

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, July 6, 2022 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello (arrived late), Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone

Board members absent: Mrs. Darcy

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mr. Brough, Human Resource Specialist, and Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology

Dr. Schuch asked for a moment of silence in honor of Blake Manzione, the learner from Strong Middle School, who passed away last month.

Dr. Schuch called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the agenda, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

### **Election of Officers**

Dr. Schuch asked for nominations for the position of board Chair.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion to nominate Mrs. Petrella as Chair. Hearing no other nominations, motion to elect Mrs. Petrella as chair carried unanimously.*

Mrs. Petrella asked for a nomination for Secretary.

*Mr. Mennone made a motion to nominate Mrs. Dahlheimer as Secretary. Hearing no other nominations, motion to elect Mrs. Dahlheimer as secretary carried unanimously.*

Mrs. Petrella then asked for a nomination for Treasurer.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion to nominate Mr. Stone as Treasurer. Hearing no other nominations, motion to elect Mr. Stone as treasurer carried unanimously.*

### **MTA Presentation**

Samantha Winkler thanked the board members who attended the MTA graduation. The program began about 19 years ago to help students with learning difficulties who turn 18 but still require public education. Students used to stay in high school, continuing with the life skills program, but that doesn't prepare them for the real world. The transition program is held at Wesleyan's campus and students from

the district as well as others from around the state attend. The students usually come into the program after their senior year in high school and stay until they are 21 or 22 (or until their goals are met).

The students work on three different categories, including vocational. They work at an internship, work with job shadows, learn about applications and take part in mock interviews. Academics includes life skills where they learn things like budgeting, cooking, banking and safety, but some students are looking to do more educationally. The program has a good relationship with Middlesex Community College and students take classes there. The students also work on social skills, including an outing at least once a week that the students plan.

One of the highlights of the program is Wes Buds, which is a Wesleyan student-run group who are peer mentors. They plan something on campus at least once a month and the MTA students are thrilled to take part.

New legislation states that students graduate on their 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, so graduation will no longer be held for everyone in June. This was the last year for the full graduation in June. All of the students graduating this year were from outside District 13. Ms. Winkler then played a slide show and told everyone about the students. The students all read a speech at graduation.

Ms. Winkler added that a student from District 13 will age out and graduate in November this year and the next one will be two years later. The incoming class includes five students from the district. Ms. Winkler added that Wes Buds has put together a proposal to start a drama class, with 50 percent of the students from MTA and 50 percent from Wesleyan. They hope to put on a full production and it looks like it will happen next spring.

Mrs. Petrella reminded everyone that the program is not only self-sufficient, but makes money for the district as well.

Dr. Schuch added that Mrs. Keane is also very involved in the program and he thanked her for her hard work on the program. He thanked Ms. Winkler for her great work at MTA, but also for stepping in to be the interim principal at Memorial.

### **Public Comment**

Carl Stoup, from Durham, thanked the board for keeping the meetings available online, but was not happy with the fact that the public cannot participate. Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that they have been working on that and they will have an update by the next meeting.

Mrs. Petrella then welcomed Mariah Roy, from Durham, to the board. Linda Darcy, from Middlefield, was not able to make it tonight.

### **Approval of Minutes**

#### **A. Board of Education Regular Meeting - June 8, 2022**

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on June 8, 2022.*

Mr. Mennone asked to add the word “ago” after 15 years on page 2, section D, and the word “they” before gone to nationals.

*In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on June 8, 2022, as amended: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

### **Superintendent’s Report (if applicable)**

Dr. Schuch welcomed Mrs. Roy to the board and Mrs. Darcy in her absence. He also congratulated the newly-elected officers.

### **Staff Reports**

#### **A. Director of Finance Report (if applicable)**

Mrs. Neubig reported the general fund has been expended at 98 percent of the budget and 99.7 percent of the budgeted revenue has been received. MTA is 70 percent expended and 69 percent of revenue received. Full bonding funds were received in May and Mrs. Neubig is estimating an end-of-year surplus of just north of \$200,000. That amount will go into the fund balance to help balance the 2023-2024 budget.

The auditors will begin their field work on August 8<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. Neubig added that the State has awarded the money to a program called School Meals Assistance Revenue for Transition, or SMART funds. They will provide funds to participating school districts to help families who need to complete paperwork to get back on free and reduced lunches. Mrs. Neubig felt that the district can hold off on a potential price increase until they see how much they will receive from that fund.

#### **B. Staffing update - Kevin Brough**

Dr. Schuch reviewed that the change to the budget reduced staffing significantly and the process for making that work is ongoing. He added that Mrs. Stone and Mrs. Trainer were at the meeting to answer any questions about programs at the high school as well.

Mr. Brough stated that four teaching positions at the high school and 3.5 teaching positions at Strong School were cut. In doing that, they are looking at every position in the district, including retirements, to try to put people in various areas in order to allow them to keep their jobs. This year, they had to tell four individuals that they no longer had positions in the district. They were all untenured teachers. Mr. Brough wished them all the best of luck.

All classes that were offered last year will be offered this year as well. It has been a while since the district has had this type of movement in teachers, so they looked at retirements and voluntary transfers. There have been two voluntary transfers to date. The next step will be involuntary transfers which is allowed by contract. Those transfers are based on seniority, areas of certification and previous experience.

Dr. Schuch added that the district is also going through the normal retirement/resignation cycle. He noted that the library/media specialist at the high school who was also a part-time Latin teacher has resigned. They are currently posting for the Latin piece of that position. If there is a situation where the district cannot offer something that was offered last year, that will be communicated to everyone. He added that class offerings are contingent on enrollment in the class as well.

Mrs. Stone explained that they have looked at getting average class size numbers up and they will look at the classes with low numbers first. Both she and Mrs. Trainer described courses that are currently held at the high school. Dr. Schuch explained that the master schedule has some challenges and they don't want to see anyone have to choose between subjects they'd like to take. Mrs. Stone noted that the schedule has to be finalized by the end of July. They also explained that if a class does not run this year, it will still remain in the programming and will run in another year. Dr. Schuch added that they are looking at creative ways to offer subjects as well.

Mrs. Petrella asked if a class has been canceled in the past due to low enrollment and Mr. Brough felt that that has happened before. Dr. Schuch hoped that online learning can become an option as well. Mr. Moore felt that teaching an SAT prep course is not the best use of a teacher and Dr. Schuch explained that his experience has been that SAT prep is done after school or through tutoring. Mr. Moore also suggested that the Latin class could be outsourced and/or online. Mrs. Stone added that there are currently two students in Latin IV.

Dr. Schuch reviewed that they are not changing the fact that there are eight periods in a day, so there are limitations. However, they are open to suggestions on other ways to do things.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked what professional development is being offered to teachers who are moving grade levels. Mr. Brough will be working with the building principals on that. Mrs. Dahlheimer was concerned about OG training for teachers moving to the elementary level. Mrs. Caramanello added that there is a mentor system as well that can help. Mr. Moore asked about the talented and gifted program at Strong School and Dr. Schuch explained that it will continue.

Mrs. Petrella asked if there has been any thought to expanding opportunities for students who are career-oriented. Dr. Schuch felt that that should be part of what the district does. Mrs. Trainer explained that they are revamping the careers class that students take in their junior/senior year in trying to support the individual students' paths after graduation and help them make connections with mentors. Mrs. Petrella was thinking more of career development in earlier grades and Mrs. Trainer stated that that is their goal.

## **New Business**

### **A. Set BOE self-evaluation meeting**

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that the board has talked about doing a self-evaluation and Mrs. Dahlheimer had hoped to hear back from CAFE by today, but has not. She asked everyone to keep a Saturday in September or October in mind to hopefully meet to Powder Ridge. She will send a survey out to everyone.

**B. Approval of committee member appointees**

Mrs. Petrella stated that Mr. Mennone has volunteered to serve on the Pension committee and she recommended Jim Armstrong for that committee as well. Mr. Armstrong was recently elected to the Board of Finance in Middlefield.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to accept Jim Armstrong for the Pension committee.*

*In favor of accepting Jim Armstrong for the Pension committee: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.*

Mrs. Petrella added that there is also an opening on the Finance committee for a board-appointed position and Peter Neidhardt, from Middlefield, came forward for that. Mr. Neidhardt has an extensive business background.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to accept Peter Neidhardt for the Finance committee.*

*In favor of accepting Peter Neidhardt for the Finance committee: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.*

Mrs. Petrella explained that they hope to use the Building committee very extensively in the future, with the field house, Pickett Lane and restructuring/reorganizing buildings in the district. She would like to recommend Nick Faiella, from Middlefield, who volunteered to serve on that committee.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to accept Nick Faiella for the Building committee.*

*In favor of accepting Nick Faiella for the Building committee: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.*

Mrs. Petrella also recommended Howard Weisberg, from Durham, for the Building committee. Mr. Weisberg is a professional engineer and City Engineer in Meriden for eight years as well as the Director of Public Works for three years. He now works at the DOT.

*Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to accept Howard Weisberg for the Building committee.*

*In favor of accepting Howard Weisberg for the Building committee: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.*

**C. Support Staff grievance hearing**

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that a grievance was brought forth by the Regional School District 13 Support Staff Union, Local 4914, on March 16, 2022. Board members then introduced themselves.

A representative from the union began by presenting the grievance and distributed copies to the board members. One of the documents is case law from the Michigan Law Review and the other is a list of 20 bargaining unit members' names.

The union believes that the Board of Education has violated Appendix B, section 5 of the contract which specifically states that retirement benefits shall be provided in accordance with the District's pension plan. The union represents the support staff, including teachers' assistants, clerical workers, people who work directly with students and with students with the highest needs. She reviewed the role of the support staff.

The union wants to be sure that the contract is being enforced. The union's position is that the Board of Education has arbitrarily and capriciously administered the plan. Folks become eligible for the pension after being employed for one year or a specific number of hours in a year.

The union hopes to not change the contract language as it is not specifically detailed and are looking to streamline the process about the pension plan.

The 20 people involved have worked in the district for years, from two to 20 years. Some are looking at retirement, but were not able to contribute to the pension plan until recently.

The union representative then went on to review the case law about a continuation of violations. Every time the Board of Education fails to inform someone of their eligibility for the pension plan, the clock on the grievance restarts. The union's position is that the district has an obligation to inform members of these plan benefits.

The remedy that the union seeks is for the district to make their members whole for their contributions that were not made by the Board of Education from the moment they would have been eligible to when they actually started making contributions. That date is written on all of the pension forms and the union can provide that information. They also ask that the Board of Education creates some type of very clear system so folks will be notified of their eligibility.

Mr. Mennone asked if there was anything contractually that states that there must be regular notification or is that process even addressed. The union representative explained that it doesn't say anything other than the Board of Education is the plan administrator who is responsible for the day-to-day administration and operation of the plan. There is a Pension committee appointed as well. Mr. Mennone asked if the employees receive all of that information at time of employment and the union representative did not know the answer to that.

Mrs. Neubig stated that new employees do receive a packet that includes pension information, but she couldn't speak to what happened in the past. The information is also on the district's website under staff resources. Mr. Moore asked if this issue had come up in the last contract negotiations and the union representative confirmed that it had not. Mr. Mennone asked how many contractual cycles have passed

that the union hasn't caught this and the union representative stated that they just found about this in March.

The union representative explained that a union member had called and explained that she was planning on retiring. She had been making contributions for almost 12 years, but just realized that there had been an additional 10 years that she missed. She stated that she was told she wasn't eligible when she first started. The union then asked other members if anyone else was in a similar situation and that list grew much larger. Folks who have retired have also called her on this issue.

Mr. Moore asked if one of their concerns is satisfied by knowing that everything is included in the current employee package and the union representative stated that as long as it is streamlined and folks know they are eligible. She does believe that information is a good start as long as the ability for enrollment in the pension is included. Mr. Moore then asked if the union expects the Board of Education to provide contributions and the employees to provide their contributions as well. The union representative hoped that the Board would pay for those years that are missing and individual members would probably want to contribute as well. Mr. Moore felt that the Board couldn't be sure if the individual employees want to make their own contributions and the union representative noted that they would talk to the employees if a settlement was proposed. She did recognize that it may be cost-prohibitive for some employees.

Mr. Mennone asked how many times the pension has been negotiated within the last 10 years and the union representative explained that pensions are not negotiated during contract negotiations and she did not know when the pension was last negotiated. She has been with the local since 2016 and it has not been negotiated since then.

Mr. Mennone asked if anyone from the union sits down with a new employee to let them know what is provided and the union representative explained that the last union president was here for about 25 years before she retired and there are building reps. She believed that new employees are asked if they want to be a dues-paying member of the union and then they review the particulars. Mr. Mennone then asked whose responsibility it is to talk to new employees about the pension plan and the union representative stated that their position was that it was the responsibility of the plan administrator. She then compared the pension to health insurance open enrollment.

Mr. Moore and Mr. Mennone felt that health insurance is completely different and changes every year, with specific open enrollment dates. Mr. Roraback added that pension enrollment dates would be different for every employee and asked if it was the district's responsibility to notify the employee on their one-year anniversary. Mr. Mennone reviewed that some employees choose not to enroll in the pension plan, but then end up staying with the district for many more years.

Mrs. Caramanello explained that she worked in the district for 10 years and felt that the years that these employees have been with the district speaks volumes to them as employees, but she wondered who the union reps were and why they didn't notify the employees after their year of employment. She believes this would be a grievance with the union.

The union representative stated that people went to Central Office and were told they really shouldn't be a part of it. Mrs. Roy asked if the people talked to their union rep after being told that and the union representative did not know if that happened. She offered to bring the employees to a later hearing to relate their experience.

Mrs. Caramanello asked how many paraprofessionals the district has in a given year and the union representative stated that there are 48 bargaining unit members, but did not know the breakdown between paras and clerical staff. Mrs. Caramanello asked why all of the other employees knew about the pension plan and the union representative stated that is why they feel this has been arbitrary and capricious. Some people knew and some people didn't know.

Mrs. Roy asked if there was documentation stating what was in the new employee packets for the 20 employees at the time they were hired and if so, did they sign something initially refusing the pension plan. The union representative had no information about that from the employees and she wasn't sure employees would even remember. Mrs. Roy wondered if it was the Board's job to contact an employee who initially refused the pension plan to ask if they were sure. The union representative stated that their position is if someone declined the pension, the Board of Education did their job.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if employees needed to formally opt-in or opt-out and if that is not stated in the contract, Central Office contacting employees is above and beyond the contract. The union representative stated that the contract doesn't saying anything about that, but in the past, some employees say they received an email others did not.

Mrs. Neubig stated that that practice has been in place since before she arrived in the district. Mrs. Neubig stated that this is no judgment on the amazing employees and what they contribute to the district, but they are here to talk about whether the contract was violated or not.

The union representative thanked the board for their time and questions.

Mrs. Petrella then declared the evidentiary portion of the hearing closed and the board recessed into a non-meeting room for the purpose of conducting deliberations regarding the grievance.

The Board then returned to the meeting.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, that the Board denies the Regional School District 13 Support Staff Union's, Local 4914, grievance dated March 16, 2022 and authorizes the board chair, with the administration and/or board counsel, to draft and issue a written decision to the union regarding the grievance.*

*In favor of the Board denying the Regional School District 13 Support Staff Union's, Local 4914, grievance dated March 16, 2022 and authorizing the board chair, with the administration and/or board counsel, to draft and issue a written decision to the union regarding the grievance: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.*

## **Communications**

Mrs. Petrella received a letter from Brian Read regarding the Memorial School art teacher which was referred to the superintendent. She also received an email from Cynthia Nick regarding high school algebra which was addressed by Mrs. Stone. She also received communication from Maya Perry-Lis

concerning elimination of the coding/tech-ed position at the high school which was also referred to the superintendent. There was another letter received today that went to Dr. Schuch.

Mrs. Caramanello asked when the enrollment study will be available and it was explained that that will take two months and should be ready by August. Mrs. Caramanello asked if they will schedule a special meeting in August or wait until September. Mrs. Neubig confirmed that they cannot make the presentation before August 10<sup>th</sup>, but she can distribute the report. Mrs. Caramanello did not want to wait until September if they don't have to. Mrs. Petrella also did not want to wait until September and asked if they can maybe just move the August meeting to a different date. Dr. Schuch suggested having a remote meeting, but to wait until the report is actually received before making a decision.

**Public Comment - at the end of the meeting should refer to items not on the agenda**

Maureen Funke, from Durham, hoped that it is just a mistake that DEI is not on the agenda tonight as she believes it should be on the agenda for every meeting. She hoped that updates would be done on a regular basis. Mrs. Funke also felt that not discussing anti-bullying at tonight's meeting is a big miss. She reiterated that some form of anonymous reporting technology should be available to students as it is totally ridiculous to expect students to put a piece of paper in a box while other students watch. Mrs. Funke felt that the majority of students do not feel comfortable reporting bullying and/or racism incidents. She added that she fully agrees with collaborating with community colleges.

**Adjournment**

*Mr. Stone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.*

*In favor of adjourning the regular meeting of the Board of Education: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

Meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First