

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Study Committee met on Wednesday, January 4, 2017 at 4:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Flanagan, Dr. Freidrich, Mr. Renninghoff and Dr. Taylor.

Other BOE members present: Mrs. Boyle and Mrs. Petrella.

Ex-officio member present: Mr. Moore

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools

Public present: Carl Stoup and Melissa Booth

### **Public Comment**

Melissa Booth asked for a time line of when the Community Forum might happen and whether all three schools will be discussed at the same time. She would also like to not have those meetings at 4:00 PM.

### **Approval of Agenda**

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

In favor of approving the agenda: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Mrs. Flanagan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Renninghoff, Dr. Taylor and Dr. Friedrich. Motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of Minutes - November 30, 2016**

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Renninghoff, to approve the minutes of the November 30, 2016 meeting as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes as presented: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Mrs. Flanagan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Renninghoff, Dr. Taylor and Dr. Friedrich. Motion passed unanimously.

### **Korn School Cost Considerations**

Mrs. Flanagan reviewed that they had reached out to the Town of Durham regarding their level of interest and also had reviewed all of the cost considerations. Dr. Veronesi apologized that she did not have the all of the figures to go over this afternoon. Mrs. Flanagan reiterated the Committee's concerns about the costs associated with maintaining Korn School, the payback of the State grant and the potential uses of operating the building. If the District were to dispose of the property, surveyors would need to identify what would be included with the property and they have asked for quotes on that work. Durham has been asked to prepare a proposal of what they would be willing to offer for the property.

Dr. Veronesi reported that Doug Gillette, the real estate attorney, was contacted by Durham's attorney and asked to meet on January 12, 2017 at 9:00 AM. That meeting would include Mrs. Flanagan, Mr. Moore, Dr. Veronesi and Mr. Renninghoff. Mrs. Flanagan and Mr. Moore are unable to make that meeting time, so Dr. Veronesi will reschedule the meeting.

Mrs. Flanagan summarized that the conversations thus far have been really trying to assess what the District's costs would be and what Durham's potential uses and costs would be. Mrs. Flanagan also commented that they are quite confident that should the building pass to a municipality, the District would be forgiven the grant balance by the State (approximately \$635,000). The initial appraisal

included approximately six acres of land and was just a value, not proceeds to the District. Dr. Veronesi also suggested that a draft of a balance sheet be brought to the meeting with the Town of Durham.

Mr. Augur reminded the committee that approximately \$900,000 was brought up as a number for demolition. Mr. Moore also commented that there was about \$150,000 per year for maintenance of the building. Mrs. Flanagan also mentioned that the estimates did not include any environmental concerns that may arise with demolition and asked if information could be gathered from any other districts regarding demolition.

### **Milone & MacBroom Enrollment Update**

Dr. Veronesi stated that Milone & MacBroom did a nice job consolidating the report and that the bottom line is about 140 more students in 2025-2026 than was originally projected. This increase is due to a number of factors, including an up-tick in housing sales as well as ready-made families moving into the district.

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that percentage changes are shown and the Committee went through the report page by page. The projection for kindergarten in 2017 will be 85. Birth rates look to be leveling off. Housing sales seem to be trending up. Mrs. Flanagan asked if there was information available as to the number of available building lots in Durham and Middlefield. Mr. Renninghoff commented that there wasn't a lot available in Middlefield because it is geographically smaller than Durham by 11 square miles, with a lot of it owned by Lyman Farm and the City of Middletown. He also commented that some of the houses that were built at Ross Farms are still vacant. Dr. Veronesi commented that the report stated that the District should not expect any impact on enrollment from new construction. Mrs. Flanagan hoped that that information might be available from the Plan of Conservation and Development in both towns and referred Dr. Veronesi to Geoff Colegrove.

Dr. Friedrich felt that the recovery of housing sales is pretty spectacular and wondered what the effect of that turnover would be on anticipated enrollment. It was generally felt that older people are moving out and younger people are moving in. Dr. Veronesi felt that they control for that in the enrollment projections. Mrs. Boyle commented that in prior demographic studies, they had looked at the age of people in town and projected from there. She also commented that there are a lot of houses in both towns that are a little older and would be perfect starter homes for families.

Mrs. Flanagan felt that the number of students per household reflects the birth rate dropping with less than four students per 10 homes. Dr. Veronesi felt that the accuracy of the projections is uncanny. Dr. Taylor asked about confidence intervals and what contingency plans are in place if the projections are exceeded, specifically in the kindergarten level. Mr. Augur also asked about the rates across the board. Dr. Veronesi felt that the accuracy has been consistent and she is very confident in the statistical analysis, but offered to get more information. Dr. Taylor asked if a component is built into the budget process in reference to this. Mrs. Flanagan felt that all of the projections have the District way under capacity at the high school level. The high school can hold up to 800 kids and is projected to be 379 in 10 years. Mr. Augur felt that it is not uncommon to house seventh and eighth grade in the high school, but Mrs. Flanagan commented that this Committee has not talked about that.

Dr. Veronesi reviewed the District's numbers on projecting kindergarten classes based on siblings coming into school and students already registered. We would still be in good shape if we got 10 additional students. Mrs. Flanagan commented that there are no physical space concerns based on enrollment.

Dr. Friedrich summarized Dr. Taylor's comments as needing to know how much head room there would be and Mrs. Flanagan felt that that would be important work for this Committee to monitor. Dr. Veronesi also commented that there is an increase in the persistency ratio of students staying in the district.

Mrs. Flanagan summarized that the up-tick in housing sales this year was expected, but she would like to know the trends for houses on the market. Dr. Friedrich stated that the housing sales go back to 1990 and based on that, we could expect that to go down again. He also pointed out the enormous increase in housing sales from 2011 to 2016, compared to the number of students per housing unit which was still declining. Mrs. Boyle pointed out that a lot of new houses were being built in 1999 and the class sizes were major. Since then, everything has gone down.

Mr. Augur asked what caused the decrease in housing units from 1990 to 1991 that appears on page 6. Dr. Veronesi will check with Milone & MacBroom. Mrs. Petrella asked if possibly the numbers of housing going up and less children per household might be part of the migration out of Connecticut. It was just reported that Connecticut is fourth in the country for people moving out of the state. Mr. Augur asked how that reflects in District 13 within the state. Mrs. Flanagan reported that the only districts gaining students were more in the urban areas and rural areas, including Durham and similar communities, were losing at the highest rate. She also commented that the average price of a house in Durham has plummeted which may account for the increase in unit sales.

Mrs. Boyle also asked if the report acknowledged the closing of Bristol Myers Squibb. Dr. Veronesi thought that that had been discussed and she felt that the District had approximately 30 parents who worked at BMS.

Dr. Veronesi summarized that she will try to get persistency ratios, confidence intervals and housing turnover as well as number of available building lots.

Mr. Augur asked if the pre-K column on page 15 is capped at 35 and Dr. Veronesi stated that pre-K is always hard to project and that it is a fixed number that they use. Mr. Augur also asked how that would dovetail on the before- and after-school program but that was left for discussion at the full Board meeting.

Mrs. Flanagan commented that while the projections are a little bit higher, that does not mean an up-tick in enrollment but rather a slowdown of the decline.

Dr. Veronesi also commented that she is aware of the emotion that gets triggered when you talk about declining enrollment and how these are true numbers. It seems doubtful that enrollment would go back to what it was any time soon. Mr. Augur asked if it was possible to get compare against other DRGs and Dr. Veronesi reported that the increase is being seen in second-language learners.

Mrs. Flanagan would then like to see this up-tick transferred into specific projections for both Brewster and Memorial. Dr. Friedrich asked if it looks as if there will be a further increase in enrollment of very young children for another year, but Dr. Veronesi did not feel that would be the case. The projection after next year for kindergarten goes up to 119, but that has been a known number from the beginning.

Mr. Augur asked why the students per unit chart only goes back to 2001 and Mrs. Flanagan replied that that was when the District began working with Milone & MacBroom.

**Silver Petrucelli Project Status Overview**

Mrs. Flanagan reminded the Committee that, as of the last meeting, the conditions analysis had been completed and the program analysis would be next. Mr. Moore thought that Silver Petrucelli was going to provide further information regarding students being switched from one to another. Dr. Veronesi did not have an update available at this time.

Mr. Moore also asked for one-year priorities that would come out of the five-year priorities that had been presented. He'd also like to know how costs would be managed regarding what would be part of grant eligibility vs. capital expenditure. Dr. Veronesi stated that Mr. Melnik and Mr. Francis have worked on that and have come up with a long-term capital plan.

Mrs. Boyle commented that, in the past, there had been a Building, Grounds and Transportation subcommittee to work on the budget and asked if that would be part of this committee's responsibility now. Mr. Moore stated that there is a five-year capital plan that will be looked at as part of the budget process. Dr. Veronesi thought that they will be looking at the capital plan a little differently considering potential renovations. Dr. Veronesi will ask Mr. Melnik to review that at the next full Board meeting.

Mrs. Flanagan asked the committee members how they plan to go about digesting the whole report and being comfortable with deciding what needs to be recommended to the board in terms of renovations and improvements for each of the schools as well as bonding and ed specs. Mr. Renninghoff felt that it would be good to do it one school at a time. Dr. Friedrich didn't want the Committee members to lose sight of the part of the process that includes visiting other schools. Mr. Moore also commented that the total square footage of Memorial and Brewster was 110,000, but the recommendation for a new school was only 85,000 and wondered if that should be something that is seriously looked at. Dr. Friedrich commented that it was really a question of what people can be convinced to do and given the recent experience with solar panels, he would be concerned that anyone would even consider tearing down buildings and building new. Mr. Augur did feel that all options should be presented to the community with the recommendation from the Board.

Mrs. Flanagan would like to follow up with visits to new facilities and again reminded the Committee members to gain a full understanding of what is contained in the report. Dr. Taylor verified that cost numbers were not included in the report and asked if they would be providing those at some point. Mr. Moore stated that they would once there was an idea of what the schools would look like. Dr. Taylor feels that this is more of a philosophical question and doesn't see how going through the project piece by piece will help elucidate the approach to be taken. Mr. Moore interpreted Mr. Renninghoff's comment as reviewing the document school by school, but not approach the problem school by school.

Dr. Veronesi felt that one approach may be to have a guided day, rather than a few hours here and there. She also felt that it would be nice to have Mr. Melnik and Mr. Francis at the table as well as Silver Petrucelli for some of it. Dr. Veronesi felt that the philosophical question does need to be addressed and it should include the historical foundation of the district which is the two separate programs. She reiterated that they are not thinking about doing away with either program, though it has been mentioned to bring the programs together at Memorial School. Dr. Veronesi also commented that she'd like to start having conversations about a 6-8 middle school with one program in the near future.

Dr. Friedrich agreed that a lot more could be done with bigger blocks of time. He also felt that Mr. Renninghoff's idea of building by building is a reasonable way to master the report. He asked for Dr. Veronesi to think about what should change in each building. Dr. Veronesi commented that the district's buildings are in great shape overall, but are not state-of-the-art and updated as far as space, light, collaboration and innovation.

Dr. Taylor asked what the decisive component will be as they go through this process, i.e. a purely financial decision or more of a pedagogy-type decision. Mrs. Flanagan felt that the answer is yes, all of the above. With so many factors, including a broad constituency and taxpayer base, to be considered, the Committee will have to fully understand the process, the project and the longer-term vision. Mr. Augur felt that dollar values should be assigned to the various approaches to help people quantify their emotions.

Mr. Renninghoff doesn't personally feel that the public has a lot of appetite for anything with a significant dollar sign and that there would need to be a strong argument for it. Mrs. Boyle brought up the work that DRA did for Korn School and felt that that may be needed again. Mrs. Boyle suggested that a representative from Silver Petrucelli be present at community meetings.

Mr. Moore felt that everyone needed to decide how to reach the educational goals through the facilities. Dr. Veronesi described collaboration between teachers and students, intergenerational programs and how they would all relate to space. She felt it was very important for the Committee members to go see other schools. Dr. Veronesi does have a chart that she will forward to the members about flip-flopping the schools.

Mr. Renninghoff would also like to strongly consider tying the names Lyman and Memorial together because of the emotional aspect.

Mrs. Flanagan summarized that the conversation has been primarily about new construction and asked if that was what the Committee would want to focus on. She reminded the members that the Committee was originally charged with doing something about utilizing the assets of the District given declining enrollment. She wondered if the Committee was now moving down a different path and look at new construction. Mrs. Flanagan thinks that new construction would be very nice, but didn't feel it would be practical. Mr. Augur thought that that might, in fact, make people think it may be more practical. Mr. Renninghoff felt that once people saw the cost of new construction that would totally destroy the option. Mrs. Boyle stated that she had asked DRA to "shoot for the stars" many years ago and Mrs. Flanagan asked if that was where they should be headed now.

Dr. Friedrich asked how long the Committee was willing to wait before getting a number. Mr. Augur suggested they ask what school is the most recent building that would fit programming ideals and what did it cost. That would at least provide a rough dollar value.

Mrs. Flanagan summarized that the Committee would be looking for an idea of the cost of a Pre-K through 5 new building. Dr. Veronesi also commented that they don't love having the two programs in one building and she believes that the philosophy would have to change for one building to be a viable option. Mr. Augur asked if stats could be applied to the two different programs, such as college rates and valedictorians. Mr. Renninghoff felt that people liked having the choice. Mr. Moore agreed that he would not be in favor of combining the two programs in one building. Dr. Veronesi and Mr. Moore did not feel it would be a good idea to compare the success of the two programs and Mr. Moore offered to talk to Mr. Augur after the meeting. Discussion continued about the differences in the two programs.

Dr. Veronesi also reminded the Committee that they had decided on the importance of an elementary school in each community. Mrs. Flanagan suggested that Silver Petrucelli be asked to give a cost range for a new building and that can at least be included as information for the public. As an alternative, Mrs. Flanagan reminded the Committee that they will have to do something with whatever schools remain and how to move forward with that process. Dr. Veronesi commented that it's better for kids to be in K-5 configurations.

Mr. Renninghoff would like to see numbers for 10- to 20-year projections for costs and benefits for renovate-as-new as well as projections for maintenance of two buildings and for three buildings. Mrs. Flanagan reminded everyone that capital projects have been deferred and the District has old buildings. Mrs. Boyle suggested that all the Board members tour the District's current schools as there are many misperceptions out there.

Mrs. Flanagan will talk with Mr. Moore and Dr. Veronesi and get back to the Committee regarding the approach and meetings. Dr. Friedrich asked for a review of the time line in order to go to referendum, bonding and state funding. Mrs. Flanagan stated that it ed specs would need to be done to get a number for referendum, then approval at referendum, then the state legislature would have to vote to approve any grant participation. Dr. Veronesi thought that that would need to be done by June. It would be almost a year between going to referendum and getting approval from the state. A referendum would have to be held by May in order for it to get in for this session. Mrs. Flanagan did not feel that that would happen. Dr. Friedrich summarized that the Committee members will tour the District's present schools while going through the report for each school. Mrs. Boyle felt the District was very blessed to have Rob Francis' history with the schools.

Dr. Taylor would recommend surveying the townspeople to get a feeling for the various options, including costs. Dr. Veronesi felt that DRA had already done that and the Board had made the decision to fully explore the two K-5 buildings and to renovate-as-new. Dr. Taylor did not remember ever seeing a dollar figure attached to that report.

Mrs. Flanagan felt that the next step would be for the Committee to say what things will have to be done in the next 10 years in order for the District to inhabit the schools and maintain standards. Once the Committee agrees to go K-5 and that the two buildings would be Brewster and Memorial, then an architect would have to be hired to develop a design, including costs. That would all have to be done before going to referendum. All decisions would have to be made by the full Board of Education. Dr. Taylor felt it would be better to have an idea of cost first, but Mrs. Flanagan explained that if a cost is quoted for renovation and it ends up being significantly different, there would be a lot of trouble.

Mr. Augur asked if the full Board voted next week and an architect could be hired, would we be able to make a referendum in June. Mrs. Flanagan felt that it could be ready for referendum in the fall and the legislature could take it up in January. That would still put the District to June, 2018 for approval of any grant. The operational standpoint during construction is a different issue.

Mrs. Flanagan felt that the next two action items for the Committee would be to visit the existing schools and review the report as well as visiting new schools. She would also like to see projected enrollments at Brewster and Memorial. It was generally agreed that this will not be an easy sell to the community, no matter how it's proposed.

**Communication Next Steps/Community Forum**

Mrs. Flanagan mentioned that one of the challenges with a community forum is that people get very annoyed when the answers are not available. Mr. Moore suggested that maybe the new enrollment figures could be published. It was also suggested that a newsletter be published in the Town Times. Mrs. Petrella suggested that Dr. Veronesi write something for the Town Times and not be interviewed, and that updates should be provided as things progress. Mrs. Flanagan suggested that maybe the information come from the Board. It was also agreed that parents are important, but the rest of the population is as well.

**Public Comment**

Carl Stroup echoed that a lot goes on in the meetings and agreed that it is important to let the townspeople know what is going on.

**Adjournment**

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

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Mrs. Flanagan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Renninghoff, Dr. Taylor and Dr. Friedrich. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First