

**Board of Education
Regional School District 13**

**District Meeting
Coginchaug Regional High School, Auditorium**

**May 5, 2014
Minutes & Motions**

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Flanagan at 8:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call	Mrs. Flanagan	Dr. Onofreo	Mr. Hicks
	Mr. Fulton	Mrs. Adams	Mr. Renninghoff
	Mrs. Buckheit	Dr. Friedrich	Mrs. Boyle
Absent:	Mrs. Fronc		
Administrators	Dr. Veronesi	Dr. Linda Berry	Mrs. Emory
Public Present	There were 24 members of the public present.		

Mr. Hicks read the "Call of the Meeting" into the record.

Mr. Hicks read the "Return of the Call" into the record.

Motion to elect moderator Jim Finley made by Mr. Hicks, second by Richard Parmelee. Vote: Unanimous.

Mr. Finley wished everyone a Happy Cinco de Mayo and said that the Board will do a presentation of the budget.

Mrs. Flanagan said that the gross district budget increase is 1.55% over last year, with the overall Net budget increase being 1.74%. There is a decrease in head count because of declining enrollment. The transportation contract is currently in negotiations but we are anticipating a decrease in the anticipated cost. The Board will make some line item transfers after the referendum passes because of the re-prioritized recommendations from the administration which includes adding back two teachers. These line item transfers will be voted on at the May 14th Board of Education meeting. In terms of revenue, there has been a reduction in carry over and in-house tuition. The reduction and increase in the transportation grant and special education excess cost is a reclassification with a very slight increase.

Dr. Veronesi gave the breakdown of the additional teachers versus what is being reduced to absorb the changes:

- 3rd grade teacher increase of \$50,587
- 5th grade teacher increase of \$50,587
- Benefits increase of \$12,000
- Engineering services decrease of (\$26,974)
- Transportation decrease of (\$20,000) not finalized
- Interns and Subs decrease of (\$51,200) downward trend
- Capital decrease of (\$15,000)

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Enrollment is down 80-90 students as we move through 2016-2017 which is significant. We will have to make a lot of decisions that will impact the students. It has been very clear that the community wants to “return to greatness”. This cannot be done without making hard choices and supporting the program in many different ways.

Questions and Comments

Kurt Peterson said that the cost per student has risen from \$17,000 to \$19,000 since 2012-2013. The budgeted amount for salaries seems to always be above what is needed. Can this be looked at again and possibly decreased?

Mrs. Flanagan commented that the Board is also concerned about the cost per student however, it is almost impossible to match the teacher reductions, buildings, busses, etc. as these students are all across the board. We cannot realize the reduction with the overhead. We started this budget process in February with a proposed decrease in staff of 13.2. We saw enrollment increase in kindergarten which we didn't anticipate. We put back in two teachers. Then at the public hearing, we heard about the concerns about the number of students and population of grades 3 & 5. This is a very responsible and well thought out budget. We are watching the salary line. In the past two years, we have reduced the budget dollars without dropping head count. We reduced the safety net, but it is hard to predict. We are looking everywhere for the extra money.

Dr. Veronesi explained that the Board has to budget for 100% of the staff who have contracts. We don't know about maternity, illness, resignations, etc. which has an impact on the salary line depending on substitute coverage. We also did a prediction of where the salary negotiations will fall.

Roger Kleeman questioned the savings on the transportation and substitute lines.

Dr. Veronesi responded that the transportation savings is based on her conversation with Mr. Melnik regarding the negotiations. We will come in lower than what was originally predicted.

Mrs. Flanagan clarified that we lease the busses and the timing of the closing of negotiations. The first payment will be August, which will yield 11 payments for 2014-2015.

Dr. Veronesi also confirmed that the payment to the universities for interns will be stopped as we are not getting the interns. We are also challenged by the excess in the salary lines, but we understand that there is a provision that if we budget under, we can go back to the towns.

Rick Parmelee thanked the Board and said that he sees changes coming. He also said that the enrollment is going down, but his taxes are still going up. He thinks we are at a disadvantage as a regional school district. He also is concerned with long-term debt from the education side, a full-time athletic director, and the elimination of activity fees. He continued to say that public schools should be equal for all. Will there be any other town assessments for school maintenance? Snow removal should be in the private sector, not done by the schools.

Bruce Gueble said that the transportation savings is only for one year. He also questioned why worker's compensation has gone up 50%. He said this is way out of line. He also asked if enrollment is in the middle of the recommendation, why are you not following that recommendation and why don't you know who the students will be in the classroom. My business has seen an 85% increase in taxes over the last 7 years. You are not being responsible with the budget increases. He also asked if teacher assistants could be used instead of adding the teachers back for grades 3 & 5. The increases are forcing people to move because they cannot afford to live here.

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Mr. Fulton confirmed that health insurance is down and worker's compensation is up and said that the Board is still looking into this.

Mrs. Flanagan confirmed that the increase is from our incidents reported.

Mrs. Adams said that class size is not just enrollment. It depends on the number of mainstreamed students also. The guidelines for class sizes are long-standing. We have more children now who are mainstreamed than in the past, common core, testing, teacher evaluation, etc.

Mrs. Flanagan said that the parents in the grades 3 & 5 were very concerned. The Administrators listened to the comments and went back and re-prioritized. They looked at class size, students in the class, common core, SBAC testing and teacher evaluations. We need to make sure that the teachers could be successful. Adding the two teachers back into the budget was done without raising the budget. We are very confident in this budget. We ask for your support for this budget and during the process of looking at each of the buildings. We will not be able to maintain all six buildings with declining enrollment.

Ellen Dombrowski asked about the decrease in special education teachers. She also asked why the class sizes for the high school were not in the listing.

Dr. Veronesi said that the class sizes at the high school are not meaningful.

Mrs. Emory confirmed that the needs of the students are looked at at the end of the summer. The reduction of .5 FTE for special education was a speech/language pathologist.

Mrs. Flanagan said that next year we will do the same thing. We have to make sure that we meet the needs of the students. We are concerned but cannot lose sight of student performance. The increases in the last two years are the lowest increases in my nine years on the Board.

Dr. Veronesi does not want anyone to think that any of the classes are problematic. We were asked to re-evaluate based on comments from the community. The administration was asked to deliver a respectful and responsible budget and when I came, I was told that there were concerns about the classes. We identify what and then find the solutions. We did that without increasing the budget. We did think about teaching assistants, but didn't want to move one concern for another.

Mrs. Buckheit said that the comments are very valid about not being able to afford living in town, but you are talking to the wrong group. When you talk about affordability, diversity, zoning, etc. you need to go to other boards. We are charged with the education of the students.

Bruce Gueble said that the education part of the budget is the highest portion of the town budgets.

Mrs. Flanagan said that we are aware of the increases being approximately 80% of the amount of the total town budget increase. We are affected by the state reimbursements. The state funds at approximately 67% and the remainder is "unfunded mandates". The amount of relief from the state continues to decline. We are doing a good job on the budget under difficult circumstances. A lot goes into this. I wish it was easier. Until we reduce overhead, we will not be able to come close to matching funds for the reduction in enrollment. There is a state statute that a budget can be less than the previous, but there is a formula to follow.

Mr. Finley confirmed that it can only be reduced by ½ of 1% with certain criteria being met.

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Mr. Fulton reiterated that the Board has talked with the Boards of Finance from each town. We are conscious of the burden on the towns. This is the case in most towns across the state. The Board of Education side is a significant part of the town budget. We are in the middle of reviewing the utilization study. We have some hard choices ahead of us. We have declining enrollment and fixed costs. No recommendations from the utilization study review will be completed within the year. What will happen if and when we close a school?

Bruce Gueble asked if there was any data that confirms that reduced class size impacts student performance.

Dr. Veronesi said yes, but it also depends on age, family income, early childhood experience, quality of teacher, time of study, curriculum, etc. We are not doing so well nationally compared to other countries. We need to give the students the very best so that they are strong and as capable as everyone else around the world. Class size is a variable on the impact of student performance, but it is not the only variable.

Ellen Dombrowski said that she understands having a good school system impacts our property value also. She asked about the cost for the turf field, track and tennis courts and about the decrease in textbooks.

Mr. Fulton confirmed that the turf, track and tennis courts cost \$65,000 and is funded annually. Textbooks depend on the year. Last year we spent more.

Motion at 9:15 p.m. to adjourn to the referendum on May 6, 2014 from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. on the budget as presented made by Mr. Finley, second by Mr. Parmelee. Vote: Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,



Tammy A. McPherson
Regional District 13
Board of Education