

Revised

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, October 13, 2021 at 7:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug High School.

Board members present: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich (by phone), Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino

Board members absent: Ms. Geraci and Mr. Hicks

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mr. Brough, Human Resources Specialist, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology and Mrs. Gonzalez, Principal of Strong School

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Moore explained that he would like to amend the agenda to move item 4 before item 3 because the Coginchaug reporters are not present tonight, but they would like to show something that they did for the board.

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the agenda, as amended, with item 4 moving ahead of item 3.

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

CRHS Reporters - Nora O'Connell, Logan Palardy and Rebecca Tobin

Mr. Moore explained that the CRHS reporters were not present tonight, but that students performed at the Durham Fair and played a video for the board with Becca Tobin as a soloist. Mr. Moore also reported that the football team is 5-0 and there are senior nights for soccer and volleyball also happening.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education regular meeting - September 22, 2021

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to approve the minutes of the September 22, 2021 Board of Education regular meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the September 22, 2021 Board of Education regular meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried, with Dr. Friedrich abstaining.

Next Board Meeting - November 10, 2021 at 7:00 PM

Committee Reports

A. Utilization Committee Meeting - September 30, 2021

Dr. Taylor reported that the Utilization Committee met on September 30th. Korn School needs to go to a vote for the formalized transfer to Durham. Some negotiation components are still needed before that can happen, but it should be soon. They also discussed general building updates, current projects and capital needs. They had a brief discussion on security and a grant had been submitted in June. The previously-funded projects have been implemented, such as window film.

They also discussed combining the Utilization and ERC Committees, hopefully after the November vote.

Mrs. Petrella noted that there had been some discussion about the field house and she would like to see that move forward, perhaps with something in this year's budget. She also asked if there has been any discussion on lighting for the fields. Mr. Moore stated that they had not discussed lighting and have turned over the field house analysis to the Building Committee. Mr. Moore would like to see a building constructed on the slab and have the booster clubs work to outfit it.

B. Well-Being Committee Meeting - October 5, 2021

Mrs. Caramanello reported that the Well-Being Committee welcomed the new administrators from Cuginchaug and Strong. They talked about school reopening and the COVID response which went smoothly. Masks will be continued until the next update from the State. Activities and programs are back in full swing.

They got an update from Dr. Schuch on Reimagining Education and he has received a great response. A great deal of time was spent discussing bullying that has been occurring in the district. Mrs. Gonzalez had already spoken to several students to try to get to the bottom of what was going on. They also discussed involving the SRO, having assemblies and using advisory time to address these issues.

Dr. Schuch also reported on an incentive program for employees to get a physical and completing a health screening questionnaire.

Communications

Mr. Moore received an email from Sunny, the teacher from China, who was interested in getting some communications started among the students again. He spoke with Dr. Schuch and Mr. Warner and they will be working on that.

Mr. Moore also talked with a lot of people at night soccer and football games about the great facility, except for the lights and bathrooms.

Mrs. Petrella spoke with the Middlefield Democratic Town Committee and their basic issue was John Lyman School. She tried to answer their questions as best as she could and address some of the misunderstandings that are out there.

Superintendent's Report (if applicable)

Dr. Schuch introduced Mrs. Gonzalez, the new principal at Strong School. He is excited about the experience and energy she brings to the district.

Dr. Schuch also noted how impressed he was with the size of the crowd at the last football game and stated that he has never been to a game where the home fans and visiting fans sit together. He was also happy to see a group of very young people running around while the game was being played. He, too, would like to see lights and a field house.

Dr. Schuch also reported that vaccine approval for 5- to 11-year-olds may possibly be available as early as the end of this month. Families will obviously make those decisions along with their healthcare providers. They have heard from a lot of parents who have been waiting for this. He added that all employees are in the front-line category to receive boosters if they desire.

Interest in Reimagining Education has exceeded Dr. Schuch's expectations. They had 33 participants take part over six sessions on Zoom, 20 participants in-person on August 16th, another 26 on September 27th and close to 40 signed up for November 2nd. They also surveyed people after the sessions and over 80 percent want to stay connected to the work. Many people are also interested in taking part in national training, with two going through it in the summer and seven more scheduled for this fall. Several more have expressed interest in training during next spring. Dr. Schuch feels this is important as this is not just his work or vision.

Dr. Schuch had a great time attending the Durham Fair and saw the high school's musical performances on two days. He believed the fair did live up to its hype and the vibe in the schools prior to it was great. He was also amazed how many of the district's families and staff are involved with the fair. Dr. Schuch noted that both his wife and daughter also felt very welcomed by the community.

Director of Finance's Report

Mrs. Neubig reported that the district has expended 21 percent of the budget and received 26 percent of revenue. MTA is at 8 percent expended and 5 percent revenue received.

Mrs. Maloney had distributed the budget calendar to everyone. Town allocations will be calculated based on October 1st enrollment and budgets will be due to Central Office on December 3rd. In January, there has historically been a Board retreat and then the budget will be finalized at the end of January by the administrative team and presented it to the board on February 9th. The board will then have budget meetings every two weeks. A meeting with the Boards of Finance and Boards of Selectmen has also been included which could also be with the Finance Committee. The district meeting will be on May 2nd, with the referendum on May 3rd.

Mrs. Booth asked to confirm the date for the retreat and also mentioned the number of meetings held during the budget cycle. Mr. Moore will see if they can come up with a weekday date for the retreat in mid- to early-January. Mr. Roraback suggested that the retreat can be held via Zoom and Mr. Moore stated that it could be part of a board meeting as well. Dr. Taylor felt that the retreat is used to discuss the goals and objectives of the budget and would like to see that held even earlier. Dr. Schuch also mentioned that they will be bringing a draft of the Strategic Plan to the board at the December meeting and assumes that the budget priorities would be included in that plan.

Mr. Yamartino would like to see the BOE/BOS/BOF meeting earlier in the budget process and Mr. Moore stated that, in the past, they have had the Finance Committee meet in November which is prior to the budget process. Mr. Yamartino also mentioned that he has proposed to work with Mrs. Neubig to try to put together a 20-year capital plan and how to dovetail that in with the current planning and get the towns to agree to start funding capital. He then explained his rationale for wanting to do that, noting that the district cannot save for capital projects due to state statutes but the towns can. Mr. Yamartino would like to do this early in the budget process, so that the towns can consider starting it this year in their capital budgets.

Mr. Moore stated that they discussed Mr. Yamartino's proposition in the Utilization Committee meeting where Ms. Geraci and Dr. Taylor had some concerns and it was agreed to bring it to the ERC meeting before bringing it back to the board. Dr. Taylor felt that they needed a legal opinion on the idea of having funds sitting with the towns. Mr. Yamartino noted that the town can reserve funds for anything it deems necessary. Dr. Taylor felt it was a control issue which is why he feels there needs to be a strong legal recommendation on what that process would look like and how it would be configured. Mrs. Petrella felt it was an interesting idea, but also wondered if it was legal.

Mrs. Neubig mentioned that it will be 2 percent that the district can save, but Mr. Yamartino felt that it needed to be closer to 7 or 8 percent.

Mrs. Booth asked if the sink hole has been repaired and Mrs. Neubig stated that they just received a quote and the work will be done soon.

Mrs. Neubig also reviewed that they had an ERC meeting last December where Kevin Nichols from Morgan Stanley discussed the pension plan. Mr. Nichols has some information and she asked if he should come back to the ERC first or directly to the full board, which she would prefer. The pension plan sits at \$11.5 million and is funded at 90 percent, with 130 members. Mrs. Neubig felt that they may be able to be a little bit more aggressive, but also wants to protect the funding ratio.

The current allocation is at 75/25 and the most it would go up is to 80/20, so Mr. Yamartino didn't feel it would be a huge move and would be okay with leaving it. Mr. Moore suggested waiting until they get his report.

New Business

A. Vote to approve CRHS Model UN field trip request

Dr. Schuch explained that is a three-day trip to Boston where they simulate a UN meeting. They will be following the venue guidelines, which, in this case, include a vaccine requirement. Mr. Moore stated that

his granddaughter was in Model UN and ended up teaching Model UN in Beijing and was invited to do that again in Dubai.

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to approve the CRHS Model UN field trip request to Boston, Massachusetts on Friday, February 4 to Sunday, February 6, 2022.

All in favor of approving the CRHS Model UN field trip request to Boston, Massachusetts on Friday, February 4 to Sunday, February 6, 2022: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Public Comment

Samantha Beaudoin, from Middlefield, stated that she was the parent who sent the Tik Tok videos to the school and noted that bullying is something she has experienced with her daughters in the last couple of years, but this has reached another level. She has spent hours going through the videos and it is heartbreaking. She has received over 50 personal messages and over 100 comments on Facebook from people who have found their own children on there as well as people saying that they pulled their child out of the district for this reason years ago. She agrees that it is possibly worse because of COVID. Last year, she talked to the school about in-person bullying and really didn't feel heard. This time, she talked to Mr. Fitzgerald who gave her a call back and explained what they plan to do. She stressed that this is the mental health of the kids and they need to feel safe and comfortable in school. Her kids are now in therapy because of this. She asked the board to not let this get swept under the rug and to address it on a larger level.

Adjournment

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of adjourning the regular meeting of the Board of Education: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First