

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 28, 2007 at 7:30 p.m. in the library at Strong Middle School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mr. Currin, Mrs. Flanagan, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Hennick, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons, Mr. Raczka, Dr. Shoemaker. Also present: Mr. Melnik, Mrs. Viccaro.

Mr. Raczka called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

Public Comment: Janice Frank of Durham spoke about the effect last year's cuts had on her children. They were not able to get into technology classes they were excited about. This District has not supported technology. Memorial School computers are generations behind; too slow to run video clips. She also spoke of the need for children to be using iPods to communicate and receive worldwide messages by pod casts.

Rich Hanley of Durham supports the budget. He feels that it is making up for things that have been cut before.

Ernie Judson is excited about the possibilities in this budget. He thanked the Board for the time put in to reviewing the budget and he will support their final decision.

Todd Pool encouraged the Board to accept the budget. He feels there are many things that could be added and does not want anything taken away.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held on April 11, 2007 at Coginchaug High School. The Board meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the library. The Board will adjourn to attend the Public Hearing at 8:00 p.m. in the auditorium and reconvene in the library after the public hearing.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Dr. Shoemaker the agenda was unanimously approved.

Dr. Shoemaker made a motion, second Mrs. Flanagan to approve the minutes to the meeting of March 21, 2007. Mrs. Adams, Mr. Currin, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Hennick, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons, Mr. Raczka, Dr. Shoemaker voted yes. Mrs. Flanagan abstained.

Communications: Many of the Board members received phone calls regarding the budget discussions. Most of the calls were positive.

Mr. Raczka received a letter this evening from Steve Buckheit regarding some of the proposed courses at the high school. He feels that TV Production and Journalism courses are frivolous and belong at the college level.

Superintendent's Report: Mrs. Viccaro reminded Board members that Monday, April 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7pm is the Strong School Reads program.

On April 9<sup>th</sup> at Coginchaug, Anthony Wolfe is speaking on the Secret of Parenting. He is a highly regarded local author. The event is open to the public and begins at 7pm.

Mrs. Viccaro said this morning she attended an assembly at Coginchaug where a past graduate shared her experiences in fashion design school. It was followed by an *American Idol* performance by the administration and several staff members of the high school. It was very funny and the kids really enjoyed it.

Finalize 2007-08 Budget for Public Hearing: Mrs. Viccaro distributed a handout regarding class size projections at the schools through grade 8. She said it is difficult to predict the high school class sizes because the class selection process is still ongoing. She pointed out that the

numbers increase between kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade because some parents are choosing to send their children to private all day kindergarten and then enter the District in 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

Mrs. Viccaro said last week she presented cuts totaling \$172,427 and was asked to look for ½% more in cuts. She presented a handout showing additional proposed staffing cuts. It included .2 Music and .4 Technology Ed at CRHS, .4 Music at Strong, and .5 Speech at the Elementary level. She has also added .3 in Family and Consumer Science at Coginchaug based on student requests. This brings the total reduction in staff from last meeting to this to 1.2. Mrs. Viccaro explained that the music position at the high school was cut based on the number of students enrolling in the classes. It did not warrant five sections. The only addition to the music program will be the addition of a .4 position at Memorial School. That will bring the teacher to full-time. Music will still be somewhat fragmented.

Mrs. Adams had people contact her about moving aides out of the regular classrooms to cover special education. Mrs. Viccaro said she believes there will be a time when there are no regular education aides. Currently there are 28 paraprofessional working in special education and 14 in regular education.

Mrs. Adams questioned whether it will be possible to hire a part-time speech person. Mrs. Viccaro said that speech is the #1 shortage area, but a current staff member has expressed an interest in moving to a half-time position so that would allow the District to look to hire a new full-time person.

Mr. Melnik distributed a handout showing the financial impacts of the suggested staffing cuts along with additional cuts suggested by the administration. He explained how it affects the gross and net budgets. Tonight's proposed cuts total \$180,056. The additional cuts include \$10,000 from the cafeteria salary account, \$2,700 for the Cobra administration fee, \$2,100 for Mimeos at Lyman, \$1,225 for Mimeos at Strong, \$4,650 for Smart Board & computers at Brewster, \$1,500 for Mimeos at Brewster, \$7,929 for Transportation (changing how the mail is delivered) and \$17,547 by changing to a five-year lease and buying refurbished portables instead of new ones. With the current cuts the gross increase will be 5.57% and the net increase will be 6.44%.

Mr. Melnik explained the portable lease more thoroughly. The District can save \$17,547 next year by going to a five year lease and buying used units. They are completely redone. It may reduce the possibility of moving the units by one move but they have a good life span. He needs to check to see what their guarantee is. This price is the fully installed price; including water to the ones at Brewster (will have bathrooms).

Mr. Hennick asked Mrs. Viccaro what her comfort level is with the cuts presented. She feels the new staffing and the portables will help the District to move forward. The portable for Memorial will allow them space for a much needed increase to technology and space is critical at Brewster. The removal of teaching assistants concerns her but she has tried to be realistic.

Dr. Shoemaker asked if the teacher assistants were added back if \$18,500 could be taken from the salary line item from teachers for new teacher hires.

Mrs. Flanagan agreed that the estimate used for teaching positions is high, \$76,500 each. She feels comfortable taking the money out of the 5 ½ new positions.

It was decided to cut \$39,800 from the teacher salary line item and add the teaching assistants back (\$18,500), resulting in a budget reduction of \$21,300.

Mr. Hennick said that the State is recommending that towns base their school budgets on the same amount of State revenue as last year. There is no way of knowing where the final numbers will be. It will be June before the State budget is settled. If there is any extra ESC money it will be applied to the fund balance and carried over into next year.

Mrs. Flanagan said she received an email stating that a projection of the ESC amounts to towns would be out by the end of the day tomorrow. Dr. Shoemaker said that final figures could be changed at the public hearing if there are real figures. Mr. Hennick cautioned that these will still be just projections.

Ms. Parsons said the Boards of Finance can adjust their figures based on the ECS revenue before they set the mil rate.

Dr. Shoemaker said the cafeteria salary money was left in as a safety last year. He feels ok removing it from the budget.

Board members felt there is some risk cutting into the teacher salary account to cover the aides, but it is worth it. This reduction brings the gross budget to \$31,923,567 (5.50%) and the net budget to \$29,913,041 (6.37%).

Dr. Ochterski questioned the change to the portable lease. Although the District will be saving \$17,000 next year the actual cost over the life of the lease will be much greater and the District will be purchasing refurbished instead of new portables. For three years the total cost would be \$231,000; for five years it will be \$300,000. Mr. Melnik said at the end of the lease the buyout is based on fair market value. It was decided that the District will probably not be in a position to make a decision about another school addition in three years and the 5-year lease option is the best way to go at this time.

Mr. Raczka asked if the copier leases have been reviewed. Mr. Melnik said he hopes to be able to get all the copiers under one lease by next year.

Mr. Raczka asked Board members what percentage rate they feel is needed to pass this budget.

Mrs. Flanagan feels that the budget is still too high. Middlefield is going to be voting on a land acquisition two weeks before the District referendum and they have just gone through reevaluation. She feels it is important that the Board supports the land purchase as it is to the benefit of the District.

Mr. Raczka said they have told the selectmen of Middlefield that the District is supportive of the land purchase. He is prepared that one town may have to carry the vote for the referendum.

Dr. Shoemaker agreed with Mrs. Flanagan but is worried about cutting into the educational process. He would rather go with the budget presented than cut further.

Mr. Hennick is comfortable with the percentage presented.

Mr. Raczka asked Mrs. Flanagan if she had any ideas in mind for further cuts.

Mrs. Flanagan suggested cutting further into the teacher salary account. This year the estimated salary was raised from \$72,000 to \$76,500 for teachers. This amount is used for 188 certified teaching positions. As an average it allows for unanticipated leaves for maternity and illness. Mrs. Flanagan suggested cutting this amount to \$76,000 and saving \$94,000. She believes it is a calculated risk worth taking.

Dr. Shoemaker said last year it was expected that the District would end the year with a -\$10,000 fund balance. It ended up that \$600,000 was transferred into this year's budget. Dr. Shoemaker is comfortable with Mrs. Flanagan's idea.

Mr. Melnik said the District is enjoying the benefits of a health care carry-over this year that will not be there next year. There will be increases next year.

Mr. Raczka said the State says we should have between 1-3% in a fund balance. He feels it is too risky.

Mr. Hicks said the District had a similar discussion seven or eight years ago. They took the risk and it paid off. He is willing to take the risk again.

Mr. Raczka is concerned that if this budget goes down he doesn't know where the Board will make additional cuts from. He would like to let the taxpayers make the decision.

Dr. Ochterski is concerned that the Board will be setting up next year to be more difficult with the increases that have already been mentioned.

Mr. Raczka opened the floor for further public comment:

Josh Stockdale feels that a buffer is important in a budget, bad things can happen.

Karen Kean agrees with Mrs. Flanagan that the 6.1% budget still has a buffer in it.

Rich Hanley agreed with Tom Hennick that you need to only focus on the gross budget, you can't control the net.

Teresa Opalacz will support whatever percentage the Board puts forward. As a CFO she believes you make the budget narrow and leave it to management to make it work. She does not want to see this budget go to a second round.

Mrs. Viccaro is concerned about unforeseen situations that can cost the District such as a major special education student moving into the District during the school year. She can not anticipate these costs and cutting into the fund balance makes her nervous.

Tina Levine supports the percentage. There are risks, challenges and opportunities with every budget. Carrying money over erodes the baseline. She suggested using this money for one-time expenditures only.

Karen Meiman asked about the line item for computers under transportation. Mr. Melnik said this is the cost to operate the software. It is not a part of the DATTCO contract, but it has been in the budget before.

Jeremy Renninghoff said every year there are expenses that are not budgeted for but the money is found to cover it. He said the Board should stop worrying, the money is always found somewhere. He also asked for the enrollment projections. Durham has 1450 students (65.97%); Middlefield has 748 students (34.03%). It is a .09% change toward Middlefield from last year.

Janice Frank appreciates the efforts of the Board. She warned the Board to not be risky because the Superintendent will have to make changes.

Todd Pool does not want the Board to take risks, there are consequences.

Mrs. Flanagan wanted to clarify that the fund balance is not a cushion; it is a reserve to cover unknown expenses that can not be quantified.

Mr. Currilin feels the responsible thing would be to go with the current budget and not take the risk.

Ms. Parsons is willing to take the risk to the public hearing and see what happens there.

The fund balance can affect the District's bond rating if it falls too low. Members were concerned if they should decide to go to bond to fix the track and tennis courts. Dr. Shoemaker said the bond for smaller projects like this wouldn't be affected as much as a large project would be.

It was decided to call it to a vote to see which way people were feeling mostly strongly.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, second Mrs. Golschneider to go the public hearing with a total gross Regional District 13 budget of \$31,923,567. Mrs. Adams, Mr. Currlin, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Hennick, Dr. Ochterski, Mr. Raczka voted yes. Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Parsons, Dr. Shoemaker voted no.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Adams the Board of Education unanimously approved to hold a referendum on May 8, 2007 on the proposed 2007-08 Regional District 13 education budget to be preceded by a District Meeting to be held on May 7, 2007.

2005-2006 Annual Report: On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Adams the Board of Education unanimously approved the 2005-2006 Annual Report.

Buildings and Grounds: Mr. Hennick said the committee met tonight. They met with the teacher and the parent, Russell Hassmann, working on the sign for the front of Strong School. He presented two final selections for the sign. Students have been involved throughout the project and the parent is going to create the sign at no cost to the District. The final selections will go before the Historic Commission of Durham for their approval and then they will let the students vote on their top choice. They hope to have the sign done by the end of the school year. Mr. Hassmann has had a very positive experience in working with the students and he would like to continue to be involved next year with possibly another sign project.

Mr. Nicol was present at the Buildings & Grounds meeting and also at this meeting to discuss another proposal. He presented a plan for a stone and brick seating area in the front of the school. It will be constructed by Torrison Stone and Garden, who will also donate a portion of the work as long as their name plaque is displayed. The PTO has offered to cover 2/3 of the cost and the remainder will come from funds raised by the school. He is hopeful for a spring or summer installation.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Golschneider the Board of Education unanimously approved to adjourn.