. Yamartino reminded the members that two years ago they saw where three or four classrooms could be eliminated by combining the programs. Mr. Moore also mentioned that the curriculum is essentially the same in both programs.

Dr. Veronesi also reported that she met with the high school communications class last week to ask them to help redesign the communication structure and content. She talked with the class about the building and enrollment issues that she and the board are discussing and many in the class said they wished there had been just one program. She noted the very strong sense of community that students in our district feel and noted that being with their peers is very important to students. Mr. Yamartino stated that he had struggled with the decision when his children were in school. Dr. Taylor felt that the two concepts need to be kept separate so that the programmatic decision doesn't hinder the utilization of space decision.

Dr. Veronesi felt that she would not want to make a decision regarding program simply based on numbers, but more about whether it makes good educational sense to have all grade levels together. She would always prefer fewer transitions for students.

Mr. Moore asked if there was a time limit on the Silver Petrucelli proposal and Dr. Veronesi suggested that the Utilization Committee recommend it to the board at the November meeting. She would also like the board to give a directive to the superintendent. Dr. Taylor also commented that Milone & MacBroom seem to have changed their model on enrollment several times. Dr. Veronesi has spoken to them and they are seeing upticks in grades 3, 6 and 8 and housing sales have increased in rural communities. She thought that they may say the predictions do not have to be redone. Mr. Moore suggested Silver Petrucelli be given a time frame of no later than January 30th and Dr. Taylor stated that he would like to see a decision made in 2018. Dr. Veronesi hoped to have a commitment to a configuration in February so that it can be phased in over the long-term. Dr. Taylor suggested that they ask Silver Petrucelli to submit the proposal in a month.

Dr. Veronesi commented that reconfiguring grades and closing a school building are far more psychological than logistical and carefully addressing this process is her number one priority. It was agreed to have the board resolve to engage Silver Petrucelli at their next meeting. Dr. Veronesi will talk to Dean Petrucelli to refine the proposal and see how long he thinks this work will take. Mr. Moore also felt that they needed to know where the money for the proposal will come from.

Dr. Veronesi stated that furniture matters and makes a difference in the learning environment. Mr. Yamartino asked whether the high school is in or out on this round and Dr. Veronesi felt that they needed to continue to look at the high school. Dr. Taylor reiterated that he didn't feel it was logistically possible not to utilize the high school space. Dr. Friedrich also agreed that the high school needed to be included in the proposal. Mr. Yamartino also noted that classrooms could be added at Strong School just by moving walls.

It was agreed to move this proposal forward to the board in a time frame to be arranged by Dr. Veronesi and Silver Petrucelli.

Korn School Building Status Update

Dr. Veronesi reported that the Town of Durham is waiting for the State budget to be passed before they revisit the MOU. She thinks it will be important for the board to think about how to proceed with the building especially as they will be preparing the budget within a month for the 2018-2019 school year. Dr. Taylor asked if a time frame should be given to the town if they do not make a decision soon.

Dr. Taylor did not see how the economic climate will change and is personally in favor of putting a short time line on a decision from Durham. Mr. Yamartino also mentioned that it is quite common in the real estate world to enter into an agreement and pay for the right to reserve the property. He suggested that that amount might be \$30,000 a year as that is what the district budgets for the building.

Dr. Veronesi also reminded the committee members that there is a joint meeting with the boards of finance and boards of selectmen immediately following the board of education meeting. Dr. Taylor thought it might be a good idea to put this issue on that agenda.

Mr. Moore stated that he had received legislation from Milone & MacBroom regarding changes in the school grant construction program and he asked Dr. Veronesi to ask Silver Petrucelli what the impact of that legislation will be.

Mr. Yamartino mentioned the threat of a downgrade in the school district's bond rating and Mrs. Neubig commented that the school district is really collateral damage. It is more a function of whether the towns can afford to pay their obligations with the proposed cuts in ECS funding. There was then discussion about the state budget being voted on today.

Public Comment

Carl Stoup stated that he appreciated the committee's work and effort and felt this was a serious issue.

Adjournment

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
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