

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Study Committee met in Special Session on Thursday, May 3, 2018 at 6:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mrs. Boyle (arrived late), Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino (arrived late).

Other Board members present: Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore and Mrs. Petrella

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools, Kim Neubig, Business Manager

Dr. Taylor called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

Chuck Stengel, from Durham, asked whether there were minutes available from the informational session. He also commented that they had learned at the informational session that the survey had not been delivered to all taxpayers and also noted that the web address on the survey was incorrect. He felt that there was no way to know how many respondents were discouraged by this error and felt that no statistical significance could be applied to the survey response. Mr. Stengel also mentioned that options A and B would require large capital investments in Brewster and felt that the projected \$925,000 savings annually from closing John Lyman could be accomplished by renting a portion of the Korn School building to the Town of Durham. He felt that that was a better option than spending \$2 million in renovations.

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Friedrich made a motion to approve to the agenda, seconded by Mr. Hicks, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes - April 5, 2018

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hicks, to approve the minutes of the April 5, 2018 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the April 5, 2018 meeting as presented: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Silver Petrucelli Presentation: Modified Pre-K/K-5 Plan

Michelle Miller, from Silver Petrucelli, began by explaining that Option D is looking at turning Brewster into a PreK-5, Memorial into a K-5, Strong with 6-8 and Coginchaug 9-12. She showed the projections of total students at each school and how many classrooms would be needed as well as the square footage charts.

For this configuration, eight classrooms would need to be added at Brewster. A cafeteria and kitchen were also added. Additions were made to the north side including one grade 1 classroom (with an ADA-accessible toilet) and grades 2 and 3 were also added, along with a bathroom core which would also support the grades 4 and 5 classrooms as well as the cafeteria. A lobby will be created that will open to the playground.

Ms. Miller also reviewed the site plan which leaves the playground intact and creates more of a service driveway. Mr. Moore asked if any playground upgrades would be made for older students and it was explained that the site was available for that, if desired.

Memorial would need about 18 classrooms, but state standards for reimbursement limit that. Three classrooms would need to be added and Silver Petrucelli highly recommends adding kindergarten classrooms. Those would be added on the north side of the west wing and would be just over 1,000 sq. ft. and include bathrooms. The total addition would be 3,665 sq. ft., but it does keep the building at 16,000 sq. ft. over state standards. Ms. Miller hoped there would still be a chance for some reimbursement.

Looking at the costs of these projects, Brewster renovations would total \$7.6 million and they would still recommend the interior additions at \$681,000. They do feel there would be a pretty sizeable reimbursement so the total project would end up costing the District roughly \$4.4 million. Memorial would only be reimbursed at 68.8 percent (about \$700,000) and the total project would be \$1.35 million.

Ms. Miller summarized that Option D has become the most expensive option, but is definitely a scaled-back version of what was previously studied. She also mentioned that Strong and Cuginchaug Option A would apply in this concept as well.

Mrs. Geraci asked about parking at Brewster and it was felt that there may be options to create a separate bus and parent loop and there would be some room to expand the parking. Dean Petrucelli explained that they had primarily focused on the building, but the site has more than sufficient room to modernize and add on to parking and bus areas. Mr. Petrucelli explained that the cost per square foot is carrying enough dollars to support the site amenities as long as they are not extravagant.

Mr. Moore asked if there would be a big impact on space if the ID program were switched to Brewster and the Contemporary program to Memorial. Ms. Miller explained that classrooms would still need to be added and she felt that the bigger gym would be more important for the ID program.

Dr. Taylor asked how much capacity this option gives the District as far as handling fluctuations in enrollment and Ms. Miller showed a chart listing projected students per classroom. Mr. Petrucelli added that grade 5 has a maximum of 25 students and the calculations are at 22. He felt there was plenty of room in the option.

Dr. Veronesi mentioned that the Board has thought about phasing in parts of the project or getting started with something on the lower budget side, but she felt that it would make more sense to do this option all at once. Ms. Miller mentioned that if they decided to take off the cafe/kitchen, they would probably get full reimbursement as they will fall within the square footage mark. However, the longer the District waits to add that, the cost will increase. Mr. Petrucelli felt that there would be nothing to phase in at Memorial and the logical thing at Brewster would be the cafeteria and kitchen expansion. His feeling is that Brewster is already pushing the need for a separate café vs. gym and the core space there is getting

much too small for the number of classrooms. Ms. Miller explained that they selected to add a cafeteria/kitchen rather than a gym because the gym would be approximately 2,000 sq. ft. more and would reduce the reimbursement further. She did feel though that the existing gym is small. Mr. Petrucelli explained that they ran the cost of adding a gym and it would be about \$3.3 million. That would increase the cost as well as the square footage which decreases the reimbursement rate.

Dr. Taylor asked about the \$1.5 million at Cuginchaug and Ms. Miller explained that was to add an innovation lab, expand two classrooms and have a coding library installed.

Mrs. Geraci asked if one ABA classroom would still be appropriate at Brewster and Dr. Veronesi didn't necessarily feel that students needed to be in one classroom and alternative space could be used.

State Reimbursement Information and Considerations

Dr. Veronesi explained that they have looked at different options, including the fact that the District still owns Korn School and how closing another school may impact reimbursement.

Mr. Petrucelli explained that the state is constantly changing and decreasing the amount of reimbursement. The state now challenges the school systems to use available space. They don't care what types of programs are being run; they are strictly looking at it mathematically: how much space is available and how much space is consumed. If there is a school that has been mothballed, but is still on the books, Mr. Petrucelli doubts highly that the state will give any reimbursement. He felt that getting Korn School off the books is critical to getting any reimbursement. Dr. Veronesi asked if the District would be in the same situation if another school is closed and Mr. Petrucelli said that the state would not look at that favorably if the school is still on the books.

Dr. Veronesi also mentioned that Mrs. Neubig has reached out to the state and they have been invited to go to a work session. She extended that invitation to any Board members who may be able to attend. Mr. Petrucelli has been through those workshops with clients and the only thing that is consistent is change. He reiterated that the state simply uses an analysis of students and square footage.

Dr. Taylor summarized that even if the District gets Korn School off the books that it would be unlikely that the state will give any reimbursement if Lyman School is closed. Mr. Petrucelli reiterated that the state will not look favorably if there is a gross overage of existing square footage. If the state sees that there is an entire school of surplus space, they will wonder why they should pay for a 13,000 sq. ft. addition and tell you to re-open the closed school. Ms. Miller added that the state could also suggest that while you may want preK-5, it won't fit so make it preK-3. Mr. Petrucelli emphasized that the state does not care about the programs, just the space.

Dr. Veronesi felt that the District would save money in the long run by closing a school and not having staffing, capital costs, etc. even if there was no reimbursement from the state. Mr. Petrucelli agreed that the state will give the District their opinion at the time of the workshops, but did emphasize that the District has to go in with which option they choose.

Dr. Taylor felt that this decision cannot be made this year because the District still doesn't know what will happen with Korn School and, as it is still on the books, there would be no reimbursement. Dr. Veronesi felt that improvements can still be made, regardless of whether there is reimbursement, and this is now \$7 million vs. \$30 million. Dr. Taylor had the impression that only reimbursement factor would

be Korn School and not Lyman. Mr. Petrucelli explained that the state looks at renovate-as-new differently than an addition. Dr. Friedrich summarized that if an addition is made in the context of renovate-as-new, the District can expect reimbursement for the existing part of the structure. Mr. Petrucelli agreed and felt that the state would challenge the need for the additional square footage. He also mentioned that about a third of the districts they work with choose not to go through state reimbursement for a lot of different reasons.

Mr. Petrucelli explained that there are no renovate-as-new numbers included in Option D and Mrs. Neubig commented that the state will consider reimbursement if the District is improving the educational experience. Mr. Petrucelli agreed that the state will consider that and explained that they have worked with some districts that could not justify any additions, but the condition of the school merited closing it and the state considered that. Dr. Veronesi also commented that the district did not anticipate at the outset that disposition of Korn would take this long.

Dr. Veronesi asked if Mr. Petrucelli felt that the state would consider two options and he agreed that they would and he would also like to attend that meeting. Dr. Taylor worried about going to the meeting with two options because he felt the state would select the option that is the least costly. Mr. Petrucelli felt that the state would give their opinion on both options, especially at this point so early in the planning stages. He also felt that three options would be amenable.

Dr. Veronesi wondered if Option D, as a modified K-5 version, would be more favorable to the Board than Option B with eighth graders at the high school. Dr. Friedrich felt that Option B could be taken off the working table. It was generally agreed to recommend Options A and D to the Board at this point.

Mrs. Neubig reported that the state offered May 8th and May 9th between 9:00 and 12:00, May 14th at 10:00 and May 22nd between 9:00 and 12:00 for workshop dates. Mr. Moore suggested having the workshop before the next Board meeting. Mrs. Boyle asked if the District would meet with the state more than once and Mr. Petrucelli explained that it is usually a one-time meeting, but he is sure the state would entertain having another work session. He also explained that he has seen as many as three or four people attend, but also as many as 18. Mr. Moore agreed to bring this up at the Board meeting on Monday night and Dr. Veronesi suggested they set the workshop for May 22nd and it can be discussed at the May 16th Board meeting. Mrs. Neubig will set the workshop meeting for May 22, 2018 at 9:00 AM. Mrs. Boyle asked that an email be sent to all of the Board members.

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Boyle, that the Utilization Committee recommend to the Board meeting with the state to explore reimbursement for Options A and D.

Mrs. Petrella asked why we would go through this process when we know that John Lyman School would be an issue and wondered about exploring a status quo option, which would include renovations. She also stated that she has heard concerns about closing the schools in Middlefield and that Memorial would be the only school left in town. She has heard comments that the voices of the Middlefield citizens would not be heard because there are no schools in town.

Mr. Petrucelli explained that the state will only reimburse for these reasons: renovate-as-new (gut the entire building), additions, roof replacement, window replacement, code conformance, environmental hazards and oil tank replacement. Any other renovations would not be eligible for reimbursement. Some of the renovations necessary at Lyman would qualify. Boilers, HVAC, lighting, ceilings, etc. would not be eligible for reimbursement.

In favor of making a recommendation to the Board that Options A and D be explored with the state for reimbursement: Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Strategic Visioning Update and May 15th Plan

Dr. Veronesi reiterated what was brought up at the Information Session that had the Board moved forward with the original K-5 plan; they would not be having these Strategic Visioning discussions. They have been talking about choice and voice, the opportunity for students of all ages to learn and work together, for the schools to be a greater part of the community and for the community to be in the schools, opportunities for students to be outside every day, opportunities for observation, analysis, synthesis and higher-order thinking on a day-to-day basis.

On May 15th from 5:00 to 8:00 PM, a group of high school students will join the Strategic Visioning work and talk about their learning experience. Dr. Veronesi does feel that the time line has slowed down a little bit and that is a good thing, but now includes the opportunity for people on the team to look at work that other schools and other states are doing. They are also looking to plan visits to other schools, specifically that support areas that have been identified by the group. They will also begin to intersect their work with the recommendation for the school restocking once the Board reaches a decision.

Dr. Veronesi truly believes that there is now a great opportunity to think differently about the future of the District.

Dr. Veronesi is also looking into whether babysitting services could be provided during the May 15th meeting.

Mrs. Petrella felt that the Student Achievement Committee should be more involved with the Strategic Planning. Dr. Veronesi stated that they are more than welcome to attend, but explained that plan was to do this preliminary planning until June, knowing there is probably two years before implementation. More specific work will be done with a consultant and dedicated grade level teams. The idea of science, exploration and outdoor education is a big theme that keeps coming up.

Dr. Taylor asked about the timing of the intersection of Strategic Visioning and the building decisions. At the informational session, a lot of people stated that they cared about the programs and he would like to have a solid idea of what will happen in the building options before a decision is made.

Mrs. Boyle stated that she would like to see the process slow down so that due diligence can be done. This is a paradigm shift and, while Dr. Veronesi is doing a yeoman's job, it is a very big move for the District and she would like to be sure all the constituents are behind the Board.

Mr. Moore didn't feel they could totally understand the programs until at least a year from now and even then it will change. Dr. Taylor felt that certain high-level features could be concrete and the public would feel betrayed if a building decision is made and changed soon after. He feels that the decision should be made that is best for children within the building options, regardless of how long that may take. Dr. Veronesi agreed that a decision can be made within a reasonable time frame and she is happy to have the time line pressure off. She does believe it is starting to take shape and hopes that there can be a high-level description of recommendations for an approach/design by October or November.

Mrs. Boyle felt that parents are getting just snippets and it will take some time for them to understand all of the issues. She is grateful for all of the ideas coming in from parents and happy that Dr. Veronesi will visit other schools. She would like to see this be a smooth, community-driven project and not the Board trying to do something without the taxpayers understanding.

Initial Survey Results

Dr. Veronesi explained that the survey is not due back until the end of this week, but so far there have been 181 electronic submissions and about 40 paper copies.

Dr. Taylor felt that the real value will come from the qualitative component (the comments) and it was not intended to be a statistically significantly valid survey that decisions would be made from. He apologized for the website link error on the survey. Dr. Veronesi also reported that the surveys were inadvertently not mailed to people with a post office box and she will have the information put in the Town Times.

Dr. Friedrich stated that he could not find the survey on the District's website and also reported that he heard that people were not submitting the survey because they thought it was just for parents. Both of those concerns should seriously color the understanding of the input received. He would like to know what percentage of the results are from people with children as opposed to taxpayers. Dr. Veronesi will have the link to the survey put on the homepage of the website and they will extend the time.

Dr. Taylor felt that you get a sense of the community's feeling and the recurrent themes that appear in the survey responses. He did feel that the surveys that have been returned are mostly from people with school children. Dr. Friedrich thought that they wanted to give everyone in town an opportunity to make their comments, not just parents. Dr. Veronesi summarized that they need to correct the perception that the Board is not interested in the voice of people without children in school and they will do that through the newspaper and mailing it to the post office boxes. They can also distribute the surveys to the town halls and the libraries. It was agreed to add a cover letter explaining that the District is looking for input from all taxpayers. Dr. Taylor also reminded everyone that there is more time now that the timeline has changed.

Dr. Veronesi also explained that the minutes from the Informational Session have been posted even though some of the last names of the people making comments were not identified. Everyone agreed that it was very difficult to hear the people speaking.

Community Information Session Debrief

Dr. Taylor asked for general feedback about the information session. Mr. Hicks suggested that they do not hold a meeting in the Strong School gym again and Dr. Veronesi reminded everyone that it was only held there because the auditorium was being used. Mr. Moore liked that the people were closer to the Board and everyone could be seen. He thought that the format worked well and that Dr. Taylor and Mr. Augur did a great job.

Mr. Yamartino felt that the presentation was extremely professional and Mr. Augur and Dr. Taylor were very direct with their answers to questions. He also felt that the public followed the format of only asking questions for the most part, with just a couple that didn't. He felt that those that made comments were pushing one program over the other. Mr. Yamartino also felt that a number of people were willing to

listen to different options, but there were also people that the information didn't get through to. He felt that the Board needs to keep repeating the same information at every meeting.

Dr. Veronesi felt that a number of talking points need to be identified in this very complex process so everyone is on the same page. Dr. Taylor agreed and mentioned the questions about the plan for Lyman and bussing that came up that he didn't have answers for. Dr. Taylor felt that they can begin to address those issues in the next several months. Dr. Veronesi thought it might be a good idea to have a couple of people on the committee look into the disposition of Lyman as opposed to the whole committee. Mr. Moore also felt that many major issues will come out of the survey results that don't yet have good answers.

Mr. Yamartino asked if this would be an opportunity to form small, short-term subcommittees and expand the membership working on these issues, including members of the public. Mrs. Boyle felt that the Board can assign an ad hoc committee at any time and Mr. Moore and Dr. Taylor agreed that it would be a good idea. Mr. Yamartino suggested committees for Lyman disposition, bussing and communication.

Communication Plan

Dr. Veronesi explained that the District needs to buy an ad to put information in the Town Times unless the reporter is at a meeting. Mr. Yamartino suggested that Dr. Veronesi can write a news report to be submitted to the newspaper or possibly reinstate the biweekly columns that were written by the First Selectmen or something like that. Dr. Veronesi was told that that kind of decision was up to the editor and Mr. Hicks reminded everyone that the editor is no longer local. Mrs. Boyle felt that there was enough money in the budget to pay for ads to educate the parents. Mrs. Petrella urged them not to depend on the Town Times as there just isn't much in there anymore. Dr. Veronesi suggested a newsletter that could give updates to the townspeople and Mrs. Boyle asked why the Devil's Advocate couldn't be the voice of the District.

Mr. Yamartino mentioned that the school can't get involved with information on a referendum item and this will ultimately be a referendum item. He felt that the Board needed to be careful with this, but Mr. Moore explained that no referendum has been noticed. Mrs. Petrella felt that possibly a mailer should be sent to the townspeople on a bimonthly basis since this is such an important issue. Mrs. Geraci also suggested using the Facebook page and would also like to see highlights from all of the schools included in the information. Mr. Moore explained that part of this issue is who would be doing it. Mrs. Boyle also suggested having community partners post information on their website.

Dr. Veronesi reported that they met last Friday with the consultant from ACES to look at the communication plan. Mr. Moore also suggested a question and answer Board activity outside of the regular Board meetings. He felt it would be helpful to be able to answer some of the public's questions, rather than just accept input.

Mr. Yamartino also suggested Utilization have the Finance Committee help with the financial piece and there was some discussion about the financial issues and how they need to be articulated. Dr. Friedrich felt that the disposition of Lyman needs to be included in the financials as well.

Next Steps Utilization Planning

As discussed above.

Safety and Security**SRO Report**

Mr. Moore reported that Trooper Kate Cummings made a presentation last week and he feels that an SRO would offer a great advantage to the school system beyond being armed. It is about dealing with students about drugs, personal issues, social media as well as the ability to gather and disseminate information. Mr. Moore feels that the whole concept is well worth pursuing and if the budget passes, he would recommend that the Board authorize beginning the process of hiring an SRO. Mr. Hicks felt that Trooper Cummings is a fountain of information, but the big takeaway for him was the fact that the SRO is a resource for the students, administrators, parents and the Board. He feels that a well-trained resource officer would be a real asset.

Mr. Yamartino mentioned that when the town got rid of their constables and went with all state troopers, all liability transferred to the state. He asked if that would be the case with an SRO and Mr. Moore thought that it would.

Dr. Taylor asked who would draft the MOU and Dr. Veronesi reported that she has requested one from the state police. Dr. Taylor stated that he's read that schools use SROs to exact discipline along school policies and not necessarily along criminal behavior and he would like the SRO there only to intercede in criminal behavior. Dr. Veronesi agreed that that is the understanding and expectation of the administrators. Mrs. Boyle asked if the District would be able to interview and have a choice and Dr. Veronesi explained that that would not be the case. The District would have input, but it is ultimately the decision of the state police.

Dr. Taylor mentioned how expensive it is to have a state trooper and felt that it would be almost \$230,000 for 12 months. Mr. Moore explained that that would include overhead and benefits. Mr. Yamartino also explained that troopers are paid on experience levels and that would probably be for a level 10 officer. Dr. Taylor stated that Durham has a \$50,000 line item for the officer, but Mrs. Boyle is concerned about the title of the position and she wants to be sure that those are two separate contracts with two separate dollar amounts.

Public Comment

Carl Stoup, from Durham, feels like they are slipping backwards to a year or two ago. Change is tough and people are not going to be in agreement, but the time has come when things have to happen. There is declining enrollment and excess building space. Mr. Stoup also commented that, after speaking with Mr. Petrucelli, there is also excess space in Coginchaug that will be taken into consideration as far as reimbursement. He asked why 7, 8 and 9 couldn't be cordoned off at the high school. Mr. Stoup felt that whatever decision the Board makes, there will be regrets later on but a decision needs to be made. He thanked everyone for all their time and hard work and means no disrespect.

Missy Booth, from Durham, appreciates the Board slowing down on this decision. She agreed that there is a lot of room at Coginchaug and neither Option A or D look at that space. She feels that there just isn't enough room for activities, such as basketball and other sports. She asked how long it would be to see savings with closing Lyman School and stated that she doesn't believe we've seen the savings from closing Korn yet. In terms of Strategic Visioning, she appreciates everyone's efforts, however she still

wants choice and asked to have the Strategic Visioning piloted in the upper grades and let the younger grades be the same as they are. Mrs. Booth stated that the Board didn't just upset the current Lyman parents, but upset a lot of people who have already been through the school. She agreed that change may be needed, but felt that they deserve a choice.

Adjournment

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First