

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, September 14, 2022 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

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

Board members absent: None

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mr. Brough, Human Resource Specialist, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology, and Mrs. Quarato, Learner-Centered Specialist.

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Approval of Agenda**

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

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

### **Work Session**

#### **A. Enrollment forecast/facility planning**

Mrs. Neubig introduced Mike Zuba who has done the district's enrollment projections since 2013. Mr. Zuba reviewed the enrollment drivers, including demographics and housing. The 2020 census came out last Fall and show the total population of both communities were on an increase up through the 2010 census, with a decline in 2020 of about 5 percent in Middlefield and 3 percent in Durham. All of the movement during the pandemic is not included in this census and they will hopefully update in about two or three years.

Mr. Zuba then reviewed the different age cohorts from the 2020 census. In 2010, Durham's median age was just over 42 and that has increased to almost 46. Middlefield was just over 43 and that has increased to almost 50. There was growth in Durham in the 55+ cohort and the 25-39 cohort. In Middlefield, there was growth in the 45+ cohort as well as the 20-34 cohort.

Mrs. Petrella commented that there seems to have been growth in the child-bearing ages. Mr. Zuba explained that in Durham, the cohort of females of child-bearing age has increased over the past 10 years but declined in Middlefield.

Mr. Zuba reported that there was a dip in overall births in 2020 to 74 that then picked up again in 2021 to 100 and is projected to be about 100 in 2022. Connecticut was one of the few states to see an increase from 2020 to 2021.

Looking at the demographic model and using the birth rates, they have projected births between 94 and 107 out to 2027. They also looked at current unemployment rates, which showed a big spike at the onset of the pandemic. Overall rates have been improving and are approaching pre-pandemic levels. Mr. Zuba explained that higher unemployment rates correlate with greater volatility in enrollment levels.

The housing market is one of the biggest drivers for generating school-aged children and shows about 170 total sales in the last several years, including the six months in 2022. Mr. Roraback asked if young families are still coming with the increase in mortgage rates and Mr. Zuba felt that it was specific to the communities. He felt that new buyers are also looking at property taxes when they are shopping. He did compare this July's sales to prior years and they are on par with the last several years. Mr. Zuba also noted that Fairfield County is humming along with no regard to interest rates, but communities in the middle of Connecticut are slowing down. Mr. Zuba summarized that sales pre-pandemic were about 160, so Durham and Middlefield did not see the same big spike that many other communities did.

Looking at the median sales price January through May, Durham was about \$400,000 in the last few years and Middlefield was about \$278,000 in the last two years. Mr. Zuba felt that the prices may come down as the mortgage rates go up. Housing permits have been fairly flat over the past couple of years, averaging four to five new permits with no new developments proposed. Mrs. Petrella asked if they looked at land available for potential development and Mr. Zuba explained that they did not do that. Mr. Roraback noted that both towns have been proactive in purchasing land for open space and asked if Mr. Zuba even knew what land would be potentially available. Mr. Zuba looked at the Plans of Conservation and Development and both affordable housing plans but found nothing specific. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the consensus would be that there is space for more homes and developments, but asked if that would warrant a boom in population. Mr. Zuba agreed that it may increase the population, but not at a large rate. Mr. Zuba explained that doing that type of projection would take a great deal of work, looking into land covenants. Dr. Schuch added that any rezoning would be done while looking at the impact on both the towns and the schools.

Looking at enrollment going back to 2006-2007, it was just under 2,200 students in the district. There has been an annual decline of about 3 percent, with a drop of about 800 students in the 2022-2023 school year. The enrollment has averaged just over 1,500 over the last five years, with the K-5 population being about 630, middle school at 60 and high school just under 500. There was a bit of an uptick over the last year in elementary of about 1 percent, however there was a decline in both middle school and high school, with an overall change of a 5 percent decline.

Looking at individual schools, Brewster preK-2 and Memorial 3-5 has been right about 350 over the last five to six years and Lyman K-4 has been declining, going from 260 back in 2016-2017 to 190 in 2021-2022. There was a big net immigration in 2016-2017 and net out-migration in 2020-2021. The middle school has been more toward out-migration and the high school had between 40 and 50 out-migration which has slowly declined over the last few years.

They also looked at individual students and showed that the last two years have been pretty steady. The greatest number of new students come in at the lower grades. Net immigration in middle school goes up and down from year to year. They are seeing a lower number of new students coming into the high school. Approximately 80 students attend other public high schools and about five students attend parochial schools.

Mr. Zuba went to explain what factors go into enrollment projections and noted that they assumed preK enrollment will average 32 students over the next decade. For the high projections, they used the high birth model and student immigration of .85 which is well above the historic average of .1. The medial model assumes 103 births annually and student immigration of .3. The low model assumes student immigration of .17.

Birth to K has rebounded to the historic average, at 1.34 in 2021-2022. There has been a lot of variability from year to year, but has recently averaged around 1.3. There has been some net out-migration of the past two years, with no big changes during the pandemic.

The low model projects about 1,280 students out 10 years, the median model is at 1,390 students and the high model is at 1,480 students. All three models are in decent agreement. Looking at housing, births and what's happening in the communities, they like to use three different models as communities use the data for different reasons. Mr. Zuba then reviewed the median model for all grade levels, showing the K-5 enrollment has bottomed out at just over 600 students and is projected to grow up to 630 in the next five years and another 50 students for the following five years. The 6-8 enrollment is projected to decline to just over 300 students and then slowly rise to just under 330. High school enrollment will continue to decline out to 2025-2026 and then be fairly flat at about 350 students for the remainder of the decade. Mr. Zuba then reviewed the individual schools, noting that they see pretty flat enrollment over the next five years at Lyman and Brewster and growth at Memorial of less than 10. All three will increase over the last five years of the decade.

Overall, enrollment is projected to be anywhere between 1,280 and 1,485. Median and high models are very similar in their trajectories.

Dr. Darcy felt that it is hard to base a decision on data that took place prior to the pandemic and asked what other districts are doing. Mr. Zuba explained that some districts had housing sales increase by 35 percent and births shot up from 140 to 250, but that hasn't happened here. He felt that the median age may have come down slightly, but there really haven't been dramatic changes.

Mr. Roraback summarized that the pandemic didn't radically change things and was not as much of a transformational experience here in the district. Dr. Schuch reminded everyone that the first five-year projection is based on actual birth rates and the last five-year projection is based on projected birth rates. They also update the numbers every three years or so. He felt that the district is a relatively stable environment and this is good information to make some decisions with. Mr. Zuba agreed and Mrs. Petrella added that prior projections have been pretty much right on when compared to the actual.

Mrs. Petrella felt that the biggest takeaway is that they can have a very high degree of confidence in the numbers that have been projected as they move forward in looking at reconfigurations for the district. At this point, Mrs. Petrella suggested that the board discuss facility planning at future meetings. Mrs. Dahlheimer would like that to happen soon and Mrs. Petrella suggested having a special meeting on September 28, 2022 at 6:00 PM.

**Presentations and Recognitions****A. CRHS Reporters - Hayden Gonzales, Catherine Taylor and Christine Waterman**

Hayden Gonzales reported that Fall sports captains are planning a Homecoming Week for the second weekend of October. Boys' and girls' cross-country teams had their first meet on September 8, 2022. Boys' soccer won their first game 1-0 and lost their second game. Girls' soccer won their first game 3-1, won their second game 2-1 and tied their third game. The soccer teams are currently fund-raising with coupon books, fall mums and a community car wash. The cheerleading team started cheering at football games this Fall and will go into their winter season with new coaches. The football team has had many games and scrimmages and home games start in October. Girls' volleyball has had three games thus far, winning two. They have organized two fund-raising events.

The Board took a break at this point.

Christine Waterman reported that all clubs are up and going this year. Christine thanked the teachers, custodial and grounds teams who helped plan the Fall Carnival this year. Everyone had a great time and she shared a video. Mrs. Stone added that Christine shot the footage, took all the pictures and put the video together by herself.

Catherine Taylor reported that the Jazz Combo played at convocation, the Pep Band and other bands played at the Fall Carnival and students also sang the National Anthem at the 911 event. Durham Fair performances start at 11:00 on Friday and Saturday, including the Jazz Combo, Jazz Band, a capella and Show Choir. The Shoreline Music Festival will be held at Cuginchaug this year, with performances on October 13 at 7:00. The Band and Chorus will hold a special Veterans Day concert on November 10 at 7:00.

Mrs. Dahlheimer then gave instructions for people who would like to offer remote public comment and asked for everyone's patience.

**B. Vote to accept Eagle Scout donations at Memorial****1. Gaga Pit - Logan Palmer**

Mr. Mennone explained that Logan is part of Troop 270 and did a phenomenal job on his project.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to accept the Eagle Scout donation of a Gaga Pit at Memorial School by Logan Palmer.*

*In favor of accepting the Eagle Scout donation of a Gaga Pit at Memorial School by Logan Palmer: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

**2. Go Far Marker - Ben Pitruzzello**

Mrs. Neubig explained that Ben had installed mile markers at Memorial School.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Ms. Betty, to accept the Eagle Scout donation of Go Far Markers at Memorial School by Ben Pitruzzello.*

*In favor of accepting the Eagle Scout donation of Go Far Markers at Memorial School by Ben Pitruzzello: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

**C. RSD 123 2022-2023 Teacher of the Year Recognition - Robb Bajoros**

Mrs. Stone introduced Robb Bajoros who was nominated by two faculty members. Both nominations spoke about his values and dedicated to authentic inclusivity. Diane Walsh's nomination also spoke about his sense of humor and his want for everyone to feel safe, valued and have a sense of belonging. Mr. Bajoros found the Unified Sports program at Coginchaug eight years ago and has since been recognized with several awards from the CIAC, including Coach of the Year. Six years ago, Mr. Bajoros started Campus Unification to create a space for regular education and special education learners to work together. Tina Hurlbert had stated that "Robb embodies every core ethical value of our district and embodies all that is good with humanity." Mr. Bajoros also has an interview tomorrow for State Teacher of the Year.

**D. RSD 13 Pension Plan Update - Kevin Nichols, Morgan Stanley**

Kevin Nichols, from Morgan Stanley, explained that his company has been running the district's pension for 25 years. The Board was provided a packet, including Morgan Stanley's investment highlights and the performance report for the district's pension. It was a tough year and the pension was down 8.4 percent net after fees, but the average pension in Connecticut was down about 13 or 14 percent. The district is expected to be in the top third pensions in the state, maybe even nationwide, in terms of performance. This fiscal year, the pension is up with about \$10.7 million total.

Morgan Stanley expects moderate stagflation, with low or negative growth. They do expect a recession, pretty shallow but possibly of longer duration. They expect the equity market to be bouncing around. Right now, there is hardly any difference between what a two-year Treasury and a 10-year Treasury pay which is usually a sign of upcoming recession. Stocks aren't really providing much more reward than bonds at this point and the portfolio has shifted a bit more towards bonds. They are looking to get secure, reliable and growing cash flow to pay the liabilities of the pension plan. Mr. Nichols explained that the pension is not in hedge funds or private equity and alternatives are energy pipelines and real estate investments.

The pension plan is currently about 72 percent stocks, 2.6 percent cash and 24.5 percent fixed income. All bonds are investment grade-rated by Moody's, with a maturity of three years or less. The next payment from dividends and interest is expected to be \$275,000. The net payments last year going out of the portfolio were \$350,000, which means that about 90 percent of the cash flow is just from dividends. Mr. Nichols emphasized that there is no reason to take risks with people's pensions. He also noted that every manager beat their goals this past year.

Mrs. Petrella also noted that there is an opening on the Pension committee, if anyone is interested.

**Public Comment - at the beginning of the meeting, public comment should refer to items on the agenda**

Before beginning public comment, Mrs. Petrella read the guidelines that are on the agenda.

**A. In-person public comment**

None.

**B. Remote public comment**

Nicole Ercolani, from Durham, thanked the board for their efforts on virtual communication and public comment.

**Approval of Minutes**

**A. Board of Education Regular Meeting - August 10, 2022**

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that she has found some errors, but has not had time to go through the whole document.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to table the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on August 10, 2022.*

*In favor of tabling the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on August 10, 2022: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

**Superintendent's Report**

**A. Strategic Plan Update**

**B. Other Updates (If Applicable)**

Dr. Schuch reported that he felt the district had a very successful opening to the school year. There is a renewed sense of joy and families are happy that the schools are opening up again.

Regular meetings are resuming with the six action teams that anchor the Strategic Plan. He hopes to be able to start sharing updates on those action plans and drafts of measurable outcomes as early as the next meeting. Dr. Schuch is excited about the transformational learner-centered work that is planned for the district.

They are also planning to share results at the next meeting from state testing that were recently released. Dr. Schuch also hopes to provide an update from the district Climate committee. On August 26<sup>th</sup>, they were able to engage with over 130 individuals during two re-imagining gatherings and the events really went well. Based on the exit surveys, 41 people have expressed interest in joining an action team. They did require the teaching staff and those that work with the children to attend and all did great. They have one more gathering planned for September 26<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Moore suggested that they have a student-only

session as he feels they are missing the students' input. He added that he felt it is important to have students on the work groups as well. Dr. Schuch agreed and explained that they did offer community service hours to the students who attended.

Mr. Moore asked if teachers have used the available grants and if there is a report. Dr. Schuch explained that all grant funds have been awarded and work will be done this school year. They will report back at the next meeting.

Mr. Roraback asked what Dr. Schuch's confidence level is in terms of staffing at this point and Dr. Schuch explained that they do not always have enough available substitutes, but haven't for years. The principals do an amazing job and other staff pitch in as well. The district does have a decent amount of undergraduate college students who substitute. Mr. Brough echoed the praise for the principals and felt that the district is good for the most part. Teachers are compensated when they are moved to another class.

Mrs. Petrella noted that CAGE states that school board members work to serve students by supporting a healthy school culture, along with student achievement. This board is committed to supporting the students and staff, including following practices and policies that address discipline, bullying or discrimination within the district as well as educating staff through professional development. A healthy school climate positively influences learners' behavior towards other learners. This behavior affects the incidences of bullying, including racial bullying, acceptance and understanding of others, acts of kindness and improved self-esteem. This year, the board will be updated at their meetings about positive practices and programs that are happening in the schools.

Dr. Darcy felt it was important to have a definition of what climate is and explained that the Carnival was an event, not climate. Activities are events, not climate. Positive practices can lead to a positive climate, but so does attendance data by SES, gender, race as well as student achievement and disciplinary data. Looking at climate is more than looking at the happy things that happen and should be looking at the stuff underneath the rocks as well.

Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that the Climate committee just met today and a report will be shared. They are looking to do a lot more collaboration. Mrs. Petrella felt that the events are very important as well as they put the students in different environments and develop teamwork. Mr. Roraback added that he sees more and more opportunities for students. Mrs. Dahlheimer was pleased to know that each school has a Climate committee.

Mrs. Petrella acknowledged that they will do the best they can, but may not be able to reach each and every student. Dr. Darcy stated she would be unhappy if she was a parent of a student that was not being reached and Mrs. Petrella explained that they will certainly try to reach all students. Dr. Schuch added that the measurable outcomes draft will give everyone an opportunity to decide if the outcomes get at what would be a measure of climate.

**Staff Reports****A. CRHS Back to School Update - Deb Stone**

Mrs. Stone appreciates the climate conversation because things have changed coming out of the pandemic. The theme for this year is to rebuild the community and they are looking to make connections. Mrs. Stone agreed that the Carnival was an event, but it did so much for the climate at Cuginchaug. In advisory this year, the focus has changed to covering relevant topics that the kids want to talk about. They are also working to build community through outside sources and attended the Chamber of Commerce meeting this morning. She felt that the towns are willing to partner with the district to create experience beyond the classroom, including increasing volunteer hours to 50 hours that cannot be done all in one place.

Mrs. Stone also reported that there will be a small job fair next week and they are already planning an event for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders to showcase what Cuginchaug has to hopefully address the attrition problem.

Mr. Mennone added that he has two kids in the high school and he feels that the vibe this year is at an all-time high. Kids have a smile on their face. Mr. Mennone has seen a dramatic change and the kids are really happy to be there.

**B. Strong MS Back to School Update - Cheryl Gonzalez**

Mrs. Gonzalez reiterated that the number one priority is to build community. They are in teams for the first time in many years. They have spent the first few weeks building community, through advisory and within the classrooms as well. One math teacher did not even start teaching math for the first week and instead talked about creating a thinking classroom. Postcards were sent out to the incoming sixth graders welcoming them to Strong School. They had extended advisory time during the first few weeks to have icebreakers and provide practical information. There was a new student breakfast this morning for students who are new to the district and also included kids who came in at the end of last year as well.

Mrs. Gonzalez reported that they are also focused on giving students leadership and mentoring opportunities as well as giving students a voice. Starting in October, Mrs. Gonzalez will meet with students from each grade during lunchtime and the Principal's Advisory Committee during homeroom. They also started having 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders be teacher assistants during tutorials. Morning announcements are being transitioned to having students do them instead of adults. During advisory, they are also starting an open studio with Tina Hurlbert which will give students the opportunity to create things and they will also incorporate teacher passion projects that students can sign up for. In summary, they are looking to change the climate and the culture to where student voice and student leadership is the norm and not the exception.

**C. Summer School 2022 Update - Noelle Durkin**

Mrs. Durkin reviewed that three programs were offered at Brewster, including extended school year, Kindergarten Academy and summer school. Kindergarten Academy was offered to Brewster and Lyman families of incoming kindergartners for four-day sessions. They learned about the routines and rituals of kindergarten. About 50 students attended the program over the three weeks and were only there for about two hours each day.

Mrs. Durkin explained that both Kindergarten Academy and summer school were facilitated by Phil Moriarty who has since transferred out of the district. About 50 students attended summer school over a four-week time period. The students were entering grades one through three at both Brewster and Lyman and this was more of an individualized program, based on goals. At the end of July, progress reports were sent home to families.

**D. Budget and Finance Update - Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig reported that the general fund is 11 percent expended and has received 17 percent of revenue. MTA is 7 percent expended and 1 percent revenue received. There is a need for a special education teacher (1 FTE) as there are now 31 additional students. That staff member would be shared across a few schools. Mrs. Roy asked if 1 FTE is enough to meet the needs of those 31 newly-identified students and Mrs. Neubig stated that it would be for now. Mrs. Roy felt that people were spread thin already. Mrs. Neubig stated that they were going to start with one teacher, but may come back to ask for an assistant as well. Mrs. Roy asked how many current vacancies there are for special education and Mr. Brough explained that they are currently looking for one teacher assistant. Mrs. Keane added that they are also looking for one ABA therapist as well which was vacated in the Spring.

Mrs. Neubig added that the window for teachers' negotiations opens on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, but there is no start date at this point. Mrs. Neubig also reported that they met with the Boards of Finance from both towns and they have both designated an observer.

Mrs. Neubig updated the board on the grievance that was discussed a couple of meetings ago and reported that it has gone to arbitration, with the first meeting on November 30<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 AM via Zoom. She will send the link to everyone on the board.

Security Training will be held on November 8<sup>th</sup> by a State Police active shooter trainer. All staff members will be asked to attend. A meeting will be held to discuss software with the SRO and Resident Troopers.

Mrs. Neubig reported that with Pickett Lane being closed, there have been some challenges with the buses which have been very well-managed. Trooper Hesseltine has been doing a great job on the light at Main Street. She added that she attended a staff appreciation breakfast at Dattco today. They are still down drivers and feedback from parents is that if the routes need to be doubled, do that every day. Mrs. Neubig met with Dattco today and there will be a change in dispatch personnel in Durham, effective immediately.

Mr. Moore asked if the number of staff is still in line with the budget and Mrs. Neubig explained that it is as there is some room with leaves of absences.

Mrs. Neubig also reported that they are looking into the See It-Say It program. Mr. Pietrasko added that the insurance company is requiring all staff emails have two-factor authentications which has been rolled out to everyone. He will make sure the board gets the instructions. Mr. Pietrasko added that they will be having cyber security training as well.

**New Business****A. Possible vote on lunch prices - Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that the Smart funds will take the district through November, but they are recommending that lunch prices be increased as of December 1<sup>st</sup>. They are receiving a lot of free and reduced lunch applications. Mrs. Neubig proposed an increase from \$3.50 to \$4.00 for student meals and from \$4.50 to \$5.00 for an adult meal. They are also asking for a 5 cent increase for milk. This equates to about a 14 percent increase and they hope to not have to increase prices again until 2027. Mrs. Neubig did not get a sense that surrounding towns were going to increase their prices, but are thinking about it. If they go to \$4.00, there could be a slight surplus of about \$30,000. If the prices are not increased, there will be a deficit and Mrs. Neubig will ask the board to cover it at about \$50,000. There are some funds in the food service account, but she would like to direct those funds to new equipment.

Dr. Schuch asked that the board decide whether they wanted the food service account to be self-sufficient or not. He added that this is an increase from pre-pandemic levels and he would rather raise the cost now and stay with them.

Mr. Roraback noted that the trend is to make servings slightly smaller and added that he is not opposed to \$4.00 but is a bit concerned that that may be a breaking point and students will bring their own lunch.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to adopt the price increase to student meals at \$4.00 and adult meals at \$5.00, with the milk carton price increased to 75 cents.*

Mrs. Caramanello stated that she is not in favor of this and believes a lot of families will be going from free food to coming up with \$4.00 per day per child. She felt that most people will pack a lunch instead. She felt that \$4.00 is too much and suggested \$3.75. She would much rather have families get used to paying again before adding much more. Mrs. Petrella is concerned that they would have to increase prices again in another year or two. She would be in favor of the larger increase and holding prices for five years. Mr. Roraback likes the idea that this provides more wiggle room on selecting products. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that parents have told her that they wouldn't be able to pack a lunch for \$4.00 per kid with the cost of groceries. Mrs. Petrella would rather see a price increase than cutting portions or options.

*In favor of adopting the price increase to student meals at \$4.00 and adult meals at \$5.00, with the milk carton price increased to 75 cents: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Mrs. Caramanello opposed. Motion carried.*

**B. Pension Committee Resolution - Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig reported that Tippi Popp was appointed to the Pension committee for three years, April Votto for two years, John Mennone for two years and Jim Armstrong for one year. There is one opening for another one-year term and Mr. Stone volunteered. The following resolution recognizes those appointments.

Mrs. Petrella read the resolution: be it resolved that, as of September 14, 2022, in accordance with section 8.5 of the Defined Benefit Pension Plan for Employees of Regional School District 13 Pension Plan and the governing guidelines in effect for the Pension committee, the Board hereby appoints the following

persons to serve on the Pension committee for the new terms that are set forth below, with such new terms commencing September 14, 2022: Tippy Popp for a three-year term, April Votto for a two-year term, John Mennone for two years, Jim Armstrong for one year and Jason Stone for one year.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to accept the resolution.*

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

**C. Vote to accept the Custodial contract reopener agreement - Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig explained that the Custodial and Food Service contracts were five-year contracts with a reopener in the last two years for wages and health insurance. That occurred on June 30, 2022 and negotiations were held over the summer. An agreement was reached of a 2.5 percent wage increase each year and a hold on their premium share at 14 percent for health insurance. The entire contract will be open for renegotiation in two years. The cost to the board for year one in Custodians is \$22,000 (2.9 percent because of step movement) and year two at \$21,700 (2.78 percent), for a total of \$43,938.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to accept the Custodian contract reopener agreement.*

*In favor of accepting the Custodian contract reopener agreement: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.*

**D. Vote to accept Food Service contract reopener agreement - Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig explained that the 2.5 percent wage increase was the same for the previous three years as well. Food Service cost to the board is significantly less because they are 10-month employees and work fewer hours. Year one cost is \$5,991 (2.5 percent) and year two at \$6,100 (2.5 percent), for a total of \$12,177. There will be no change in health insurance premiums.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Ms. Betty, to accept the Food Service contract reopener agreement.*

*In favor of accepting the Food Service contract reopener agreement: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.*

**E. Vote to establish June 14, 2023 as the high school graduation date - Doug Schuch**

Dr. Schuch reviewed that the state requires the district to set the graduation date once school has begun. This could mean that graduating seniors may have fewer days in school, due to snow dates, but many families have people visiting from far places and planning is required. Dr. Schuch clarified that this does not necessarily make June 14<sup>th</sup> the last day of school for all other grades and that the date does meet the statutory requirement.

*Mrs. Caramanello made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to establish June 14, 2023 as the high school graduation date.*

*In favor of establishing June 14, 2023 as the high school graduation date: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.*

## **Committee Reports**

### **A. Building Committee Meeting - August 16, 2022 and September 7, 2022**

Mr. Moore reported that Mrs. Petrella named Howard Weissberg the chair of the Building committee and Darin Overton was voted in as Vice Chair and Nick Faiella as Secretary. The Memorial roofs are a state-funded project and are almost done. Mechanicals are not funded by the state, but will still need to be certified under bonding. Both projects should be done by the end of the September.

The culvert is starting to be back-filled and the diversion channel worked during the heavy rain. That will hopefully be done by September 30<sup>th</sup> as well. Mrs. Neubig added that that could be pushed out to the first week of October, but they are making significant progress. The Building committee also talked about paving on Pickett Lane which will be done by Ludlow, going from Main Street down to Allyn Brook. They are waiting for design drawings on the pump house.

The Building committee had a lot of discussion about the athletic field storage building and Mr. Weissberg has put together a draft and they need board approval to go to RFP at probably the next meeting. There are a couple of contractors that can get it built well within the \$180,000 budget. They hope to get the RFP out, with an answer by December, to hopefully start construction in March.

They had a long discussion on Pickett Lane paving and the recommendation so far is to have a full reconstruction with reclamation. The committee set their meetings dates for 5:00 PM on the first Wednesday of each month. Mrs. Petrella also mentioned that there had been talk of approximately \$1.7 million to reconstruct Pickett Lane and this new process will be significantly less. They will keep the same footprint at 32 feet wide.

Mrs. Dahlheimer is not on the committee, but has been attending the meetings and asked them to be mindful of giving clear explanations to the board and the public. The current committee has five engineers on it.

Mrs. Neubig explained that they will put together an RFP to give vendors latitude to suggest what would work best for the project and asked the board for consensus on that.

Mrs. Roy asked if the Building committee would be the ones to talk to the town about how much money is being put into Pickett Lane and possible usage fees. Mrs. Neubig felt that that would be the Board. Mr. Moore and Mrs. Dahlheimer both felt it was a nonstarter with the town to ask for usage fees. Dr. Schuch felt that the majority of the wear and tear on the road is from the buses that transport students from both towns. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they could look at this again as the Community Center evolves.

The board gave general consensus to send out an RFP for the field house.

**B. Policy Committee Meeting - August 30, 2022**

**1. Possible vote on Policy Concerning Temporary Policies and Regulations Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Mr. Moore reported that the committee decided that the use of cell phones was not a policy change. Dr. Schuch explained that they will be amending the regulation regarding cell phones.

Dr. Schuch noted that it was in August, 2021 that the board took an action to eliminate a huge binder of individual COVID policies, giving authority to Dr. Schuch to make changes to COVID-related guidelines based on changes from executive orders. Rescinding that policy is what is being voted on tonight. Mrs. Dahlheimer emphasized that Dr. Schuch still has authority to make decisions for the safety of the district. She added that all recommendations are posted on the district's website for families to make the right decisions for them.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to rescind the Policy Concerning Temporary Policies and Regulations Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

*In favor of rescinding the Policy Concerning Temporary Policies and Regulations Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried unanimously.*

**Communications**

Mrs. Petrella received an email from Sarah Overton thanking the SRO for his excellent job regarding traffic on Main Street and Pickett Lane. She also received an email from Phil Augur who submitted his resignation from the Finance committee.

Mrs. Caramanello received an email and forwarded it to Mrs. Petrella and that will be reported at the next meeting.

Mr. Roraback reported that Janina Eddinger from Middlefield was for increasing the price of lunches.

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

Heidi Johnson, from Durham, stated that parents and students described experiences with racism last year. Numerous students stated that racial slurs were being used openly without consequence. Students shared their experiences with racism and Coginchaug students organized a walkout. Both parents and students demanded that the board address this problem in a meaningful and ongoing way. State associations have proactively addressed intolerance, racism and violence. On July 14, 2021, a joint statement was issued on the importance of a culturally-responsive education and committed to the goal of improving the academic lives of Connecticut's increasingly diverse student body, including sustaining equitable and welcoming learning environments. There has been resistance on the part of some board members to the request to add a regular agenda item for DEI. The district also does not have updated and robust policies which

fully address racial discrimination and race-based bullying in school. Other districts have detailed policies and procedures. Ms. Johnson was present tonight to ask that the board create a public record via discussion of those in favor of such measures and those opposed. Many board members ran on a platform of transparency which is needed on this issue. On Monday night, Durham's First Selectman noted that the town is not diverse by any measure and has a lot of work to do. The Superintendent has represented that the needs of black and brown students are being met, however it is impossible to see how that could be the case given the lack of action, policy and dialog.

Julia Talbert-Slagle, a senior at Coginchaug from Durham, also asked for a regular agenda item concerning the lack of policy that would consistently let the learners know what is being done to combat discrimination and racism that is rampant within the district. She would like to hear the thoughts and plans of actions that were developed over the summer as last year was very turbulent and there had been a lot of discussion about this. She offered to share her thoughts with the board and noted that other students deeply care about this as well. She also felt that regular monthly meetings are cutting off outreach to the board and asked that they meet more regularly to allow for further conversations. She stated that the longer the board doesn't deal with these issues, the more students of color and LGBTQ students feel ignored.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, thanked the board for the Zoom opportunity.

**Adjournment**

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Ms. Betty, 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, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

Meeting was adjourned at 9:08 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First