

Educational Resources Committee

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Educational Resources Committee met on Wednesday, June 7, 2017 at 6:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mr. Moore, Mr. Renninghoff, Mrs. Boyle (arrived 6:20 p.m.), Mr. Yamartino (arrived 6:50 p.m.)

Committee members absent: Dr. Taylor

Other BOE members present: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Russell, Interim Business Manager

Public Comment

Mr. Chuck Stengel, Durham reviewed House Bill 7294 that says that municipalities can cut their budgets by the amount of money that they have been reduced by the state. Mr. Stengel suggests that the BOE considers the ECS cuts in the upcoming budget process as the education budget is prepared. Mr. Stengel indicated that he believes many of his peers will not have a lot of support for a building project and that any payback period should be short.

Mr. Moore moved to the Budget Process Debrief item because of the absence of a quorum.

Budget Process Debrief

Dr. Veronesi indicated that she and Laura Francis had discussed holding a town and school joint session in the fall facilitated by a third party in order to determine key priorities for the coming budget session in both towns and the school district especially given the uncertainty of the state budget.

Dr. Friedrich indicated that the Board need to trim non-academic areas as well as academic areas if we have any chance of reducing the per pupil expenditure. The Board needs to set goals and then make decisions about the particulars. The BOE has to be willing to take the heat for making unpopular decisions. Dr. Friedrich believes that the Board's leadership in developing next year's budget was poor. Mr. Friedrich did not think the BOE scored high on leadership. The middle school athletics was a good example. He thinks the BOE needs to be very specific in the suggestions that are made in terms of what is supported and what is cut.

Mr. Renninghoff believes that the Board must not over spend on capital plans with fancy new school construction. He believes the Board needs to do what is needed but not beyond given the financial climate. The Board and the superintendent and business manager used to go on a retreat and work together but that did not always result in a coherent process and often the Board was in the position of cutting proposals made by the superintendent. The budget process should not be a place to effectuate major changes.

The meeting officially began at 6:20 p.m. when Mrs. Boyle arrived.

Approval of Agenda

On a motion made by Mr. Renninghoff and seconded by Mr. Hicks, the agenda was unanimously approved.

Approval of Minutes – May 10, 2017

On a motion made by Mr. Renninghoff and seconded by Mr. Moore, the minutes were approved by all present except Mrs. Boyle who abstained because she did not attend the May 10th meeting.

Budget Process Debrief continued

Mr. Moore suggested that the BOE indicate that there are non-academic priorities that the Board stands behind and supports.

Mrs. Boyle talked about importance of prior information for the BOE so that there can be a consistent message from the BOE. She believes a retreat is helpful. She believes that there must be cuts in all departments. Mrs. Boyle would like an entire athletic budget by sport and other areas by department. She believes it will help the Board understand the big picture and the financial impact of making cuts. She indicated that the Board must be committed to attending all meetings that involve the budget and if other committee meetings need to be added we should explore that possibility. She also brought up using Facebook Live for people to weigh in and/or ask questions during BOE meetings or other forms of technology and social media to increase communication. In the past Board members held coffee hours to answer questions and hear feedback at Perk on Main and Lyman Orchards.

Mr. Moore is concerned that we are trying to make people come to school here, yet we are looking at making cuts. We need foreign language and more developed STEAM, etc. We find that some schools are attracting students because of athletics. We know that Music can attract people to our school and it has.

Long Term Infrastructure Planning

Dr. Veronesi reviewed the importance of agreeing on a long term infrastructure plan. She discussed the change of the course of the past year in terms of the pace and progress in the Utilization Committee relative to addressing declining enrollment and closing another school and moving forward with renovations. She indicated that the board needed to refocus and determine what the next steps would be including other necessary capital improvements. Dr. Veronesi re-shared the 2017-2018 Capital Budget (1/20/17 draft) with the committee. Dr. Veronesi also indicated that looking at our debt schedule is critically important at this time given the fact that the debt is “falling off”. We have projects that need to be done and that will get more expensive over time and require more work. A collective decision needs to be made about how much money is needed over time and how we will fund various projects.

Mrs. Boyle questioned whether the public should be asked to participate in Utilization Committee in order to get greater feedback from people who have expertise that the Board does not have and in order to achieve greater buy-in and understanding. She indicated that non-board members may offer the group some energy and insight.

Mr. Moore indicated we need to have a plan and we need to identify the projects and how we will fund them over time.

Mrs. Boyle requested an electronic copy of the document. Dr. Veronesi indicated she will resend it to all board members.

Mr. Yamartino arrived at 6:50 p.m.

Mrs. Boyle would like to see this discussion as a standing item on the ERC agenda and would like Mr. Francis to attend all meetings.

Public Comment

Carl Stroup, Durham indicates that we cannot offer everything that everyone would like and that decisions need to be made to prioritize our goals.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. Renninghoff and seconded by Mr. Hicks, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.