

**Board of Education
Regional School District 13**

**Public Hearing
Coginchaug Regional High School, Auditorium**

**April 10, 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. Renninghoff
	Mr. Hicks	Mr. Fulton	Mrs. Adams
	Mrs. Boyle	Mrs. Fronc	Mrs. Buckheit
Absent:	Dr. Friedrich		

Administrators	Dr. Veronesi	Mr. Melnik	Mrs. Emory
	Mr. Brough	Mr. Sadinsky	Mrs. Heckler
	Mr. Ford	Mrs. Stone	

Public Present There were 28 members of the public present.

Mr. Hicks read the "Warning of Public Hearing of the Proposed Budget for 2014-2015, Regional School District 13 of the state of Connecticut, Durham/Middlefield, April 10, 2014, 8:00 p.m." into the record.

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

Brief Overview of the Budget

Mrs. Flanagan started by recognizing each of the Board members and thanked the Administrators for their efforts every day. There will be a district meeting on May 5th followed by the referendum on May 6th.

Dr. Veronesi thanked the public for attending. It is our mission and commitment to uphold the values in everything we say and do. The budget supports the mission and is an indication of its value. We are reacting to unfunded mandates, new state testing and teacher evaluations. Dr. Veronesi stated she has been here for 3½ months and the message is clear: we want to be great! This will happen. The budget process is difficult. This 1.74% increase over last year is respectful. It provides for four additional AP classes, support for professional development, technology teacher, and two kindergarten teachers because of the increase in enrollment.

Mrs. Flanagan said that the process was different and earlier than in the past. This was a collaboration between the administration, Dr. Veronesi, Dr. Perlini and the Board of Education. Many difficult decisions were made, priorities were addressed, enrollment was reacted to, and programs were enhanced. 1.74% increase is very hard to hit. This is a responsible budget and we thank the administrators for keeping to the goal of an under 2% increase. We have had an increase in expenditures over two years, a decline in receipts and have spent down the fund balance so we are working from current year revenue only. The tax increases in each town have not kept pace with the cost of education. The budget is 75.2% salary and benefits. There is not a lot of ways to change this

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except through head count. The 9% “other” is where the Board can look to make changes.

In revenue, there has been a reclassification in transportation grant so that transportation grant and excess cost need to be combined in order to compare to last year. Every dollar in any fund is carried forward to the next budget year. The dollars are rolled over and shown as a revenue item. This helps with taxes in each year that there is a rollover.

Mr. Fulton welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. The salary and benefits line is 75.2% of the total budget which is an increase of 1.96% for this budget. With lower enrollment comes a decrease in staff. We have moved to a full-time Athletic Director, increased certified staff for kindergarten and technology education and have also increased support staff. We have stayed in compliance with the long-standing guidelines for class size. Demographics are an important challenge. The utilization study has summarized that there will be a decrease in enrollment over the next 10 years. Contract negotiations are anticipated to conclude by June 2014. We try to keep a balance between being prudent and making the district attractive to new employees. We need to be competitive if we want teachers to bring something to us. There is a 4.04% increase in insurance. We are starting a 5-year lease for music equipment and a 4-year lease for the Chromebooks (one to one devices) for the entering freshmen. Electricity costs are declining because of usage and capital is decreased because the schools are in good shape or we are holding because of the utilization study.

Mrs. Adams said that we are embracing change. We have Common Core, more AP classes, in-house PSAT testing, a K-4 technology teacher, Chromebook initiative at 9th grade, music equipment lease, professional development, and CABA (CT Association of Boards of Education) membership for the first year included in the budget. CABA is professional development for the board.

Mrs. Flanagan said she is very excited about a technology teacher at the elementary school, and the Board is very cognizant of the budget. We are finding ways to put money back into the schools so that we enrich the students. Dr. Veronesi is very committed. This is a starting point for RSD 13. We need to evaluate salaries, professional development, and keep class size within the established guidelines. We ask that you please support the budget. This is the lowest possible budget that we can support. If we cannot pass this, I don't know where we can go. We are thrilled with the work that the administration did on this.

Public Comments and questions

- What are the new AP classes? With the decrease in enrollment will we have students taking these new classes? How many students are taking AP classes?
 - Statistics, chemistry, physics and composition. Parents are happy about these additional classes to address students who excel. The new principal will look at all of the classes and make sure they are still relevant. We want to keep our students at the high school. AP classes need to be offered to sophomores, juniors and seniors. It is hard to tell how many students are taking AP classes because they take multiple classes. We would like to see more students taking AP classes. There is so much we can do to increase the offerings to all students. The new principal will be key in this process. Our kids are excited about the new AP classes.

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- Reducing class sizes develops the students for better scores. Don't cut teachers.
 - We are looking at grade 3 and 5 class sizes coming close to the limits. If we add a teacher, class sizes will come down. The superintendent will continue to look at this as it is very important to her. We are committed to staying within the guidelines that are set.

- There are more tutors at Memorial. Why is kindergarten getting more priority than grade 5?
 - We may not have the same number of students needing support next year. Tutors help to close the gap. The level of need changes. We work with the support staff so that we know the needs of the students coming up and can work with them. It is hard to say that we will specifically do something, but we are always talking about these things. We are here to educate and advance all of our students. We are doing what we can to enhance the program. We are committed to do what we have to in order to support the students in grade 5. Class size is a priority for us at every level.

- There is an importance at kindergarten but reconsider the 3rd and 5th grade teachers being put back in the budget. There are hard choices that go into budgeting. The programs and class sizes are unfair. Common core kindergarten have the added years and grades 3-5 only get half of the common core curriculum but are expected to meet the standards. The reputation of the district is to return to greatness. We are not getting what we pay for. Core curriculum is hard for the students. It is hard to budget, but this will not bring us back to greatness. Regarding the high school principal, maybe you should look at raising the salary since we cannot find anyone.
 - No class is more important than another, but we need to make hard decisions. The decision for kindergarten was made because of the increased enrollment. You are asking that we add resources, but we have tried this in the past and have been defeated at referendum. We cannot heat buildings that are not fully utilized. We have gotten unfriendly feedback about the utilization study. We need to free up resources to get the budget passed. There are a lot of residents who don't have students in the schools. We are proud of this board and the administration for this budget. We will not fall short of increasing student achievement. We have a dedicated group of administrators. If there is a problem, they will tell us and we will find a way to address it. This is about the kids. The communication from Dr. Veronesi and the administrators tells me that we will figure out what to do when we need to do it. We will work together and be responsive every day. The principal search has been unsuccessful twice. The salary range is low and we will be looking at that. Recruitment is bad across the state. We will not settle on a principal. We need quality and experience.

- Is there a cap on the class sizes? Can you tell a family that they cannot be in a specific program?
 - Yes, we can cap the class size. We have to provide an education but do not have to overload a program. The student achievement is the same for each program.

- I have faith and confidence that the good will get better and the bad will be good. I know you would give us all that we want if you could. I hope we get what we deserve. If the budget fails, it will have to be trimmed. We need to support this budget. Have the teachers been asked what they think about the increase in class sizes? They are stressed with common core. It is a mistake to go up in class size. What is the cost increase for one teacher?
 - The cost for one teacher is between \$45,000.00 to \$70,000.00. We are making cuts that do not affect the classrooms. We hear you, and we are trying to cut all non-classroom expenses.

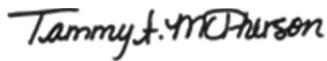
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- AP is important, PSAT is great, and class size is important, so maybe we need to look again at the guidelines. This seems to be an issue every year. What is the cost for the Chromebooks? Can students use what they already have at home? This is a big expense and once you start, you cannot turn back. The fund balance of \$991,000.00 will be rolled into this budget? This seems high.
 - Chromebooks for the entering grade 9 students to have for four years is \$13,000.00/year. Students cannot use what they have. Textbooks have been reduced. We are feeling our way through the process of using the one to one devices. We will be rolling \$991,000.00. In a budget of \$37M, this is not so far off. If the fund balance is too low, we will have higher percentages for bonding.

Mrs. Flanagan thanked the community for allowing us to have this conversation with you.

The Public Hearing was adjourned to the library at 10:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Tammy A. McPherson
Regional District 13
BOE Recording Secretary