

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held a Community Engagement Session at 5:15 p.m. on Wednesday, September 5, 2018 at Coginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Board members present: Mr. Moore, Mr. Augur, Dr. Taylor, Mr. Yamartino, Mrs. Boyle, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Mrs. Neubig, Mr. Rossignol, Ms. Manning, Mrs. DiMaggio, Mr. Falcone, Mr. Gustafson, Mr. Sadinsky, Mrs. Stone and Mr. Ford

Dinner and registration were held in the Coginchaug cafeteria from 5:15 p.m. until 6:15 p.m.

At 6:15 p.m., in the auditorium, Mr. Moore lead community members, Board of Education members and administrators in the Pledge of Allegiance.

A brief panel presentation was shared by Mr. Moore, Dr. Taylor and Dr. Veronesi.

National Honor Society students introduced themselves and served as note takers for the small group discussions. Building and Central Office administrators served as facilitators for the small group discussions. The small group discussions were held in classrooms in the high school and began at 6:45 p.m. and all ended by 8:00 p.m.

**Regional School District 13  
Board of Education  
Community Engagement Session  
Wednesday, September 5, 2018  
Discussion Group Notes**

**Room 107**

1. What are the hallmarks of our district? What is most important to you?
  - Core ethical values
  - Integrated Day is a major reason
  - Having the choice of the two school programs/ approaches
  - Small classes
  - Being comfortable in front of people or groups
  - Each kid is taught in a way that helps them be successful
  
2. Consider what you have heard this evening. What are your thoughts?
  - Split programs or together with option D
  - Option D seems to be the only choice with a true choice
  - Option C: John Lyman school (\$4 million)?
  - What will happen if John Lyman is not a school what will the building be?
  - Decline in enrollment in CT, Plans to help the community with enrollment
  - Multi-age classes, Clarification (or multi- grade) will there be a choice
  
3. Given what you have heard this evening, please tell the Board what your top priority is at this stage in the process.
  - The kids do not get stranded on the ladder (the kids in specific programs)
  - Limit the possibility of students moving to one building then back to another during the transition. Smooth transition - no jumping from one program to another.
  
4. Knowing that you may have a strong preference for one of these options, we would like you to assume that you don't get your first choice. What would make the final proposal acceptable to you?
  - COST
  - Clear streamlined process
  - Keep the integrity of the two programs to the degree it can be
  - Maintain options
  - No portables
  - Keep united front
  
5. Further thoughts, questions or suggestions may be left for the Board on the 3 X 5 cards that are in your group setting.

## Room 108

1. What are the hallmarks of our district? What is most important to you?
  - Connections, having the kids feel comfortable with going to school. Also, having the parents feel safe with their kids going to school. Building a school community. Kids themselves feeling safe in the school.
  - Feel that their town matters
  - Concerns that only one school in Middlefield, seeing younger families moving into towns
  - Is there a decline in high schoolers because they are opting to go to private schools?
  - Important to evenly distribute the schools in both towns
  - Important to have a town that you can live in, spending more but not getting the performance
  - Important for the towns to combine more, recreation departments, programs
  - A one track plan is not as bad, elementary schools have a lot in common except grade combinations and assemblies every week (pro because more public speaking at a younger age)
  - The board is split but trying to unify an education system
  - Regionalizing the towns, more than just the school systems
  - When do you cut it off at combining the two towns?
  - A big positive to the district is having more than one choice
  - Two programs that are old... is the common core contradicting that
  - If it is the same material and curriculum why are they separated? Unless they are being taught the same, because teachers all go to the same development
  - Different schools in the district have different approaches in punishment and reward but they teach the same bigger picture material
2. Consider what you have heard this evening. What are your thoughts?
  - Evening out the school systems in different towns vs. regionalizing it
  - Needs to allow the parents to make a choice on how they want their child to be taught
  - Has to make financial sense to all members of the town
  - Members of the town want to see the # of Durham residents sending children to Lyman vs # of Middlefield members sending their children to Brewster
  - Losing a school and all the people that have worked there → what impact does that have on the town and economy
  - Are these the only options? → only one school in Middlefield, could we close Strong? Expand on memorial? Want the numbers for all the options
3. Given what you have heard this evening, please tell the Board what your top priority is at this stage in the process.
  - Figure out what options D is → like having a choice for parents to make
  - Option C is not an option
  - Option C is an option bc if the population increases it would be a shame to have all the schools in one town
  - Leaves room for the future to allow incline in the Lyman school system

How long does a student have to ride on the bus?

Cost of transportation is a big factor -> need to reduce bus count

Can you go to other schools but only have a bus for that towns students... the child can go to that school because they are in the district but the parents have to drive them

4. Knowing that you may have a strong preference for one of these options, we would like you to assume that you don't get your first choice. What would make the final proposal acceptable to you?

There should be an option for the child to loop (you stay with the same teacher for more than one year) if they want to

We need to save money ... money per child

Need to have schools in both towns

Board needs to be equal in town representation → make the two towns equal but Durham owes money to Middlefield because of Korn closing

Have the option to throw another option out there

Not equal representation with the taxation → Middlefield feels like they don't have a say

We work better united than divided

Per pupil expenditure in similar towns

More development in Durham

5. Further thoughts, questions or suggestions may be left for the Board on the 3 X 5 cards that are in your group setting.

## Room 109

1. What are the hallmarks of our district? What is most important to you?
  - Children who love learning.
  - Community sense is enhanced because of the academic sense of collaboration.
    - Because it's the academics where children are together.
  - Fiscal responsibility of the town.
  - Looking at the whole district, children love learning throughout.
  - The choice makes the district amazing.
  - What could we do with extra space in the high school?
    - Possibility for extra programs.
    - Credentials.
2. Consider what you have heard this evening. What are your thoughts?
  - Option D, however are we going to be spending money on buildings or edu?
  - Option D, kids do better with fewer transitions.
  - Middle school seems to be lost in the mix- can't dedicate themselves to a school. More parent involvement and dedication with less school transitions.
  - K-5 track, 6-8, 9-12.
    - Look at class sizes and enrollment declines.
  - Bigger schools = getting rid of some admin.

- School of 1000 kids had 3 admin.
3. Given what you have heard this evening, please tell the Board what your top priority is at this stage in the process.
    - John Lyman should stay open.
    - Financing down the road.
    - Middlefield has lots of room that can be developed.
      - Demographics.
      - Cost down the road when demographics change?
    - John Lyman could possibly be a very good investment. What will the cost be if we invest or don't?
    - Small group of BOE should not make such a small decision.
    - Korn/ JL closures were a combined deal.
    - Taxed like crazy in this town- however in certain neighborhoods families are leaving once a child graduates and taxes are left in the hands of the citizens.
    - Part of purpose of CC was so everyone was following the same protocol and learning.
  4. Knowing that you may have a strong preference for one of these options, we would like you to assume that you don't get your first choice. What would make the final proposal acceptable to you?
    - Best education.
    - What will create the best edu? If that means putting 2 programs together, that is what we should do.
    - Taxes have tripled in the past 18 years.
    - Taxpayers should decide this?
    - How can this be equitable? (6 v. 4)
    - Conservation land.
  5. Further thoughts, questions or suggestions may be left for the Board on the 3 X 5 cards that are in your group setting.

## **Room 111**

1. What are the hallmarks of our district? What is most important to you?
  - John Lyman- open classroom
  - Collaboration
  - Keeping both programs in one school, if John Lyman is closed
  - Keeping the kids close to home on bus rides, especially in the early grades
    - Join kids together on the bus
  - Unification
  - Community, collaboration, connection, choice, voice
2. Consider what you have heard this evening. What are your thoughts?

- Support for Option A: Brewster is not built for bigger kids, too much money to have 2 K-5 schools, keep Brewster K-2
    - Neighborhoods are too divided because of bus loops- pick up all kids from one neighborhood on one bus- one school would solve this issue (Option A)
  - There needs to be a focus on what the kids' days are going to look like
  - Looping is a good option- teachers get to know their kids
3. Given what you have heard this evening, please tell the Board what your top priority is at this stage in the process.
    - Priority- knowing what environment the kids are actually going to be in
      - What will the new program consist of?- direct answer
  4. Knowing that you may have a strong preference for one of these options, we would like you to assume that you don't get your first choice. What would make the final proposal acceptable to you?
    - Knowing what the new program will look like- multigrade classrooms? Looping?
    - Earlier integration- if 2 programs (like in related arts)
      - Too much division
    - Taking away choice would make any option unacceptable-
      - Flexibility is important
    - Board needs to stay financially responsible
    - Who shows up to the voting? Cater towards who is going to be voting
    - 2 programs 1 school option- would eliminate the double bussing, bring neighborhoods together, allow parents to have the choice of programs but not schools
  5. Further thoughts, questions or suggestions may be left for the Board on the 3 X 5 cards that are in your group setting.

## **Room 113**

1. What are the hallmarks of our district? What is most important to you?
  - Reputable
  - The education students receive
  - Importance of the school system
  - Being unified and blending principals
  - Having a choice
  - HOT school-K-12
  - Community spirit
  - Recognition of the whole child (holistically)
  - Children going through the system love to learn
  - Population size- "Small town feel"
  - Enthusiasm

Strengths in the school system depend on the teachers (committed to what they are doing)

2. Consider what you have heard this evening. What are your thoughts?  
You either agree with John Lyman or you do not  
It would be a good idea to collaborate in the middle, not being on one side or the other  
Not necessarily John Lyman, the building itself, it is what inside of it that people care about (the choice)  
Can be made to work for everyone, but it might not be the best option  
The design elements are very important that Dr. Veronesi talked about (student directed learning and authentic learning)  
The logistics are more difficult if the grades are split up  
More exploration of the logistics  
Fewer transitions from schools is more beneficial  
Parents feel very strongly about keeping John Lyman, whether it is integrated day or contemporary  
Integrating philosophies into one unified approach (which is a challenge)
3. Given what you have heard this evening, please tell the Board what your top priority is at this stage in the process.  
Authentic and student directed learning  
Maintaining choice because it is necessary to offer it to a child regardless of the facilities  
Integration of both systems into one unified and collaborative approach  
Commitment to excellence  
Stay with a timeline to reach goals  
Minimizing transitions (being more involved in schools)  
Increasing a unified community
4. Knowing that you may have a strong preference for one of these options, we would like you to assume that you don't get your first choice. What would make the final proposal acceptable to you?  
The whole district became a HOT district (how it is going to be implemented)  
The design elements  
Having this many buildings and staff since the numbers are not decreasing  
Collaboration should be the top priority

Further thoughts, questions or suggestions may be left for the Board on the 3 X 5 cards that are in your group setting.

## **Room 115**

1. What are the hallmarks of our district? What is most important to you?
  - Choice of school in community; happy with choices; two good choices that are currently existing
  - People like both Lyman and the program

- People like: proximity, quality, teachers
- School choice, ability for students to be creative and have a choice, programs are unique to students' needs/learning styles

2. Consider what you have heard this evening. What are your thoughts?

- Upset about potential cost of options (feel that not all costs are accurate)
- Information presented to smaller committee meetings differs from public forums
- What happens if there's another demographic increase?
- Cost of maintaining Lyman versus cost of opening brand new school
- Concern is if a school closes and demographics increase
- Difficult planning for unknown future enrollment
- Concerned about the challenge of an enrollment increase in the long term
- Perception of board is going to move forward without reimbursement
- Dividing K-5 by town is not a good idea; merging students from both towns early is a good (fewer transitions); more opportunities for different age groups interacting
- Recommend that Lyman students go to Memorial and Brewster students remain; incoming students get a choice
- Not many people are aware of school configuration discussion
- Needs to be publicized better

3. Given what you have heard this evening, please tell the Board what your top priority is at this stage in the process.

- Make sure needs/education of every child is met without extra spending
- K-5 (structural beneficial)
- Keep Lyman open
- Maintaining choice

4. Knowing that you may have a strong preference for one of these options, we would like you to assume that you don't get your first choice. What would make the final proposal acceptable to you?

- Nothing (complaint to state board of ed)
- No win scenario
- Too many unknowns; need more specifics on what this will look like in order to answer question with educated response

5. Further thoughts, questions or suggestions may be left for the Board on the 3 X 5 cards that are in your group setting.

### **Team 117**

1. What are the hallmarks of our district? What is most important to you?
  - Unique how you can have an option of choice

- Values of the program
  - Students have friends of all ages
  - Students are fit or placed to their ability level (Flexibility)
  - Leadership is important in the merging of grades
  - The location of John Lyman school is vital to residents and families in Middlefield (Economically and socially)
  - Schools are part of a community ecosystem
2. Consider what you have heard this evening. What are your thoughts?
- Option D has more questions than answers (Didn't seem to be a plan, just ideas)
  - Option D- Vague option
  - Our time was extended by adding another option which came along with more confusion
3. Given what you have heard this evening, please tell the Board what your top priority is at this stage in the process.
- Keep John Lyman
  - Keep the balance of 2 schools in each town
  - Memorial is out on the border
  - Our towns and district likes to be unique by offering choice
  - Our community is caring for the students, for example they bus students from home to schools across town
4. Knowing that you may have a strong preference for one of these options, we would like you to assume that you don't get your first choice. What would make the final proposal acceptable to you?
- If they were still 2 programs
  - Take the best of both
  - Financial benefits to the townspeople (Lower taxes) if the schools were cut
  - A conversation on the impact on the community values
  - Combine resources
  - Save jobs
  - Lower class sizes
5. Further thoughts, questions or suggestions may be left for the Board on the 3 X 5 cards that are in your group setting

## **Room 118**

1. What are the hallmarks of our district? What is most important to you?
  - Lyman school, good foundation to support the students
  - Choice of both programs: Lyman and Brewster
  - Public speaking is the most important thing to learn

- Student led learning (multi age is very important to have): it is great to be able to speak in front of your peers
  - Project approach
  - Having two schools that are easily accessible to people in all towns
  - Sense of community: small towns, people know each other
  - Acceptance of different styles of learning
    - Different learning styles for different students
  - Passion for the district (unique)
  - There is a divide between the people of the two schools
2. Consider what you have heard this evening. What are your thoughts?
- Confused by the idea of bringing k-5 to memorial and 6-8 together
  - Which learning style will be used for k-5?
  - Don't like being town specific, want the students to be a community and be able to interact with each other, don't want to be separated
  - Maybe put preschool with first grade?
  - Want to maintain both programs
  - There isn't enough credibility on the Board
  - Why is the principal at Brewster only contracted for one year?
  - Don't like how there are so many separate schools
3. Given what you have heard this evening, please tell the Board what your top priority is at this stage in the process.
- Look at question 2
4. Knowing that you may have a strong preference for one of these options, we would like you to assume that you don't get your first choice. What would make the final proposal acceptable to you?
- Preference is for integrated day
  - Want to maintain the hot school status
    - Keep a lot of the teachers from the integrated day community (ones that understand the learning style)
    - How do you decide which teachers stay and which ones go
  - Have all teachers have training in integrated day
  - Assembly (hot school)
  - Multi age
  - Different learning styles
  - Community
  - Passion for the district
  - People are invested in a "quality" district
    - Want to keep elementary schools (two different programs): it can attract more people to move into the town
    - People want the schools to be town centralized so they are close to the school (don't want to travel far)
    - Supporting the house prices for the people
  - The schools aren't big enough to hold all of the grades (lower school or upper school assemblies)

- All school assemblies with parents and schools
- Fix the gyms that are unsafe for the students
- Project approach (PBL)
  - Test scores Lyman vs Brewster (benchmark)
  - Utilize what worked from both school systems
  - Learn the same topics, just change the style to help the students
  - Teach students with a single person basis (don't miss helping any one student)
  - Want to see an increase in the test scores (% of growth)
  - There shouldn't be a gap between the different grades
- Want to improve the overall performance of the students (relate to other schools)
- Shouldn't be fully focused on test scores
- Having students and teachers all in one building would make it easier to relate the students
- Climate and culture:
  - All students learn and act differently
  - Extroverts and introverts (ID allows both students to succeed)
  - Measure the success
  - Being able to know older students (study buddies) make the students feel more like a community (multi age)
- Assemblies and public speaking are a base for good growth
- Values that come from the community and the school shape the students into very mature young adults
- Don't rush the decision
- Option D is too vague to be an option - make it more specific
  - Retention of the ID system

Further thoughts, questions or suggestions may be left for the Board on the 3 X 5 cards that are in your group setting.