

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 13, 2019 at 7:00 PM in the Library at Cuginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Board members present: Mr. Augur (arrived late) Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks (arrived late), Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella (arrived late), Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino (arrived late).

Board members absent: None

Administration present: Mrs. Neubig, Business Manager.

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Moore proposed eliminating items 9 and 13 from the agenda as Dr. Veronesi is sick and will not be able to attend the meeting. He also mentioned that item 10B. will be slightly different since Dr. Veronesi is not present and the Board will use that item to talk about other revisions to the budget.

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to amend the agenda to eliminate items 9 and 13.

In favor of amending the agenda: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Chuck Stengel, from Durham, read a letter that was written by Jim Irish. It noted that enrollment has decreased by 14 percent over the last five years and support staff has been reduced by 20.5 percent, but certified staff has only been reduced by 7.5 percent. This is an under-reduction of 13 staff or well over \$1 million. Enrollment is forecasted to decline an additional 9.4 percent over the next five years. That would be a reduction of 3.6 personnel as opposed to the increase of 4.7. Mr. Irish explained that this is not about specific staff, but more that school districts feel that they don't have to respond with its largest cost category to the continuing enrollment reductions. Students per class have been below target class size recommendations as long as Mr. Irish has observed them. He stated that quality education is not a teacher number question; otherwise there wouldn't be such a focus on coaches to raise teachers' capabilities. When Korn School was shut down, RSD 13 requested an MBR reduction equal to the projected savings. The state granted only 50 percent of that request. He felt that that message was that the district should not make large reductions to the budget, even if they are legitimate. Mr. Irish felt that if the district doesn't start to reduce the budget, including certified staff reductions, they will continue to lose ground to the cost equations. He felt that teachers get and deserve raises each year, but the district must reduce the line items responsible for the largest budget contributions. Salaries are 57 percent of the budget and salaries and benefits make up 74 percent of the budget. Mr. Irish asked the board, on behalf of the taxpayers, to consider these facts as they continue their budget discussions. Mr. Stengel stated that while the letter was written by Jim Irish, he agrees with his thinking.

Carl Stoup, of Durham, wholeheartedly supports Jim Irish's letter. Mr. Stoup also corrected his comments made at the last meeting regarding Latin and understands that the Latin program is planned to be eliminated over a period of time. He encouraged the board to keep Latin in the district.

Patricia Roy, of Durham, explained that she has a five-year-old in the Pre-K program at Brewster. He receives ABA services and has received these services since he started at Brewster after his third birthday. This has been life-changing for him and he has moved from being 1:1 in the ABA program to the regular ed program full-time, being pulled out for minimal ABA services. Mrs. Roy is not in support of any of the proposed budget cuts, including those to Latin. She believes it would be best to keep the status quo this year, including not adding a special education coach for the high price of \$87,000. She was disheartened to hear about the proposed cuts to ABA, including changing their status from 12-month employees to 10-month, removing their paid vacation days and a cut to their holiday and sick pay. She received a letter from Scott Rossignol stating that the proposed ABA changes will not have an effect on their kids, but she doesn't believe that will be true. She felt that experienced staff will be forced to seek employment elsewhere. She noted that these staff members work with some of the most challenging students in the district, yet these students are able to remain in-district and are not outplaced because of these services. They allow the classroom teacher to focus on the classroom as a whole. Finding quality replacement staff would take a while, if it could be done at all. This could result in the outplacement of several students with autism, at a cost ranging between \$75,000 to \$150,000 per year per student. Yet, the district is looking to turn these people's lives upside down for a mere \$69,000 or .002 percent of the entire school budget. Mrs. Roy felt that that was extremely irresponsible. She then reviewed the ABA program and why it is important. The idea is to close the ability gap between individuals with autism spectrum disorders and their peers. She described the responsibilities of the ABA staff and summarized that these changes will, in fact, affect the children and the ABA staff need support. She asked the board to reconsider their proposal in regard to ABA.

Colleen Jacobs explained that she has two children at Brewster, one of which receives ABA services. He was diagnosed with ASD at the age of four-and-a-half. They specifically came to the district a year-and-a-half ago because of the ABA team and their reputation. They knew that early intervention was critical. ABA therapy, especially during the formative years, should be made readily available. This is where the foundation for their learning is set for the remainder of their lifetime. The current ABA team at Brewster has been absolutely amazing. Her son has made so much progress, due in part to the trained, qualified staff that is at Brewster. Mrs. Jacobs felt that the current ABA staff needs to be retained in order to ensure her son's success. Any changes to the schedule could impact the district's ability to retain these professionals and any disruption to the team would jeopardize the stability that her son has come to know and expect in his day-to-day routine. Changes could lead to regressed behaviors and functionality, therefore risking his potential future successes. She asked that the board please reconsider the budget for ABA services.

Mark Longo explained that he is a parent from Durham with three children at Brewster, one that is in special education. He wholeheartedly does not agree with cutting the ABA services at all. Anything that is done to disrupt the routine of the children or to take away any of these services could drastically affect the outcome in the end and we will all ultimately end up paying more. If a coach is needed, he suggests increasing the budget rather than trying to find the money elsewhere. Mr. Longo summarized that to lose this staff isn't the answer and they should find the money elsewhere.

Caroline Furman was present with her daughter, Kelly, who graduated from MTA this past June. She was completely stunned when she heard cuts were being proposed to ABA, followed by disappointment because the district has such an exceptional program. She has been to workshops with other parents from

very wealthy towns who have told her how deplorable their programs are. She has always been able to tell them that she has everything she wants in this program. Mrs. Furman went to school in the district and couldn't wait to move away, but also couldn't wait to move back when she had children. She has never questioned anybody on the ABA team. She also questioned if the board members really know that the ABA staff does on a daily basis. When Kelly entered the district, she was completely nonverbal and she is now minimally verbal. Her therapists got to know her and communicated with her on a nonverbal level. The discrete trials help the ABA therapists modify the workload and it is different for every student. The therapists pre-teach so that when the students go into class with other typical students, they are accepted and can socialize. On top of the data collection, they do toilet training, personal hygiene, daily living skills, safety and desensitization. Mrs. Furman gave several examples of desensitization that was done with Kelly. She stressed that the kids need consistency and continuity. If the proposed changes are made and the staff will not be there through the year, she doesn't believe that the summer program will do what it's supposed to do which is keep children from falling back. Mrs. Furman asked that the board please reconsider making cuts to the ABA staff as she feels they are one of the cornerstones of this exemplary special ed program. She feels that it has been severely damaged and the staff has not been valued or appreciated. She urged the board members to speak with the staff and to observe them because they more than deserve to be full-time and give the kids the consistency, continuity and love that they deserve.

Bronwyn Cummins, from Durham, explained that she has worked with ABA staff at Strong School for several years and shared her support for them. She has seen profound and measurable changes through the intense, dedicated work of the ABA teachers. ABA worked directly with students in her class and by the next year, the students were different people. They were happier, spent more time in class involved in direct instruction and group work and were more focused. They were engaged. ABA teachers work with the classroom teacher, ask for input, collaborate, monitor behavior and respond accordingly. Students with ABA services stay in the classroom with ABA support and, if necessary, they take a break with ABA support. Their presence in the classroom makes learning possible for all students and makes teaching more effective. In over 20 years of teaching, Ms. Cummins cannot recall seeing such dramatic changes in students and she is convinced that it is thanks to the intervention of this dedicated group. Changes may lead to the risk of losing these outstanding educators. She asked the board to consider the needs of all the students in the district by avoiding any changes to ABA hours.

Allison Kelly stated that her daughter who goes to Strong asked her to read a letter. Her daughter felt that this was BS. She has been in ABA since preschool and they work so hard, they deserve vacation too. Mrs. Kelly feels that the ABA staff works really hard and the children are not always the easiest. Her daughter has thrived with the regular curriculum at Strong and is able to stay in the classroom and learn while not taking away from the teacher trying to teach the class without ABA staff. She also volunteers in her son's classroom at Lyman and realizes that if there were two ABA staff people in the classroom instead of one, there could be a lot more instructional time.

Fran Paulson told the story about her son, Alex. He is a freshman in high school right now and started in the district at three years old. He was in preschool and ABA, child psychologists and special ed came into the classroom and told her that they needed him. He was nonverbal until he was about six, he stammered, didn't engage or play with anyone. Today, he talks and talks and talks. He joined cross country, got the captain's award and is doing everything that she never imagined. He has a long way to go, but he has come a long way. Mrs. Paulson felt that this was because of the whole team. ABA is so strong. She asked her son if he still wanted ABA and he said he loves ABA. ABA has also come into their home and taught Mrs. Paulson how to teach her son. Last year, she was going to take Alex out of the district and go to Roses for Autism to teach him vocational skills. Chelsea, at Strong School, urged

her to let the team work with him and developed an awesome summer program for him. He is moving forward because of these people. Mrs. Paulson explained that she would do everything for her son and does not want to see anything happen. ABA therapists need a break from everything and deserve vacation. She explained that if her son is impacted in a negative way, she will leave the district and have him outplaced, but she didn't want to do that because the district has a great system. She urged the board to remember the whole team.

Sarah Salling, from Durham, explained that she has no children in the district presently, but has an almost three-year-old who will be entering the Pre-K program in the fall. Her daughter has significant special needs as she does not walk or talk. She asked the board to please reconsider the changes being made to the budget as she has heard great things about the program.

Administrator Welcome - Debra Stone

Mrs. Stone wanted to highlight the K-12 art department and the art department at Memorial School. The entire art department works collaboratively to ensure the students get a great education. They have committed to having art integrated into the subject areas and she gave several examples of that. At last week's curriculum night, the art department had over 100 students come to their station and make a spectrum glass project. At Memorial, Mrs. Langley, the new art teacher, is committed to making sure that the students use a wider variety of mediums and get a wider view of artists. They are using oil pastels and chalks and fabric to make their art projects. She is working to make sure students are exposed to class artists all the way through to modern artists. She is also teaching the students to display their art in a professional manner. Mrs. Langley has committed to expand the mediums even further and more closely art into the curricular areas. Mrs. Stone encouraged the board members to stop by Memorial to see the art that is displayed. They also have a Harry Potter-themed original artwork mosaic that is hanging outside the library.

CRHS Reporters - Timothy Arcari, Emily Dell'Orfano and Lindsey Marino

Emily Dell'Orfano reported that students in AP Spanish took the assessment of performance towards proficiency in languages which took about three hours. Twelve out of 14 students scored above intermediate level and earned the seal of bi-literacy which will be presented at graduation. Junior student, Joe Viski, has been selected as one out of 15 Connecticut students to participate in Digging Through History, a three-week trip to France to restore a World War I trench and participate in other cultural activities. Emily also explained that both Tim and Lindsey are at the winter sports banquet and they have enlisted Cole Neidmann as a substitute today.

Cole Neidmann stated that the co-op hockey team is playing in the state championship game tomorrow night at 7:00 pm at Yale and are playing Sheehan. At the end of the first semester, the two most prestigious academic honors are awarded, Valedictorian and Salutatorian. This year, Emily Dell'Orfano earned the honor of valedictorian and Margaret Fiondella earned the honor of salutatorian. Last Tuesday, DECA participated in the State Career Development Conference at the Aqua Turf and had 29 students compete. Brandon Hayward, Brice Fleck and Cole Neidmann placed in the top three in their respective categories. Because of that, they will travel to the international conference in Orlando, Florida later in April. Two other students will accompany them as people in their categories dropped out. Three other students will attend to participate in certain leadership activities.

Emily Dell'Orfano also reported that the Unified Sports team went to Memorial School on March 7th and spent recess and lunch there, followed by playing in a volleyball game with the teachers. On the same

day, there was an assembly at Coginchaug with the freshman, sophomore and junior classes about the China partnership. They learned how students can get involved and there was a lot of interest in the program. Mr. Falcone asked interested students to stay after the meeting and about 130 students stayed, which is about 30 percent of the student body. There will be a parent meeting about the China partnership tomorrow at 7:00 PM.

Cole Neidmann also reported that the senior experience class, Making a Difference to the Community, is planning a senior service day in May. Seniors can sign up for various activities to volunteer their time, such as trail work at Brewster, painting at Peckham Park, cleaning up Lake Beseck and painting the lifeguard chair at the beach, weeding the baseball diamond at Peckham Park and planting trees as well. DECA is once again sponsoring the annual Mr. Coginchaug event on Friday, March 15th at 7:00 PM in the auditorium. There are 10 contestants who will be showing off their talents and three judges will determine who the next Mr. Coginchaug will be.

Emily Dell'Orfano added that her band, Bored of Education, is also performing at Mr. Coginchaug. She reported that Mr. Fisher and Ms. Schilling have been working with students on the production of Beauty and the Best which includes 45 cast members, 25 crew members and 25 band members. The performances will be held on April 4 through April 6 at 7:00 PM and April 7th at 2:00 PM in the auditorium. The weekend after that, from April 11 to April 15, the music department is going to Walt Disney World in Florida to participate in various band and choir competitions. About 150 students will be competing, which is about 29 percent of the student body.

Cole Neidmann added that the Coginchaug Regional Scholarship Ball will be held at the Zandri's Stillwood Inn in Wallingford on Saturday, March 23rd at 7:00 PM and all funds raised will be awarded to various seniors. There will be a comedy show, dinner and a silent auction.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education regular session meeting - February 27, 2019

Mrs. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education regular session meeting of February 27, 2019, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education regular session meeting of February 27, 2019, as presented: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Next Board Meeting - March 27, 2019 at 7:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School

Mr. Moore added that he would like to have a special meeting on March 20, 2019 due to the fact that Dr. Veronesi could not be here tonight and the board would not have the proposed revisions to the budget. In addition, Mr. Yamartino has asked for a staffing analysis and that can be discussed at that meeting as well.

Next Board Meeting - March 20, 2019 at 7:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School

Board of Education Appreciation

Mr. Sadinsky explained that Dr. Veronesi had asked him to report that March is Board of Education appreciation month. He read the following message from Dr. Veronesi: On behalf of the students and staff in our district, I would like to acknowledge for you the countless hours that you devote to attending meetings, your dedication to learning about what it takes to provide students with exemplary education and what is necessary to sustain and strengthen the heartbeat of an incredible school district is greatly appreciated. The refreshments provided for you tonight are from students at MTA with support from Samantha Grayeck. The seed packets are a gift from the Strong Middle School students in Amy Schaefer's class.

Mr. Moore also thanked everyone for their hard work on the board and stressed that budget issues are challenging for all. Mrs. Petrella also thanked Mr. Moore.

2019-2020 Budget Presentation**A. Potential ECS and MBR impact**

Mr. Moore reviewed that the total budget that the town taxes are based on is \$35 million. Showing the budget that was originally presented, the net expense to Durham would be \$23 million and \$11+ million to Middlefield. The ECS funding would be subtracted from that and the net cost to the towns would be \$20 million and \$10 million, respectively. Because of the shift in population, Middlefield had a very large impact last year while Durham had a very low impact. This year, it's the other way around. There will be a decrease to Middlefield of \$182,000 and an increase to Durham to \$402,000. These numbers are based on the budget proposed that was before Governor Lamont's budget.

Mr. Moore then showed the impact of the governor's budget and explained that the ECS grant was reduced by a significant amount, raising the cost to Durham to \$698,000 and a savings of \$82,000 for Middlefield from last year. He also explained that one of the problems is that the board will not know what is in the governor's final budget until after the district's budget is adopted.

Moving to the MBR, Mrs. Neubig noted that under the original proposed budget, they were about \$22,000 away from the MBR (minimum budget requirement). Mr. Moore explained that MBR is a requirement that the state has that the budget cannot be reduced beyond a certain amount, based on the prior year. The MBR can be reduced because of the reduction in the state ECS grant and if the district has declining enrollment and Free and Reduced Lunch Program. The MBR can be reduced by 3 percent because of the students that fall into that category. With those two reductions, the budget can be reduced by \$592,000 for the Free and Reduced Lunch and by \$593,000 based on the ECS grant. In summary, the budget can be reduced by \$1.16 million and still meet state requirements.

B. Revised Budget Proposals

Mr. Moore explained that Dr. Veronesi and her staff have worked on budget revisions and will present them at the special meeting to be held on March 20th.

Reviewing the Finance Committee meeting, Mr. Augur stated that Mr. Stengel had explained that the Grand List in Durham has decreased, but Middlefield is having a bit of a windfall this year with a Grand List increase. They discussed how the new reduction number should probably be in consideration as the district has had a long period of declining enrollment, but not the same reduction in overall costs. Mr.

Augur felt that it is critical for the board to think long and hard about that, but they have also heard compelling commentary about the ABA staff. He felt that cuts need to be purposeful and mindful. He mentioned that they have also heard from the public about the Latin program. Mr. Augur felt that a long and hard look should be given to non-classroom teachers; those who are a degree removed from face-to-face interaction with students.

Dr. Taylor agreed with Mr. Augur and felt that there has been a shift in FTEs away from the direct, classroom FTE. He felt that the swing has been significant over the last three to four years, with about eight FTEs coming off of the general staff and move into coaches, interventionists and other areas. That shift has come close to \$1 million and Dr. Taylor wasn't sure that they've seen clear-cut evidence that that has been cost effective. Dr. Taylor reviewed that he had not been in support of the SRO last year because of these types of issues. He did not feel that the money spent there was the right priority for the district. Moving forward, he agrees that the district needs to think about the overhead and stay away from things like Latin and ABA.

Mr. Yamartino agreed with everything that Mr. Augur and Dr. Taylor said. He was concerned that he didn't have a good handle on the staffing structure, in terms of how many people are coaches, etc. That is why he made the request for a staffing analysis and is happy that the board will discuss that at the next meeting. Mr. Yamartino did not like the idea of cutting direct programs that are face-to-face with the students, like Latin and ABA. He would rather look at overhead and felt that one way to do that would be to reduce the \$340,000 in capital that is budgeted and move that into the bonding. Mr. Moore agreed that some of the capital could be moved, but not all of it. Mr. Yamartino felt that that the district will be faced with another MBR calculation once a school is closed, so the more the budget is lowered now, the more of that MBR can be captured the following year. Mr. Moore also noted that approximately \$600,000 in contingency was included in the bonding.

Dr. Friedrich went back to the SBAC scores that were first given five years ago and the district-wide math achievement was about 30 percent or less of the students actually meeting state standards. There has been a steady improvement in that number. He felt that going back to the good old days would leave the district in a bad old place. Dr. Veronesi has spoken repeatedly about the conscious strategy of improving student performance by improving support for students and Dr. Friedrich would be concerned about throwing the teachers of teachers into the same category with the guys who was the artificial turf. He did not feel it was the same type of overhead and thought it would be a dangerous thing to do. Dr. Friedrich asked the board to be careful about approaching the people who teach teachers with suspicion. He also suggested that if education programs are going to be cut, they should be balanced by cuts in extracurricular activities, including sports and other activities like music.

Mr. Augur added that about three years ago, that area was about six FTEs and definitely had an impact on SBAC scores. The proposed budget brings that number to 14 and he doubted there would be twice the rate of improvement in the SBACs. He was not suggesting to go back to zero, but more likely somewhere between 14 and six.

Mr. Yamartino agreed that the number should be somewhere between six and 14, but he doesn't know what the number is today. The proposed budget states that coaches and specialists went from 12.4 in 2017-2018 to 14 in 2018-2019 with the proposal to go to 17. Special education went from 17 to 18 to 20.2, including a coach. He would like to see exactly how many special education teachers, how many coaches and how many specialists there are. Mrs. Petrella agreed that the board needs a lot more detail before they can make decisions.

Mrs. Geraci agreed with what has been already said and mentioned one-time purchases and spending in general. She would like to spend some time discussing ABA, given the public comment tonight. Mrs. Geraci would be concerned about the staff retention piece of the ABA cuts and agreed that finding a good ABA therapist is difficult. She mentioned that it is a very competitive marketplace as there are lots of agencies and nonprofits who need ABA therapists as well. Some of the staff have been in the district for over 20 years and that represents important consistency for the students. Their work helps the student, but also helps the teachers and other kids in the classroom. She mentioned that this staff is who prevents the students from being outplaced and, with 300 children in special education, she did not want to risk outplacing students.

Mr. Moore asked Scott Rossignol to address these issues. Mr. Rossignol did not disagree with anything he has heard tonight and explained that his primary focus is making sure that the IEPs are viewed as legal contracts and that the district is able to deliver the services required in a high-quality manner. He stated that he wrote in his letter to parents of ABA students that their child's IEP would be honored and that budget proposals would not directly impact child services. He agreed that the district has an incredibly dedicated, amazing ABA staff and he would hope that the district would not lose them.

Mrs. Geraci didn't feel that services would be cut for a child as there is a legal obligation, but felt that most parents would be concerned about the type of person that would be carrying out those services. She felt that mental health work is very, very challenging and it is a little disgraceful to tell these people they can't have a paid day off.

Mr. Yamartino asked if there would be a change in the summer program and Mr. Rossignol explained that the extended school year for students with special education needs would still be in place, as required by federal law. Mr. Yamartino asked if the number of weeks would remain the same and Mr. Rossignol explained that it would be very comparable to what was offered last year. The difference would be special education staff and teacher assistants, since they are 10-month employees, are offered informal contracts for particular hours. If this proposed change was to go through, the ABA staff would be offered these same contracts. Mr. Rossignol is not proposing to decrease the number of weeks for ESY and foresees it being four weeks for general programming, with additional weeks and hours for specific students. Right now, it looks as if ESY will start the week after the 4th of July and run for four weeks, at four days a week (with no programming on Friday). Last year, programming ran for 18 days and this year it is being proposed to run 16 days.

Mr. Yamartino wondered if the four weeks, four days a week, is enough for some students. If budget wasn't a consideration, what would be optimal? Mrs. Petrella reviewed that the ABA staff is now 12 months and suggested that the children can actually come for more time in the summer since the staff is there which would expand the service without impacting the budget. Mr. Yamartino reviewed that the ABA staff was 15 in 2017-2018, 11 in 2018-2019 and is proposed at 11 for next year. He asked what the actual current staff level is and Mr. Rossignol stated that, to the best of his knowledge, there are 14 positions, one of which is vacant and he is interviewing for. Mrs. Neubig explained that some staff is funded by grants. Mr. Yamartino reviewed that, under grants, there are 6.1 positions, 3 are ABA and 3.1 are something else. Mrs. Neubig will flush that out and provide a complete breakdown for the board. Mr. Yamartino thanked Mr. Rossignol for his help on this.

Mr. Augur asked about the criteria by which students remain in district vs. being outplaced. Mr. Rossignol explained that that is determined at a PPT meeting and really boils down to what is the student's least restrictive environment at that moment. It could be a public school setting with time in a resource room or it can be a private placement with more of a therapeutic base or strict behavioral

modification. The goal would always be to bring any students that are outplaced back to public education to be with their peers.

Dr. Taylor stated that one of the things that the board doesn't have is actionable data to make some of these decisions. He would like to see how many students are in special ed, tier II intervention, growth rates in different quartiles of SBAC scores, etc. That would allow them to know if interventions are being effective and whether there have been increases in areas that aren't commiserate with changes in the student population. Dr. Taylor would like to be able to tie all of this to student outcomes. He, once again, urged the board to make different decisions about the structure of the budget process so that these priorities can be discussed earlier.

Mrs. Petrella explained that the Student Achievement Committee gets more detailed information, but they have asked that the information be condensed and brought to the full board. She also felt that more time should be spent throughout the year, outside of budget time, to go through that data.

Mr. Roraback added that there are a lot of real estate signs everywhere and a number of special ed students could be added next year that weren't expected.

Mrs. Caramanello stated that what ABA has done for her as a teacher in the district was invaluable. Her concern would be who the district will attract by reducing the hours and she felt that there is a big difference in the quality of therapists. Since one of the district's goals is well-being, she felt that the board should be thinking about the employees' well-being without cutting their time and appreciate what they do.

Mr. Moore was looking for a reaction to the MBR and had asked Dr. Veronesi to come back with ideas on how to cope with the towns' tax issues and how to get to a budget that will pass as well as meet the needs of the district. Dr. Veronesi's initial response was to not propose any new positions and start to look at reductions through all program areas.

Mr. Augur suggested that Dr. Taylor's comment about the SRO might be worth a quick straw poll. He reminded everyone that he had abstained on that vote as he was not convinced either way. Since the district is investing in more building hardening, it might be a way to get a reduction in the budget. Mr. Moore suggested that they look at the whole system next week. Mr. Moore added that a lot of issues that have occurred with the SRO were not made public. Mr. Yamartino asked if it would be worth starting the next meeting with an executive session to apprise the board of some of those issues and Mr. Moore will talk to Dr. Veronesi about that.

Mr. Moore asked if the board generally felt that the budget needed to be decreased and Dr. Taylor felt that it would have a low chance of passing if it is not reduced. He agreed that there would be long-term implications for not moving the budget down now. Mr. Moore also added that there had been discussion about possibly moving Latin to a four-year program at the high school, with none in middle school. Mr. Augur pointed out that the schedule at the high school is not aligned with the schedule at Strong and that is another issue that should be talked about prior to budget time.

Committee Reports**A. Student Achievement Committee Meeting - February 28, 2019**

Mrs. Petrella urged the board to read the minutes of their meeting. They received extremely positive feedback from the professional development that was held on February 15th and focused on using technology. More teachers are using the support of the coaches, the technology teacher and the STEAM coordinator. They also had a discussion about Curriculum Night and the Enrichment Think Tank at Strong School. She also noted that Mrs. Guidet is a very valuable community member on the committee and she shared ideas about how her district addresses enrichment.

The committee also addressed some issues about articles and books that parents felt were inappropriate and Teacher's College was notified about the materials in question. There are also Nutmeg books that are quite explicit for middle schoolers. They had discussion about informing parents prior to a unit to let them know what choices are available and the vetting process is ongoing.

There was an extensive presentation on the i-Ready data. It can provide data on students by district, by school, by classroom and by individual students over time.

Dr. Friedrich added that when he first came on the board five-and-a-half years ago, there was only one school that was actually using test data as formative data with data teams. Since Dr. Veronesi came to the district, the PLCs (professional learning communities) are widespread and I-Ready has allowed the teachers to deliver better services to the students. This information is now in a form that teachers can use in real time. Dr. Friedrich spoke with some teachers at Curriculum Night and found that it is impacting them in the way the board wanted. He summarized that both I-Ready and Data Dashboard are two very good things.

Mr. Roraback added that Dr. Veronesi admitted that the teachers want very rigorous, mindful, engaging professional development. He also mentioned that students that asked Mr. Sadinsky for more which helped to create the Enrichment Think Tank. He summarized that the district has awesome students and awesome staff.

Mr. Moore went to the professional development last week and found that the teachers are very engaged in the process. He reviewed several of the sessions and felt that they are getting information that will really enhance their skills. Mr. Moore also went to the Curriculum Night and found the high school students to be very engaged and felt that they could easily take over the process.

B. Human Resources Committee Meeting - February 28, 2019

Mrs. Petrella stated that one of the first things that was brought up was a request for organizational charts for each school to be presented to the HR committee. They also asked for job descriptions of certified, non-certified and stipend positions with consistency in terminology.

The meeting focused on the superintendent's evaluation form and they made some recommendations for revisions. They discussed the grading and applying different weights of importance. It was suggested that student achievement be weighted at 50 percent.

Mr. Augur added that any numbers were suggested just as placeholders, but felt that weight should be added to areas to help drive the board's direction to the superintendent.

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that student achievement was the highest priority, with fiscal oversight as a close second. Well-being and engagement were also included.

Mr. Moore stated that Mrs. Petrella had done a tremendous job at preparing the four categories and they will be distributed to the board. Each of the categories will be a weighted factor and Mr. Augur has prepared a survey to ask the board members what they think the value of each category should be.

Mr. Yamartino cautioned the board to remember that what is asked of the superintendent may be different than what is asked of the board. Mr. Augur felt that the weights that the board assigns to the four pillars should, in fact, be the weights on the superintendent's evaluation. Mr. Yamartino felt that the board should be weighted higher in fiscal oversight and the superintendent higher in student achievement.

Mr. Hicks felt that the conversation was inappropriate as this is the time for reports, not engagement. Mrs. Petrella felt that it was part of the committee report, but should be on the agenda for a future meeting as well.

Mrs. Petrella went on to review that the committee also reviewed an engagement survey and Dr. Veronesi had suggested Thought Exchange which gives people an opportunity to ask questions and add comments in real-time. The committee felt that the survey would fit better with the Well-Being Committee. Mr. Moore explained that a draft of the survey has been done and will be reviewed. Mr. Augur added that they thought this would not be the budget season to add cloud-linked software next year. Mr. Moore explained that the Well-Being Committee has only three members so far and they are waiting for more. They will meet on March 19th.

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Mr. Augur explained that he has already given his report.

Communications

Mr. Moore reported that he has received a great number of emails and letters about support for the Latin program, sixth grade movement, support for ABA funding and cost of the field house. He also mentioned the letter written by Jim Irish.

Dr. Friedrich asked how many of the board members studied Latin in school and Mrs. Petrella stated that she grew up Catholic when the mass was still done in Latin.

Business Manager's Report

Mrs. Neubig reported that there is nothing out of the ordinary to report. The district is 60.22 percent expended in the general fund and is right on track. As of March 4th, snow removal is under budget by \$10,000. She is not estimating a big surplus in salaries and benefits this year as it is running pretty close to budget. Non-certified staff has a little bit more cushion, however there will be a little bit more expended toward the end of the year for substitutes.

Enrollment in magnet schools and outplaced students has already run over budget by \$182,000 but the full expenses have been encumbered for any known students.

The general fund is at 64 percent of revenue. MTA is at 83 percent of revenue with 61 percent of expenditures and could have a bit of a surplus at the end of the year. The RFP for transportation has gone through the attorney and will go out by the end of this week. The RFP for audit services is also going out in the next couple of days as well. No news is available on the school security grant.

Public Comment

Tyler Fusco, a freshman at Coginchaug, asked if enrollment numbers are available for the Latin program. He would like to see the data to be able to figure out percentages and whether the declining enrollment in Latin correlates to the district's declining enrollment. Mr. Moore stated that Mr. Falcone will be able to provide Tyler with that number.

Mariah Roy, from Durham, was sad that cuts are being proposed in an area that not everyone knows the true value of. She is an emergency room nurse and she knows that if she doesn't give 110 percent at her job, someone could die or have poor outcomes. The goal would be to have positive student outcomes and she didn't see how the staff could be asked to give 110 percent every day when the district doesn't give them paid time to care for themselves. The positive impacts that the ABA staff has had on their son's development since August are beyond anything they ever imagined. The staff has formed a wonderful relationship with their son and with them, as parents, and they rely on them in order to provide their son a functional and successful future. The consistency and stability is a huge part of his growth and development and he has come to trust them and thrive when he is with them. She didn't understand how the district can provide every opportunity for success while moving the ABA staff down from full time. Their son is nonverbal but is no less important than other students in the district and the ABA staff truly understand him. While he can't thank the ABA staff every day, they give him 110 percent every day. Mrs. Roy felt that these individuals should be respected and valued just as much as teachers. It worries her that the people making decisions don't know the true significance of the ABA staff's role. She mentioned that there is teacher appreciation and tonight she learned there is Board of Education appreciation and wondered how appreciation of ABA staff fits into the district's budget.

Julie Carroll, from Rockfall, explained that her children are freshmen at Coginchaug. She is a teacher and felt that the ABA in her school help her every single day. Listening to the board talk about overhead tonight, she has not heard anyone talk about the upper administrative levels, finance people, curriculum people, special ed people. She was also concerned that the board didn't even know what the staffing is. She thought that the proposal was to cut ABA people and not pay them benefits and was sure that the upper level administration all gets benefits and sick time. As for the Latin program, it does benefit some students just like the new Chinese program. Her daughter benefitted in an amazing way from Latin. Mrs. Carroll asked if everyone knew that the high school bathrooms are locked and students cannot use them. She reviewed that she teaches in another district and felt that the administration knows the staff members, knows what they do and knows hour of services of students. Her kids are very involved in the music department and she spends a lot of hours volunteering. The music department is already stretched thin and she asked that no further cuts be made there. She also supports sports, even though her kids don't participate. Mrs. Carroll does appreciate the board members and, as a teacher, champions the board.

Lori Fusco, from Durham, explained that she had emailed the Durham board members about the Latin program and ABA, but also wanted to point out some issues with the budget. With regard to staffing levels, an audit can be done of the staffing, both at the teaching level and administration level. That would streamline a lot of staffing and probably save a lot of money. Mrs. Fusco was shocked when she heard that there had not been a transportation bid for years. She stated that, as a small business owner, there is not one company that she would be beholden to and worry about them stopping services. With

regard to the China program, she wanted to make everyone aware that, before more money and time is spent on this, the State Department has a level 2 advisory for travel to China right now, as of January 3, 2019. This is due to trade disputes and the recent American-requested arrest of a high-profile Chinese executive in Canada. Apparently, American citizens are being arbitrarily detained in China and any child that goes there could be arbitrarily detained. Darien just recently cut their high school exchange program because the State Department has refused to issue visas to the incoming Chinese students. Another issue with this program is the potential liability for a child who is detained or otherwise arrested while in China. She encouraged the board to check with their insurance company on this issue. Mrs. Fusco also noted that she has still not seen any data to support the expenditure of the SRO. She also felt that the board should look at new purchases and maintenance of buildings. She felt that a lot of funds are going to building maintenance staffing levels when it should be educating students. She also thanked the board for their hard work.

Caroline Furman wanted to confirm that Mr. Rossignol stated that his main focus was to provide services that are legally required through the IEP. Mr. Moore explained that this was not a question and answer process. She went on to state that she finds that appalling because the Pupil Personnel Director's focus should be to provide superior special education by hiring and retaining superior people. She felt that the staff is definitely not on his list of important things. As a parent, Mrs. Furman would be furious and terrified as to what would happen to her child and would be glad that her daughter is now out of the district, if this is the direction it is going in.

Adjournment

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

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz
Alwaz First