

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held a public hearing on April 5, 2017 at 8:00 PM in the Julian Thayer Auditorium at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut. Board members present: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Boyle, Mrs. Flanagan, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Renninghoff, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino.

Board members absent: Mr. Hicks.

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools and Mr. Russell, Interim Business Manager.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Hearing

Mr. Moore asked the members of the Board of Education and administration to introduce themselves. Mr. Moore summarized that this great group of men and women have tackled some substantial problems over the year and have worked hard on the budget. He also mentioned that they have had two joint meetings with the Boards of Finance from both towns. Mr. Moore also praised Dr. Veronesi for her ideas and focus and also thanked the administrators for the great job they do.

Mr. Moore summarized that priority was given to improving math skills this year and has been addressed with this budget.

Mr. Renninghoff read the call to the meeting, the warning of the Public Hearing and the return of the call into the record.

Dr. Veronesi began by acknowledging the prioritization that went into this budget process. The administrators began with long lists of individual priorities and then refined those lists as a commitment to the entire district. The District is far more focused, more coherent, stronger curriculum, improved instructional practices and teachers that meet consistently. Student data is continuously looked at and decisions are made based on that. Student achievement and well-being as well as engagement are main focus areas.

Dr. Veronesi explained that the District is no longer trying to figure out how to reach the targets, but instead is now on track. Class sizes remain within the guidelines. Math interventionists will be at both Lyman and Brewster. The pre-school programming has been extended with tuition to be paid for that program. Dr. Veronesi and Mrs. Emory are working on the payment schedules for that tuition.

A Career Center is being instituted at Coginchaug to help students to be college and career ready. Dr. Veronesi also stated that she had initially proposed an intramural program at Strong School rather than an interscholastic program, but that proposal was withdrawn and interscholastic sports will be maintained at Strong School. A pay-to-participate fee will be charged at Coginchaug and Strong School, \$100 per sport, with a \$200 limit per individual and a \$300 limit per family.

Dr. Veronesi also mentioned that she is very passionate about the District starting their own before- and after-school enrichment program. There is nothing in the budget with regards to that program and discussion about that will continue at next week's Board meeting.

Dr. Veronesi reminded everyone that enrollment is declining significantly with this year's projected enrollment at 1,722 students. Today, there are 1,726 students enrolled. A decline has also been projected for next year and the District will lose close to 200 students over the next five years, primarily in the middle and high schools.

Dr. Veronesi went on to review staffing changes, with a decrease of over 20 staff members over three years. As the District has seen a decrease in enrollment, there has been no increase in class size beyond the Board of Education recommendations. She reviewed projections for next year, which are at or below those guidelines.

Dr. Veronesi summarized that nothing has a greater impact on students than high-quality leaders and staff and commented that the District has the best in the world.

Mr. Moore began with a breakdown of the major components of the budget, with salaries having an approximate increase of 2 percent and benefits have increased by about 1 percent. Buildings and Grounds have gone up a bit. Operating Services includes transportation and leases and is continuously looked at. Supplies has gone down.

Mr. Renninghoff went on to talk about capital, debt services and dues and fees. He reviewed the track surface, synthetic turf field and generators as well as the emergency fund for buildings and grounds. Phone system upgrades as well as furniture were also reviewed.

Moving to debt service, Mr. Renninghoff reviewed the principal and interest budgeted, with the entire debt being retired in fiscal year 2025 unless the electors choose to authorize more debt.

Mr. Renninghoff explained that due and fees are primarily for professional and board associations, CIAC entry fees and professional fees for staff and administrators.

In summary, Mr. Renninghoff explained that capital appropriations are going down by 31 percent; debt service is going down by 3.5 percent.

Mr. Moore reviewed that a little over 75 percent of all the expenditures are due to salaries and benefits.

Moving to the revenue side, Mr. Moore explained that it has gone down this year with reductions in State grants. Buildings and Grounds rentals is reduced with Korn School being closed. Interest Income is going down because the fund balance is going down. There is projected revenue from the Pre-School program, charged only to the peer group, not students with special needs. The activity fee is increased by the pay-to-play that Dr. Veronesi had explained earlier. Fund balance carryover is projected at \$184,000.

Mr. Moore explained that the State budget is questionable at this point, but the Board of Education has agreed with the two Boards of Finance to return anything above the \$346,000 back to the towns.

Total receipts are projected to be down about 10 percent, giving a total net budget increase of 1.82 percent. The expenditure side of the budget, which is what is voted on at referendum, has an increase of 1.18 percent.

Mr. Moore reviewed that the cost-per-student has risen with a decrease in enrollment, but was cut back by \$434 this year. He also explained the distribution of the budget per town and that the enrollment changed this year, with Durham going up a bit and Middlefield going down. Durham's allocation goes up by \$776,000 and Middlefield goes down by \$269,000.

The budget's expense side has gone down by .03 percent for the last three years, with the net due to reduction of revenue going up by .3 percent. Mr. Moore commented that the budget has stayed fairly constant over the past few years, with the distribution going up and down.

Mr. Moore explained that the District's Board meeting will be held on May 1st, followed by a referendum on May 2nd. At this point, Mr. Moore thanked everyone for coming and opened up the hearing for public comment.

Public Comment

Elmer Clark asked for the Board to comment on the ECS money. Mr. Moore explained that the ECS cut in the Governor's proposal is \$1.5 million. Mr. Clark explained that this would equal about a 2 mill increase for Durham, plus the pension payment that is being proposed, meaning more than a 3 mill increase for Durham or \$1,000 to \$1,500 per household.

Mr. Clark also asked about the teachers' pension money for the last three years. Mr. Russell explained that the teachers' retirement money that is paid to the State is deducted from the employee's paychecks. The new proposal by the Governor is that the District help pay for the actuarial annual required contribution that the State has been paying. Mr. Renninghoff commented that the Governor's proposal is that the municipalities would pick up one-third of the employers' (State of Connecticut) actuarially-required contribution each year. He also explained that the legalities of this proposal are being looked at and he does not feel that this plan will pass.

A gentleman from Durham thanked the Board for their hard work and service to the communities. He mentioned the bathrooms and the lockers that will be on the ballot and asked the Board to reconsider putting those on the ballot at this time. In 2009, the public was told that the buildings would be paid by volunteer contributions and now the townspeople are looking at a proposal for \$800,000. He was concerned that that money would be financed over 10 or 20 years and the project would still not be complete. He felt that the District should be doing it right and asked that the Board put the whole project in front of the communities and not ask for more funding in a few years. He also asked about the \$20,000 for surveying the Korn School property with the cost being \$10,700. He also asked about Brewster School's increase of 43 percent. Dr. Veronesi explained that the increase at Brewster is primarily due to the expansion of the pre-school program. Mr. Yamartino also commented that that increase will be partially offset by the tuition that will be charged. He then asked about the capital reserved for building maintenance and turf replacement and Dr. Veronesi commented that those adjustments were made at the last budget meeting. She also explained that the budget books are printed at the beginning of the budget season and changes have been made in the process. The entire updated budget will be put on the website.

Laurie Tuttle, from Durham, explained that she was speaking as a private citizen and not in her capacity of the Chairman of Durham's Board of Finance. Ms. Tuttle commented that they had received a clear message at the Town's budget hearing that Durham wants to keep businesses in town. Ms. Tuttle is concerned about both the preschool program and the before- and after-school program and feels that they

are counterintuitive as both programs currently exist in Durham. Ms. Tuttle also thanked the Board members for their hard work. Mr. Moore reviewed the preschool program is required for special ed students and peers and has been going on for a number of years. Mr. Yamartino explained the differences between the proposal and what currently exists. Mr. Moore also explained that the before- and after-school program has not been voted on as of yet by the Board.

Chuck Stengel stated that he had received a question from someone in town asking what the actual savings achieved from the closing of Korn School were. Mrs. Flanagan explained that a reduction of \$560,000 in operating expenses were removed from the 2016-2017 budget and were not budgeted at all in the 2017-2018 budget. Of that \$560,000, \$430,000 was for salaries. There is about \$30,000 in the current budget for minimal maintenance of Korn School and \$25,000 for legal fees in the hope of transferring the school to Durham for a community center.

Bruce Gueble, a resident of Durham and a business owner in town, asked for clarification of the \$82,000 expenditure for Korn School plus the one-time closing costs of \$92,000. Mrs. Flanagan explained that that was the original proposal for the budget and the numbers were reduced through the budget process. Mr. Gueble also asked about the target class sizes and stated that he has a hard time justifying the number of teachers. Looking at grades 3/4 at Lyman, there are 88 students and with the target class size of 22, there should be four teachers and there are five. He saw the same thing at Strong School. Mr. Gueble felt that if the Board sets the class size criteria, they should then adhere to it. Dr. Veronesi explained that class size is more of a guide and the individual students still need to be taken into consideration. She also explained that she had had discussions with the principals and considered reducing a teacher and it was decided that it would not be in the students' best interests. Mr. Gueble also commented that his tax bill has gone up 55 percent over a four-year period and wondered how any business would be attracted to the town with that kind of logic. He felt it is unsustainable and with shrinking population in the school, there should not be increased budgetary constraints put on the general public. He felt that nobody wants to buy houses in town with the current tax rate. Mr. Gueble had figured out that if you clear \$100,000 in a household, you will work one hour a day to live in Durham.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, thanked the Board for their time and effort, but felt that we could still do a little better. Mr. Stoup had received a letter from Donia Viola of Durham that he read into the record. Mrs. Viola was unable to attend tonight's meeting. At the March 8th meeting, she had asked for the total savings realized from the closing of Korn School and was assured by Mr. Russell that spreadsheets were being drawn up. To date, Mrs. Viola has received no information and felt that to be disrespectful and unprofessional. Mrs. Viola also mentioned the interscholastic program at Strong School and the extended preschool program. She encouraged the Board to reduce the projected budget. Mr. Russell acknowledged that he had received Mrs. Viola's request and they are almost finished compiling the information.

Melissa Booth, from Durham, stated that she appreciates the Board keeping the class sizes down and reminded everyone that the upcoming class is bigger. She felt that getting rid of a teacher this year and then bringing them back in another year would be disruptive to the children.

Michelle DiMauro-Murphy, from Middlefield, thanked the Board members for the time, effort and energy they have put into maintaining the existing programs and implementing new ones.

A resident from Middlefield stated that she had moved here from Virginia because of the schools and is very pleased with the ID program. She thanked the Board of Education for that.

With no further comments, Mr. Moore explained that they will adjourn the public hearing and return to the library for the remainder of the Board of Education regular meeting. He, again, thanked everyone for their participation.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First