

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

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

Board members absent: None

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Brough, Human Resource Specialist, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology, Mrs. Stone, Principal, Coginchaug Regional High School, Mrs. Quarato, Learner-Centered Specialist, Mrs. Siegel Learner-Centered Specialist and Mrs. Winkler, Program Coordinator, MTA

Mrs. Petrella called the work session to order at 6:01 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

A moment of silence was observed for Sandy Hook.

### **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. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

### **Presentations and Recognitions**

#### **A. MTA Share**

Zachary Ryer explained his experience at MTA to the board. He felt that the teachers were always there for support, when needed. MTA provides students with on-the-job work sites in a variety of workplaces, including Price Chopper, YMCA and Bob's. The students learn how to use public transportation. The students also go on outings and are taught how to have good social skills. MTA also holds a dance and students can also let teachers know of any changes they'd like to see. Students also go to Club 24 in Middletown to help keep healthy. They are offered more freedom during the school day and students are trusted to be independent. He is thankful to MTA for giving him new experiences and expanding his horizons. Zachary graduated in 2022 and is now applying to Middlesex Community College.

Mrs. Winkler invited any and all board members to come check out the program at MTA.

#### **B. CRHS Reporters - Hayden Gonzales, Catherine Taylor and Christine Waterman**

Hayden Gonzales explained that Christine Waterman was unable to join the meeting tonight. He noted that the Honduras class has planned fund-raisers in the new year which will help purchase medical supplies for people in Honduras. The annual Powder Puff game was held on November 22, ending in a tie. This past Monday, two therapy dogs visited Coginchaug. Community Round-Up was a great

success and collected over 8,000 pounds of food and \$1,800 in cash and gift cards. Edge is currently collecting hats and gloves.

Hayden Gonzales reported that the fall 2022 sports season has come to an end and the winter sports season is already underway, including indoor track, basketball, co-op swimming with Lyman Hall, competitive cheer, co-op ice hockey and a co-op fencing program with North Branford High School. Reviewing the fall season, girls' soccer made it to the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of states, girls' cross country made it to 7<sup>th</sup> place in Class SS, boys' cross country made 10<sup>th</sup> place in Class S and volleyball went to the semi-finals round of states. The fall sports banquet was held last week, and student athletes were honored.

Catherine Taylor reported that band members participated in tree lighting ceremonies in Durham and Middlefield. The Music Department also conducted their annual poinsettia and wreath fund-raisers. The winter performance for band and chorus will be held on December 21<sup>st</sup> at 7:30 PM. In January, A Capella, Show Choir and Jazz Bands will hold their annual concert. The CMEA Southern Regional Festival will be held on January 13 and 14.

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

**A. In-person public comment**

Julia Talbert-Slagle, a senior at Coginchaug, stated that she emailed Mrs. Roy over a month ago about having student representatives on the Board of Education and also saw her when she went to the CABA conference and discovered that the majority of districts in the state have student representatives. She felt that having student representatives would help strengthen their voice within the district. She believed it would be especially helpful for the district because there really isn't anyone who discusses the school climate, specifically the negative parts. Julia hoped that the board would strongly consider having student representatives.

Grace Harkins, a junior at Coginchaug, also supported the idea of having student representatives on the Board of Education. She felt that it would definitely help bridge the communications and allow the students to provide input and make the district even more collaborative.

Diya Patel, a junior at Coginchaug, also wanted to support the idea of student representatives. She noted that the purpose of the Board of Education is to make student life a better place and to make the district and its education better for the community. In order to do that, Diya felt that there really needs to be a connection with the students. She felt it would provide the board with a better idea of the day-to-day life in the district which would help bridge the divide between the board and the students.

**B. Remote public comment**

None.

**Approval of Minutes**

**A. Board of Education Regular Meeting - November 9, 2022**

Mrs. Petrella asked to change the word "asked" to "asked to add" under Approval of Agenda. She also added the words "need to be developed" to the sentence "Mrs. Petrella looks at the outcome measures as

end outcomes, but more specific competency outcomes by grade level” on page 3. On page 4, Mrs. Petrella asked to correct the word “teach” to “each.”

Mrs. Roy asked to add the word “not” to her comments on page 4, “she was fearful that the district would not meet the educators’ needs to be able to do that.”

*Mr. Roraback made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on November 9, 2022, as amended.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting on November 9, 2022, as amended: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

## **Superintendent’s Report**

Dr. Schuch felt it was important for the Board to be aware that they are taking a hard look at all parts of the budget, including staffing and class sizes. He also noted that a few people from the community have reached out with some concerns about social media, specifically employees’ use of social media, and the leadership team feels that there are some major disconnects between written policy and they would like to refer the policy and regulations to the Policy Committee for review. He would like to be able to give clear direction to the district’s employees.

## **Staff Reports**

### **A. Director of Finance Report - Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig reported that the general fund is 37 percent expended and 40 percent of budgeted revenue has been received. MTA has expended 22 percent, with 22 percent budgeted revenue received.

Mrs. Neubig stated that the remote grievance hearing will now be in February. A grant has been filed with the State of Connecticut for reimbursement of the work on the HVAC system at Memorial. If the district is awarded the grant, any funds from the award will be returned back to the bonding. The governor recently announced that there will be another round of security grants, but there are no details yet.

All administrators have submitted their budgets and Mrs. Neubig has meetings scheduled with them next week to go over line-by-line details. They will then move on to the leadership team to plan for the February 8<sup>th</sup> presentation.

Mrs. Neubig added that the district began charging for lunch on December 9<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Darcy noted that she read an article that stated that a school district is reporting that they will be \$1 million over budget and she asked if the district is on track. Mrs. Neubig explained that they keep an eye on the budget throughout the year. Mrs. Caramanello asked if more food choices will be offered now that they are charging for lunch and Mrs. Neubig will relay her question to Mark Basil. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked that she also report some schools running out of lunch options.

Mrs. Neubig added that the audit field work has been done and she has received the emailed copy of the audit and the hard copies have been mailed. The auditors will be present at the January board meeting to present the audit.

## **B. Digital Reporting Form - Jen Keane**

Mrs. Keane reviewed that some systems were costly and none of them really checked off the boxes that the district was looking for. Julia Talbot-Slagle took the initiative to work on a Google report form for students to report incidents of bullying or other concerns. The administration has reviewed the report form and they hope to pilot it in January. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked to see a copy of the form and Mrs. Keane will share it with the Board.

Mrs. Petrella asked if they will get a report on the climate survey in January and Mrs. Keane confirmed that that will happen. The survey was done with K-12 students.

## **New Business**

### **A. Vote to accept Teachers' Contract**

Mrs. Petrella explained that she, Mr. Mennone, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Moore and Ms. Betty represented the board and a Board of Finance representative from each town participated in the teachers' contract negotiations. They felt it went very well and the teachers voted to ratify the contract today. The Board members have received an outline of the changes that were made.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, that the Regional School District 13 Board of Education approves the tentative agreement for Successor Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Regional School District 13 Education Association and authorize the Board chair to sign such collective bargaining agreement on behalf of the Board.*

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that it was nice to have Board of Finance reps take part as passive observers. Dr. Schuch thanked everyone who was involved in the process, with a special shout-out to Mrs. Neubig and Mr. Brough. Dr. Schuch added that the union voted unanimously to ratify the contract which he felt speaks volumes.

*In favor of approving the tentative agreement for Successor Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Regional School District 13 Education Association and authorize the Board chair to sign such collective bargaining agreement on behalf of the Board: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

### **B. Vote to accept 2023 Board of Education and Committee Meeting Schedule**

Mrs. Petrella noted that Mrs. Maloney sent a meeting schedule to everyone, but the only committees listed are the Building Committee, Finance Committee and Policy Committee. Dr. Schuch added that they did not schedule Finance Committee meetings beyond March due to the budget season, but they can add more meetings, when needed. He also added that they are recommending the same number of board meetings, with work sessions scheduled specifically to work on the budget. There will also be a January retreat and Mrs. Petrella added that they will do a mid-year evaluation of the Superintendent at that time as well as evaluate board goals.

Mr. Moore stated that neither the Finance Committee nor the Building Committee are actual board committees and were assigned for a specific purpose. Student Achievement, ERC and HR were set up by policies. He was concerned about having a regular Finance Committee since it is an advisory committee

and felt that the more they meet, the more that committee may feel they have authority. He felt that the Finance Committee should meet through the budget process, but then not meet again until the fall. He also felt that if they are not going to continue with the other committees, the policies need to reflect that.

Mrs. Petrella would like to continue discussion on the committees in January and would also like to recommend a Communications Committee. Mrs. Dahlheimer thought that Finance was scheduled in prior years, but many meetings were cancelled. Mrs. Neubig noted that they were not regularly scheduled but met as needed. Mrs. Petrella felt it would be better to have consistent meetings dates. Mrs. Dahlheimer confirmed that Finance Committee meetings were not cancelled, but rather not called.

Mrs. Petrella agreed that they need to look at the policies about committees as well as having community member and student representatives. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if they want to have a special meeting in January to have these discussions or roll it into the Board Retreat. Mrs. Petrella felt that they could do it at the regular meeting in January. Mr. Stone suggested they do it at the Board Retreat as the January meeting agenda is looking pretty full. Mrs. Petrella suggested that they decide when to have these discussions in January at a later time. Mr. Roraback asked about Student Achievement and Mrs. Petrella felt that that should be a full committee with scheduled meetings, either separate or as a work session. Mrs. Caramanella would like a Student Achievement report at least once a month.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the draft of the 2023 Board of Education and Committee Meeting Schedule.*

*In favor of approving the draft of the 2023 Board of Education and Committee Meeting Schedule: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanella, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

- C. Vote to adopt policies (from November first read)**
  - a. Meal Charging**
  - b. Non-Discrimination (Community)**
  - c. Non-Discrimination (Personnel)**
  - d. Non-Discrimination (Students)**
  - e. Title IX Sex Discrimination and Harassment (Personnel)**
  - f. Title IX Sex Discrimination and Harassment (Students)**

Mr. Moore felt that the Meal Charging policy should be voted on separately, but all others can be voted on together.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to approve the changes in the Meal Charging policy.*

*In favor of approving the changes to the Meal Charging policy: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanella, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

Mr. Moore explained that all changes to Non-Discrimination and Title IX policies are related to changes in the definitions in the state statute.

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the changes to the Non-Discrimination and Title IX policies.*

*In favor of approving the changes to the Non-Discrimination and Title IX policies: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

**D. Vote to amend previously approved CRHS Costa Rica Field Trip**

Mrs. Stone explained that when this field trip was approved last fall, the teacher thought that the 16<sup>th</sup> was a full-day professional development and counted the trip as three days out of school. However, it is only a half-day and the trip is now four days out of school. Mrs. Stone just wanted to make sure the board was aware that it was wrong on the paperwork.

*Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the change to the Costa Rica field trip.*

*In favor of approving the change to the Costa Rica field trip: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

Mrs. Caramanello thanked Mrs. Stone, Mrs. Keane and Mr. Bradanini for the phenomenal senior trip that was taken. Mr. Mennone echoed the sentiment.

**Committee Reports**

**A. Finance Committee Meeting - November 15, 2022 and December 14, 2022**

Mr. Stone stated that they reviewed the 2022-2023 budget and Mrs. Neubig answered any questions the committee members had. Members asked about the capital plan and debt service. Mrs. Neubig provided them that information and they went over it more in-depth at the meeting today. People have been asking questions and getting more involved. They are going to request that the towns provide information on their own budgets as well. Mr. Roraback explained that Bob Yamartino had started that process that helps everyone to forecast. Mrs. Petrella added that it was eye-opening for the Board of Finance members to sit through the teacher contract negotiations. Mrs. Dahlheimer found it interesting that one of the Finance Committee members wanted to find out how to better explain the budget to the communities.

**B. Building Committee Meeting - December 7, 2022**

Mr. Moore reported that facility planning for Memorial School has started and Silver Petrucelli has been hired. They are trying to decide if the Cuginchaug field turf gets done this year or next year. They are hoping to put it off for another year. The Memorial roof project is done and they are awaiting an as-built drawing. The Memorial mechanicals are basically done but there is a punch list. A flow rate will be done to determine the size of the pumps and then they can decide the size and location of the pumphouse. The culvert is done and paved over. The first part of Pickett Lane is also done. They have broken up Pickett Lane into three projects: drainage, paving and reclamation. They are working with Nathan Jacobson to come up with a plan and hope to save money through reclamation.

One bid came in for the athletic field storage building and was higher than anticipated. They are going back to look at taking off the abutments on the foundation. The building would be cheaper if the foundation is square and they have an estimate of about \$25,000 to do that. Mr. Mennone added that they need numbers for the Memorial School reconfiguration by June 30<sup>th</sup> in order to meet the deadline with the

state. He added that the Building Committee is stacked with a lot of knowledgeable people with a lot of great ideas that will save the community a lot of money. They are taking it all very seriously and the board appreciates their efforts. Mrs. Neubig also felt that the Building Committee has been a great resource. She also explained that the bid received did not meet their needs because it wasn't the right solution. Through that process, they learned information that it will be more of a specialty building that not a lot of vendors can provide. The general consensus of the committee was to report to the board that while they weren't successful through the RFP process and they declined the bid because it was over budget, but this now falls under the Exceptions of Bidding in the specialty category. The Building Committee would like to get quotes on the kind of the building they now know they need and choose from those three quotes. They do believe that will be significantly less than the bid that was rejected. Board members did not object to that. Mr. Roraback added that the Building Committee is doing a stellar job and the district will gain efficiencies and the educational experience for the students will be stronger.

Mrs. Neubig reported that the grant culvert was approved, but they have not yet received the money. Because the culvert was part of the \$6.9 million bonding, that money will go back into the bonding projects and could be redirected to the Pickett Lane project. Dr. Schuch added that there will be a lot of upward pressure on the budget in 2023 due to inflation and that will help.

### **C. ACES Report**

Mrs. Dahlheimer reported that the governing board of ACES met on December 8<sup>th</sup> for their annual holiday meeting. All of the different schools held contests for t-shirt designs, greeting cards and ornaments which went on to be a fund-raiser. Mrs. Dahlheimer showed the greeting card winners, but she was unable to get ornaments. She then showed the winning t-shirt.

At some point, Mrs. Dahlheimer would like to talk about the district doing the same types of fund-raisers. Mrs. Caramanello added that they used to do that at Brewster with student art. ACES also had a craft fair where these items were sold.

Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that ACES is selling one of the buildings on State Street and she found it interesting talking to other members of the board. One of the other districts has over 200 teacher vacancies right now and retention is a problem just about everywhere. She was happy to be able to report that the district retains a lot of teachers. Substitutes are also an issue in many districts. The past chair, Norm Hicks, was also at the meeting.

### **Communications**

Mrs. Petrella received a number of emails about the social media issues. She also received an email from Gabriel Epstein regarding a district audit interview.

Mrs. Roy reminded Mrs. Petrella about the learner in the district who asked about the possibility of having a student as a board representative. Mrs. Petrella reviewed that they will discuss that in January. Mrs. Roy has reached out to CAFE and got copies of policies from RSD 17, Stafford, East Hartford, Clinton, Old Saybrook, Windham and Newington about how they do student board representatives and she will forward that information to the rest of the board to review before the discussion. Mrs. Petrella reached out to the CAFE chairs and has information as well.

Mr. Moore noted that the board received a long letter from Michelle Gohagon about an outplacement issue and he felt it would be good for the board to have a special Executive Session to discuss the outplacement request and denial. Mrs. Caramanello asked if there had been a response to either Mr. Daricek's letter or Mrs. Gohagon's and Mrs. Petrella explained that she did not respond to Mrs. Gohagon because she believes that the district is in negotiations with the family. She did send a quick response to Mr. Daricek that she would be looking into it.

Mr. Moore added that there were some threats that were dealt with, but he felt it should be part of the well-being program and they need to be careful not to ignore those things. He is very concerned about threats relating to guns and feels that the board needs to play close attention to those issues and keep them on the agendas. Mrs. Petrella explained that everyone was copied on them which is why she didn't bring that up specifically. There was a lot of confidential information in that and the board has been made aware.

Mrs. Roy asked if there was the potential for an Executive Session to address the email that was received before the threats. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it was important that Dr. Schuch explains the legal issues as well. Mrs. Caramanello reviewed that they will be starting the bullying reporting process in January and asked how an issue like what just happened would be reported. Dr. Schuch felt that there were ways to report it, if they wanted to report it. The digital platform will hopefully recognize that some children may feel it's the right thing to do but there is a stigma to walking into the office or even telling their parents. Mrs. Keane added that the digital platform will be to report anything, not exclusively for bullying, at both Coginchaug and Strong. Mrs. Dahlheimer reported that the presentation by John Halligan at Strong today was very powerful.

Mrs. Petrella added that she received information about a group from Harlem who does presentations on bullying through basketball. She also noted that bullying is very different now when bullies can be anonymous.

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

#### **A. In-person public comment**

Julia Talbert-Slagle, a senior at Coginchaug, noted that the woman at the CABA conference who ran the student session actually wrote a policy for Old Saybrook. Julia got her contact information and she would be open to helping with that. Julia also explained that she designed the reporting form to be particularly broad to provide a catch-all for any issues students want to talk about.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, commended the Building Committee and felt that there is a great amount of talent there and they are doing their best to control prices. He also felt that the field storage building is counterproductive and is much bigger than just a storage building. Insulation is also being added to it and he didn't feel a storage building requires insulation. He felt that it is headed to being a much bigger project that will add permanent fixed costs to future budgets.

#### **B. Remote public comment**

None.

Mrs. Petrella wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays as well as a safe and healthy New Year.



## **Adjournment**

*Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, 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 7:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First