

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session on Wednesday, November 6, 2019 at 6:30 PM in the Library at Memorial Middle School, Middlefield, Connecticut.

Board members present: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino

Board members absent: Mr. Hicks

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

Ed Bailey welcomed everyone to Middlefield and thanked the Board of Education for holding the meeting there. He then led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Approval of the Agenda**

Dr. Taylor *a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the agenda as presented.*

*In favor of approving the agenda as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried unanimously.*

### **Community Welcome**

Mr. Moore welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave an overview of what would be discussed.

### **Historical Information: Formation of the Regional District and Plan of Regionalization**

Merrill and Richard Adams explained that they were new to the Town of Middlefield at the time of regionalization and decided to get involved in the process. They reviewed some of the history of the process of regionalization and shared their experience of working together with many people in both towns.

They attended a town meeting in February, 1968 to authorize a resolution to hold a referendum in both towns. He recalls that there were almost 300 people at the meeting and it was debated and approved 196-78. There were still people, however, who were afraid of losing the town's identity and its independence. Merrill Adams added that the people in Middlefield did not want to go over to Durham with those farmers.

Mrs. Adams stated that there were also kids who had been playing football and the new district would not have football. Other people felt it would cost too much money and some people didn't feel like it would be a good match. However, nothing would have warned them that there was a groundswell of opposition. On the day of the referendum, the vote was 472 in favor and 486 opposed and they were stunned.

The town fathers and school boards of both towns asked to take the vote again because they didn't feel people understood how important it was for the children. Mr. Adams spoke to Mickey Fowler and Jack Lyman and was asked to attend a meeting at the Lyman Homestead. Mr. Adams called the Secretary of State's office and the Elections Bureau and the superintendents and school boards and various lawyers and no one could come up with any reason why another town meeting couldn't be called to try again. A

group of 50 to 60 people got together to organize the effort and they called a second town meeting in two weeks. People were assigned to visit the eligible voters in the towns and the town meeting was held on March 18, 1968 with almost 600 people in the room. The vote that evening was 429 to 126 in favor of calling a new referendum.

People noticed that it looked like there were 57 more voters who attended the original referendum than there were votes cast and the margin of 14 was in question. Mr. Adams created a flyer showing how to operate the voting machine and, at the second referendum, almost 1,400 people participated in Middlefield, with a vote of 851 to 519 in favor. Durham voted yes at that time also.

In two weeks, a Board of Education was elected with four votes from each town. The eight candidates spoke at a town meeting and Jack Lyman, Julian Thayer, Bob Mason and Phil Sheehan were elected from Middlefield. In Durham, it was Mark Spatuzzi, Charles Chace and two others. Mrs. Adams reminded everyone that, in those days, everything was done in a big room, allowing everyone to speak.

Following that, there was a Building Committee that had to approve the construction of the new high school and a budget needed to be approved. The vote was held by paper ballot and was handed to the Registrar of Voters who sat in the front of the room. Overwhelming support of the budget came from Middlefield.

Mr. Adams explained that a group was put together in 1966 by each town, with the strong support of the State Board of Education, to develop the Plan of Regionalization. He reviewed what was included in the report and explained that hearings were well-attended. Some of the members of the group were Mark Spatuzzi, Julian Thayer, Dorian Nelson, John Lyman, John Ferretti, George Eames, Greg Curtis, Dave Bascom, Tyler Smith and Pasquale Rinaldi.

Mrs. Adams reviewed that 51 years later, who could know what would happen with school populations. Studies have been done over the years she noted that Durham and Middlefield experienced about the same growth for a long time, until Durham expanded further. The configuration of the board was changed to reflect that, with six members from Durham and four from Middlefield. Mrs. Adams noted that it was important to participate in a democracy where everyone's voice counted. Mr. Adams stated that Middlefield schools were Public School (now known as Center School), Chestnut Hill School (now John Lyman School) and Memorial. In Durham, it was Brewster, Korn and Durham High School (now Strong School).

Dr. Veronesi explained that she had wanted Mr. and Mrs. Adams to be part of this conversation because she felt that the history of this district is part of the tapestry of where it is now. The idea of participatory democracy is part of why the board wanted to have this conversation so that voices can be heard and there can be dialogue that is different from what happens at a Board of Education meeting. She thanked Mr. and Mrs. Adams for their insights and noted that everyone is now part of history, making new decisions for the future.

A question was asked about the history of the two programs and Mrs. Adams explained that, at the time, Bud Church was getting his doctorate at UCONN and met Vince Rogers who had written a book called The Open Classroom. Mrs. Adams was the organizer in Middlefield and Gladys Levine worked in Durham. They petitioned the board to try it and there ended up being an open classroom at Brewster School for a year, growing to two classrooms and then not enough room. It eventually moved to Center School, with half of the school being a traditional program and the other half being an open program.

These first classrooms were a little different from the program now at John Lyman, but the same idea that kids needed to take charge of their own learning. The first classes were formed after regionalization.

Another question was asked if this program was developed to be more about arts and music and Mrs. Adams stated that it didn't start out that way and she felt that the real interest in the arts started at Lyman. Christine Davis, Lyman teacher added that the HOT (higher order thinking) school program is an arts integration program with the state and the district did not get it the first time they applied for it. There has always been democratic practice at Lyman and philosophies that started with open classroom, but evolved into student voice and student choice. She explained that the HOT school is totally separate from integrated day, but they go hand-in-hand.

Mr. Moore added that Lyman School began to host the open classroom in 1981 as well as the traditional program. After the 1990 renovation of Brewster School, the contemporary program was then moved to Brewster. Mrs. Adams added that she visited Brewster when she was on the board and felt that the systems were very much the same.

#### **Plan of Regionalization: Suggested Amendments**

Mr. Moore explained that, in January of this year, the board voted to have a program adjustment with K-2 at Brewster, 3-5 at Memorial, 6-8 at Strong and the high school. They also want to pursue the revised HOT program throughout all of the schools. In order to do that, they found that more room was needed at Brewster and they needed to decide what would happen with Lyman. Minor adjustments are also needed at Memorial. That resulted in the need for a bond referendum to make those improvements.

While the referendum was being prepared, the bond counsel indicated that the language in the initial Regional Plan did not include closing a school and it needed to be amended. They have found other regional school districts had the same problem and received legal opinions on that. It was then decided not to proceed with the bond issue and to amend the Regionalization Plan.

Two amendments have been suggested, one because of the closing of a school and the other regarding election of board members. Mr. Moore reviewed the language that the board will act on at its next meeting, beginning with the original language and adding "required to best serve the students of the district as established including the alteration, expansion or closure of district school buildings."

The board would also propose to add, "Additionally, Regional School District 13, will maintain at least one active school in both the towns of Durham and Middlefield that educates students of determined grade levels. The Board of Education will hold at least one public hearing to receive input from both Durham and Middlefield communities before determining the programs and facilities required to best serve the students of the district as established including the alteration, expansion, or closure of district school buildings."

Mr. Moore explained that the report includes the history that was spoken about tonight, some of the language from the original report and a series of what's happened in the 52 years since regionalization.

Once the board acts on this amendment, it gets submitted for review for filing with the State Board of Education. There will be public hearings in both towns, followed by a referendum on the language which must pass in both towns. They are hoping to have the referendum in January, with public hearings held in December.

Mr. Moore then reviewed that the Town of Durham made a charter revision in 2006 which required Board of Education members to be elected at the November elections rather than at the May town meeting. The Town of Durham asked for this to be included in the amendment, "The election of Board of Education Members from the Town of Durham shall be in the manner as prescribed by Sections 2.1(6) and 6.1 of the Town of Durham Charter and serve a term of four years." Right now, board members are elected in May for a term of three years. This language does not apply to Middlefield, though Middlefield does have to vote on it.

There were questions from the public about how they would learn the candidates' views and how it would work having the board members elected differently from each town.

Kindra Liptak, from Middlefield, asked why they wouldn't go back to equal representation on the board and Mr. Yamartino explained that state statute governs the school district and states that the representation would be by population. Every 10 years, the State Department of Education will look at the level of the population and rebalance as necessary. Dr. Veronesi stated that the advice from the attorney was to wait until the next census to look at that. She agreed to put this information on the website tomorrow morning. Mr. Adams reviewed that while the towns were very similar at the time of regionalization, it was true that Middlefield was 43 percent and Durham was 57 percent and was trending in that direction. Cheryl Pizzo, from Middlefield, felt that the original plan was to only come together for high school and continue to have the other schools in each town. Mr. Adams agreed that the philosophy was that the two towns would be equally represented, however the atmosphere of constitutional law regarding this type of decision has changed. It is no longer simply up to the communities and is now a matter for federal courts. Mrs. Pizzo felt that the original agreement was sending the message that there needed to be equity.

Maya Liss asked if the language that was on the slides is what will appear on the ballot and Mr. Moore explained that there will be public hearings on the language and then the referendum. Dr. Veronesi noted that the actual question on the ballot has not yet been finalized. Mrs. Liss also asked how many other towns have their board members elected in different ways and Dr. Veronesi did not know of any towns that do that, but she will get that information. She also mentioned that there are not many districts that elect board members via the town meeting method. Mr. Yamartino added that people on the board currently have overlapping terms and did not feel that electing them differently would be detrimental. He also noted that people have been on the board for different lengths of time. Dr. Friedrich felt that it would be an advantage because you would not want everyone turned over at the same time. Mrs. Geraci felt that the board members volunteer their time because they value the education of the children so much.

Another member of the public asked what makes this language different than when Korn School was closed. Mr. Moore explained that the original language included that the Board of Education could determine the programs and facilities of the district and they are now adding the language regarding alteration and closure to make it more specific. Dr. Veronesi added that the bond counsel also stated that they if asked they could not give a clean bond opinion without that language.

John Szewczyk, from Durham, added that he felt that the board should move forward with the amendment regarding the elections as Durham had passed it back in 2006. He noted that holding the elections at the polls offers a greater opportunity for people to vote than a town meeting does.

A member of the public asked if the state has approved these revisions yet and Mr. Moore explained that the board hasn't even approved them yet. The revisions will be filed with the state, but they do not approve it. He reiterated that once the board approves it, there will be public hearings and the report will

be published. She continued to ask about phase 2 of the alterations to Brewster School and Mr. Moore explained that any decision on the alterations is delayed until after the referendum. Dr. Taylor added that there is no concrete plan about a second phase and it is only in discussion at this point.

Dr. Taylor also agreed that the board members should be elected by the full population and voting in November would be the way to do that. He wondered why Middlefield wouldn't allow that option to the voters in their town as well. Mrs. Adams added that she had helped with Charter Revision and they recognized that when board members are elected at the polls, most of the candidates would come through a town committee and would become a little bit more political. It would also be harder for people who are independents to run for the Board of Education. Dr. Taylor just wanted to allow Middlefield to decide if they wanted their representatives voted in in that way. He also added that it would become very difficult from a logistics standpoint because some people would come on the board in May and others in November. That would make it difficult to vote on officers as well. Dr. Taylor would just want to see Middlefield be able to vote on whether they wanted their representatives elected that way or not.

Mr. Yamartino explained that state statute says that the legislative body of the town can determine the method by which people are elected to the Board of Education. Durham's legislative body chose to have that done with the elections. He believes it would be wrong for the Board of Education to tell Middlefield they need to do it that way. Mr. Yamartino felt that that would have to be voted on at a town meeting. Dr. Taylor added that, according to state statute, minority representation does not apply to this. Mr. Moore explained that the board will continue to debate these issues and come together with a decision.

### **Community Conversation: Vision of the Future and Associated Budget Implications**

Mr. Moore explained that the budget process will begin in January and the board has come up with a list of issues. Dr. Veronesi stated that they have specifically talked about upgrading playground equipment but also talk conceptually about gifted and talented programming. Dr. Veronesi explained that they would like to hear from the public about their thoughts on future items for the budget.

Maya Liss felt that arts integration has been wonderful and she would like to see that continue. She is also interested in hearing about the gifted and talented program. A Middlefield resident asked about students with special needs and Dr. Veronesi explained that they are working on addressing the needs of students who are significantly struggling. The Middlefield resident also asked why the minutes from the October meeting stated that the amendment would need to be approved by the state, but she is now being told that it does not. Dr. Veronesi explained that it simply needs to be submitted, not approved.

Rick Parmelee stated that his dad was on the Board of Education in the 1940s and he too felt it would be a good idea to join forces with our neighbors. His parents were strong advocates of forming the regional system. He reviewed how the elections have been handled at town meetings and felt that it should be done at the polls.

Oanh Stephan felt the district is severely lacking opportunities for talented kids in arts and music. Mr. Yamartino asked if she was talking about the STEAM programming integrating more of the arts and Mrs. Stephan agreed. Another parent agreed that animation is not there, illustration and design is not there. Mrs. Stephan stated that the high school students are being encouraged to take a study hall rather than arts and music.

Another Middlefield resident asked for class sizes and scheduling to be put on the budget list. She stressed that it's about what is best for the kids. She felt it was important to attract people to stay in the

district's schools. Another member of the public felt it would be great to have languages taught in the lower grades. Special education and transitions were also discussed.

A member of the public would also like to see more AP offerings. Mr. Moore explained that a lot of students want to learn more about business, checking and banking. Another member of the public would like to see the exchange program fully funded. Mr. Moore added that there is a lot of information about the Chinese visit in the newsletter which he found to be rewarding and life-changing.

A member of the public asked for continuity through the transition at Memorial, possibly bringing their teacher with them, as well as a lot of communication. She feels that merging the programs is a great thing, but is concerned that it happens the right way and the teachers are prepared. Someone else mentioned that storage is a problem and social-emotional was also added to the list.

Kindra Liptak asked if cursive writing is still taught and someone explained that it is more done on a volunteer basis and is not taught. It was also explained that it is taught for one year. Someone else mentioned that there is also nowhere that the kids are required to learn how to type. Another member of the public stated that she loved the Portrait of the Citizen but was terrified at how little social studies instruction her sixth grader received.

John Szewczyk suggested as much diversity training as possible, to include things like homelessness and mental health. Transportation was also mentioned. Another member of the public asked if the Board of Education has considered putting things out to the townspeople to volunteer for, such as playgrounds. Dr. Veronesi stated that they are looking at what is available for playground equipment now and a member of the public mentioned a gaga pit.

A member of the public suggested more connections with nature which would encourage environmental stewardship. She mentioned that there are a lot of woods right near Memorial School. She also stated that the Rockfall Foundation owns a lot of property and they are all about environmental stewardship. She also suggested linking service opportunities with projects throughout the year.

Mr. Moore thanked Mr. and Mrs. Adams for their insights and thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting. Mrs. Booth also clarified that if someone emails the entire board, Mr. Moore will answer the email.

### **Adjournment**

Meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First