

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, September 11, 2019 at 7:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Board members present: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich (by phone), Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino

Board members absent: Mr. Hicks

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

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

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

A moment of silence was observed in memory of 9/11.

CRHS Reporters - Ava Kowal, Joshua Mann and Nicholas Vestergaard

Nick Vestergaard noted that he recently met with Mr. Petronio, the new Athletic Director, and feels that he will do a lot of great things for the school this year, including creating a community amongst the sports. Mr. Petronio would like students, parents and athletes to communicate with him and he would like to see the athletes support the various teams. He has held both parent and student-athlete meetings and will create a seasonal captains' council as well as a monthly leadership council. Mr. Petronio has also carried out a food drive between the cross country and football teams.

Josh Mann spoke about the music department and explained that the jazz band, a capella groups, show choir and combo band will be performing at the Durham Fair. Roughly 60 students will take part in that. Rehearsals in concert band are going great. The first concert band and concert choir shows will be held on October 29th and Mamma Mia will be the play in April.

Ava Kowal reported that the library has been transformed and the bathrooms were changed. There is a new cell phone policy which has made people focus more in class and study halls are now held in the cafeteria, but students can also work in the library. Ava is excited about the students from China who will arrive at the end of September as well as the career class where students can shadow people. Ava is also excited about the Washington, DC trip, prom and the senior picnic this year.

Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Moore explained that item 14C should be item 15 and would be in public session. He added that item 14B should be removed.

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the agenda, as amended.

In favor of approving the agenda, as amended: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

Donia Viola, from Durham, commented about the declining enrollment and the closure of schools, including Korn and Lyman. She asked if these issues have had any impact on the number of buses in the district. She thought the bus contract would be coming up soon and hoped that something could be done about having smaller buses.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, spoke to item 12A on the agenda and noted that the Board of Education never followed through on what the town had done with their charter regarding having Board of Education members on the ballot, rather than elected by hand vote at a town meeting. He would like to see that happen.

Chuck Stengel, from Durham, distributed a copy from the Board of Education's handbook regarding voting (where it says voting is done at the annual town meeting) as well as a section from the Town of Durham's charter (where it says they would like to have voting done at general elections). Mr. Stengel also supports the voting be done at the time of the general election.

Richard Parmelee, from Durham, noted that he is in favor of the change in the way Board of Education members are elected and felt that the Board should take action to make sure that all the people in the two towns vote on this. He noted several difficulties with electing Board members at town meetings and urged the Board to let the voters of the district decide.

Approval of Minutes**A. Board of Education regular session meeting - August 14, 2019**

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Yamartino, to approve the minutes of the August 14, 2019 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the August 14, 2019 meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.

B. Board of Education special session meeting - August 20, 2019

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the minutes of the August 20, 2019 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the August 20, 2019 meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried, with Mrs. Geraci abstaining.

Next Board Meeting - October 16, 2019 at 7:00 PM in the library at Cuginchaug Regional High School

Progress Toward Strategic Coherence Goals

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that she had shared some draft improvement strategies with the Board in August and went on to introduce those strategies in the three goal areas: student achievement, well-being and engagement. Dr. Veronesi recognized the staff in the district as every person in the district contributes to the growth, development and improvement in the district. The leadership team gathers information, looks at student performance and makes decisions about goals and improvement strategies. The goals need to be reasonable, rigorous and not be so daunting that they are unachievable.

The goals this year include: Student Achievement: Ensure an authentic learning environment that supports growth, innovation and critical thinking so that all students are successful in life, learning and work beyond school; Well-Being: Sustain a district-wide culture and climate that supports and promotes safety and connection for all; and Engagement: Ensure community understanding, participation, and support for district goals and priorities.

The district is moving into a year with a new K-5 report card and presentations were and will be held about the new report card at the various open houses. Team leaders will begin specific training in October on project-based learning. Work in dyslexia continues, SRBI protocols are being finalized and school learning plans are being built for each school, focusing on ELA and math. Data chats will be held, with teachers meeting with students to discuss their student performance data and areas of growth. Instructional rounds and school visits continue and a committee has been formed to look at enrichment planning and gifted and talented identification. Administration will also refine the message regarding the district's student achievement to include growth and accountability.

Dr. Veronesi stated that the SBAC scores have been received and the district placed 1st out of 13 in the DRG for ELA and second for math in the area of "Percentage of Students Meeting Growth Target" in DRG C K-12 districts. Overall in grades 4-8 our students' scored 6th out of 29 in ELA and 7th out of 29 in math in "Average Percent of Growth Target Achieved" in grades 4 through 8 in DRG C. She realizes that comparisons with the DRG are not the recommended comparisons, however, the team is very proud of the students' and teachers' work. Dr. Veronesi is extraordinarily proud of the students, teachers and Mrs. DiMaggio's leadership. There will be a comprehensive overview of the scores presented at the October 16th Board meeting.

Regarding the Portrait of the Citizen, they are working on identifying the top knowledge, skills and attributes necessary for successful students. Much of what has been identified in this work as well as the Strategic Visioning work could be supported in a project-based learning framework. Project-based learning characteristics are already part of the practices at John Lyman School. This year will be a year for exploration, learning and piloting in project-based learning. A draft Portrait of the Citizen statement will be presented at the October 16th meeting.

In well-being, Strong Middle School will begin exploring restorative practices, looking at the strength of the community and understanding the children within the community. Dr. Veronesi noted how successful the career center programming is at Cuginchaug. The equity work and proactive parenting series continues. Wellness programming is underway.

In the area of engagement, the climate survey will be distributed at the end of the month to staff, students and parents. The administrative team met and decided to ask some very specific questions in the survey of students, parents and faculty. Strategies for sustaining positive work will continue while strategies for

making improvements based upon the survey feedback will be the next steps after a review of the results.

Mrs. Manning has begun to expand marketing and programming for MTA, including college transitioning. They are working on the transition plan for district-wide grade reconfiguration which will also include school design teams. They continue to look at how to integrate the HOT approach into this work.

Dr. Veronesi reported that 24 visitors from China will be arriving in a couple of weeks, including 22 students and two faculty members. She will share a calendar with the Board members and they are welcome to participate in any of the activities. The district is also looking to expand hiring and recruitment efforts to create a more diverse faculty, staff and school population.

They are also hoping to implement a time for community conversation for the Board of Education, school personnel and members of the community to discuss budget priorities. The administrative team is also talking about developing a leadership academy for any interested teachers to encourage succession planning. Dr. Veronesi thanked the Board for their support and efforts.

Mr. Yamartino asked if the community climate survey will be distributed to just the school community or to the broader community. Dr. Veronesi explained that this is done through the State Department of Education and is distributed to the school community only (including students, faculty and parents). She thought that they may be able to send something to the greater community once the results are analyzed.

Mr. Moore noted that he will be having a barbecue at his house for the visitors from China and invited all of the Board members.

Committee Reports

A. Building Committee Meeting - September 11, 2019

Mrs. Booth reported that the Building Committee met earlier tonight and discussed the Brewster/Memorial alteration project. They are hoping to hold a referendum in either January or May of next year. A grant is pending for the Strong and Cuginchaug vestibules. The culvert project has been moved to the summer of 2021 and the hope is to get a 50 percent reimbursement for that. The water main should be happening in the summer of 2020. Gas will probably not happen until next year.

They also had some discussion about the field storage house. Mr. Overton did some preliminary research and will provide information about various costs. A building to cover the slab would be between \$100,000 and \$125,000. He stated that since the plumbing is already there, it might be good to go through with bathrooms.

The Building Committee's next meeting will be on October 16th, right before the Board meeting.

Mr. Moore mentioned that the ERC is also meeting on October 16th at 6:00 PM.

Communications

Mr. Moore received communication from Michelle DiMauro about her support for completing the field house, Heidi Johnson wrote regarding moving students in sixth grade to Strong School sooner, Missy DiPietro about the need to keep a K-5 school in Middlefield and Phil Augur about those same issues.

Mrs. Petrella received a letter from Patricia Raczka supporting a K-5 school in Middlefield.

Mrs. Caramanello received communication from parents who were disappointed in the process and implementation of the cuts for the volleyball team this year. A few elementary teachers also contacted her about having assistants cut from their schedules. Dr. Veronesi explained that the issue about support staff at Brewster has been brought to her attention and she is working with the principal to look at that. Mrs. Caramanello suggested that the Well-Being Committee discuss the sports issue, but Dr. Veronesi felt that the parents should call the principal or the AD. Mrs. Caramanello felt that the committee would like to meet with the AD anyway.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Veronesi invited Board members to participate in the teacher contract negotiations which will happen between October 7th and November 26th. She is not sure how often they would meet or how long the meetings would be. Dr. Taylor suggested that the Board meet in Executive Session to discuss their thoughts on the negotiation process before moving forward. Dr. Veronesi wasn't sure if that can be discussed in Executive Session, but will check on what would be appropriate.

A new law was passed in the 2019 legislative session that all public schools in Connecticut include African-American, Puerto Rican and Latino studies in their curriculum by 2021-2022. Mr. Falcone suggested the creation of a cultural competency course at the high school. They will also work to have an equity and well-being leader at each school. Cultural competence and bullying will be added as required components for open house nights and they will develop a district policy supporting equity. Dr. Veronesi added that there are some funds in the Medicaid reimbursement that could be used toward this work.

Dr. Veronesi added that they will share the results of the Equity and Diversity focus groups that were held at the high school. They also hope to hold parent focus groups on equity as well. She also recognized Mrs. Manning for her equity efforts as well as the administrative team. Mr. Moore added that he spoke with Laura Francis about this and she will expand her efforts for the adults in the community.

Director of Finance's Report

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that 20 percent of the revenue has been received and expenditures are at 12.5 percent. The first teacher payroll was in August. Some preliminary audit work has been done and various other projects have been completed. Some paving repairs were done at Brewster and yearly leases have been paid for Apple and Chromebooks as well as a vehicle lease. The Power School license and web hosting have also been paid. MTA is running on schedule as is capital reserve. Expenditures for building maintenance are \$42,000 and include the repair of an oil tank at Memorial for \$25,000. The repair of the culvert was \$12,000.

The auditors will finish up their field work in October and the report should be received in December.

Mrs. Neubig distributed a draft budget calendar for review. Dr. Veronesi suggested adding a Board retreat and a community, staff and board conversation time. Mr. Moore thought the end of October would work for the retreat and the community meeting, as well as meeting with the Boards of Finance, in early November.

Mrs. Neubig stated that exterior surveillance cameras have been completed and are up and running. Some interior cameras still have to be installed. The wiring has been done for the cell phone boosters and Brewster has one active zone. Visitor management kiosks have been purchased and they are hoping to implement them in October or November.

New Business

A. Possible Regional Plan Amendment

B. Brewster/Memorial Alteration Project

Mr. Moore reviewed that Bond Counsel had indicated that it would be necessary to amend the Regional Plan prior to going to bonding. The portion of the plan in question is that the plan states that children attending elementary and middle schools remain in their present location. That has obviously not been occurring as children go to both towns for school. They have asked the lawyers to look at this issue and would like to have the Utilization committee prepare the necessary documents. A report will be generated to define the change and craft the language of the amendment. That would need to be approved by the Board and would then go to the state for review and approval. It would then go to a public hearing and finally a referendum in both towns. Utilization will meet next week to get the process started. Mr. Moore noted that the district cannot go ahead with alterations at Brewster and Memorial until this amendment is approved.

Dr. Taylor wanted to confirm that the Utilization committee is expected to address the issue around the bonding and revision of the report and Mr. Moore stated that that was correct.

C. Appointment of community members to Board of Education committees

Mr. Moore reviewed that John Giammatteo serves on Utilization and Grace Guidet served on Student Achievement, but has left town. Bronwyn Commins taught in the district for 19 years and is asking to serve on Student Achievement, however no one from Middlefield has shown any interest in Student Achievement. Thomas Peters, a student, has served on Town of Durham committees, Student Council and the Scholarship Committee and Mr. Moore recommended having him serve as a student advisor to the Student Achievement Committee.

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve Mr. Moore's appointments of Bronwyn Commins as a member and Thomas Peters as student advisor to the Student Achievement Committee.

In favor of appointing Bronwyn Commins and Thomas Peters to the Student Achievement Committee: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Yamartino asked if there were openings on the committees and Mr. Moore confirmed that someone from Middlefield can still serve on Student Achievement. Mr. Yamartino explained that all of the committees have community members except Policy and HR.

Public Comment

Donia Viola felt that it is hard to comment on agenda items at the beginning of the meeting when there is no synopsis as to what would be discussed. She would like the agenda to be a little bit more defined. Mrs. Viola asked if the gas conversion was a done deal or not and if the Board voted on that. She reviewed articles that were in the Middletown Press about fossil fuels. She would hope that more research would be done before the district considered converting to gas. Mrs. Viola also asked about vaccinations and what percentage of students are vaccinated. She felt strongly that vaccinations are necessary and reviewed several statistics. Mrs. Viola also felt that community conversation about the budget sounds good and also reiterated that she is not in favor of partnerships with nations that do not support our democracy. She is very much pro-American and pro-democracy.

Chuck Stengel asked the Board to include changing the voting for election of Board members to be included in the wording when the Regional Plan is amended.

Carl Stoup feels that the field house costs are just the tip of the iceberg and the numbers will grow from there.

Theresa Weimann, from Durham, asked the Board to do a demographic enrollment study before any further discussions are held on building alterations. She was not shocked to hear that Durham is number two for home sales in the state and felt it might be wise to take another look at that. Mrs. Weimann was taken aback about separating the referendums about the building project and the Brewster gym/cafeteria renovations as she felt that that was the bare minimum that would be necessary. She felt it was very sad after talking about this for so many years and felt it was another example of the Board trying to get away with something without being completely honest. She recalled that comments were made last fall about how to get the construction voted through and felt that it was very important to get legal advice about how they are trying to do this. She reviewed some of the costs for the renovations at Brewster.

Richard Parmelee, from Durham, is a firm believer that public school systems should not be daycare centers nor a substitution for parents. He is also adamantly against any fees being assessed to students to participate in activities. He noted that the interest in football is declining, with head injuries being cumulative and he cited a suit against the NFL for injuries. He reminded everyone that football cost the district around \$80,000 to start up and wondered why the district is subjecting students to possible head injuries. He also reviewed football at UCONN and costs associated with that. Mr. Parmelee suggested applying any windfalls to activity fees since assessing fees is discriminatory and is not public education.

A resident of Middlefield wanted to get clarification about the amendment to the Regional Plan. She understood that children should stay in their own towns until eighth grade and then come together at the high school and asked if that was what the Board was trying to amend. Mr. Moore explained that the Utilization Committee will prepare a report on the language necessary to deal with the question raised by the Bond Counsel and to create an amendment to the plan. He noted that schools have been closed and children move from one town to the other over the last many years. She noted that she attended school in the district and it was still separate in 1984. Mr. Moore reiterated that there will be a public hearing on this issue.

Heidi Johnson, from Durham, would also like to see election of Board members at the polls and for that to be included in the amendment. She would like to see a lot more participation with the Board of Education. She would also like to see something come out through ParentSquare about the amendment process.

Jim Irish, from Middlefield, stated that he will check Middlefield's town charter to see if there is anything in there about Board of Education elections. He also endorsed Dr. Taylor's comments about addressing contract negotiations since teacher salaries is one of the largest line items in the budget. He also thanked the Board for adding the community night.

Anticipated Executive Session

A. Director of Student Services and Special Education interview

The Board moved into Executive Session at this time, after taking a five-minute break.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:15 PM.

Possible Vote to Authorize the Superintendent to complete the hiring process

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Geraci, in favor of authorizing the Superintendent to complete the hiring process of Jennifer Keane as Director of Student Services and Special Education.

Discussion followed including Dr. Taylor asking about the inclusion of this language/action given the fact that the Board's role does not include the approval of hiring administrators. Dr. Veronesi indicated that the inclusion of the language had been suggested at a prior meeting by a Board of Education member and has been included after Executive Session since that time.

In favor of authorizing the Superintendent to complete the hiring process of Jennifer Keane as Director of Student Services and Special Education: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Christine Geraci made a motion, seconded by Andrew Taylor to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.

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

Meeting was adjourned at 9:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz
Alwaz First