

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 11, 2020 at 7:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Board members present: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor

Board members absent: Mr. Yamartino

Administration present: Dr. Serino, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance.

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Mr. Friedrich, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Board Appreciation

Dr. Serino acknowledged that March is Board of Education appreciation month and she thanked the members for all of their hard work, recognizing that it is a volunteer effort. She acknowledged that the work is mighty and the lift is heavy, yet everyone comes back to meeting after meeting to make decisions to improve the experience for the students in the district. She thanked the board, on behalf of the children and the staff.

The board took a brief recess for cake and coffee.

Mr. Moore made a few comments about how rewarding it is to serve on the board.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education regular session meeting - February 26, 2020

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the minutes of the February 26, 2020 regular session meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the February 26, 2020 regular session meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried unanimously.

Next Board Meeting - March 25, 2020 at 7:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School

Mr. Moore felt that the board would continue to meet, even if school is closed.

2020-2021 Budget Discussion

Mr. Moore noted that they had originally scheduled two more meetings for the budget, but he would like to be able to wrap up discussion at the next meeting.

A. Staffing

Dr. Serino reviewed that she had received some questions about class size in grades 3, 4 and 5. She did report that in the past month, there has been a new student in third grade, fourth grade and fifth grade as well as student who returned to the district for sixth grade in January. Regarding fifth grade, if they went from five classrooms to four, there would be three classes with 26 students and one with 25. That would be over the board-recommended class size. Dr. Serino also noted that next year will be the first year when ID and contemporary fifth graders will be combined.

In third and fourth grade at John Lyman, enrollment for next year is 87 with five sections. If they moved to four sections, the average class size would be 21.8 (one class of 21 and three classes of 22). Dr. Serino feels it would be a disruption to move students to a different classroom since the fourth graders were with the same teacher for third grade.

B. Buildings and Grounds

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that there is an overall increase of \$279,000. She explained the various parts of the buildings and grounds budget, noting that the largest increases are in repairs and maintenance. These repairs include the tennis court, basketball court, security blinds as well as regularly-budgeted annual repairs. Repairs add up to \$477,000. There was also an increase in leases, with a new capital lease for the energy project. That is essentially a reallocation from building supplies, fuel and oil. She reiterated that various items in the lease had been identified in the bonding package as being critical. Leases have increased \$47,000, due largely to the \$77,000 lease, but that has been offset by expiring leases.

C. Operating Services

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that this object code covers transportation, communications, insurance, travel and tuition. There was an increase in transportation of roughly \$200,000, per contract. An additional bus was added as students had been arriving late at school and there was also an increase in outplaced student transportation.

There was an increase of \$8,000, primarily due to the property and liability insurance increasing. There was an overall decrease in tuition, which is attributed to the proposed alternative education program. If that program is brought in-house, the district saves on tuition and transportation.

D. Supplies

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that this object code shows an overall decrease of \$154,000 and covers classroom and instructional supplies, buildings and grounds supplies and textbooks. Classroom and instructional

supplies increased by \$44,000 based on the district's decision to purchase student supplies that had been previously purchased by parents. There was a decrease in curriculum supplies of \$15,000, but the biggest decrease was in buildings and grounds where the costs were basically transferred to the energy project lease. Textbooks also had a decrease of \$25,000.

E. Equipment and Capital

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that buildings and construction, capital reserve, technology hardware, technology software and district equipment are included in this area. There is an overall increase of \$294,000. Hardware increased by \$23,000, due to Chromebooks for grade 6 and iPads for kindergartners and first graders. Software increased by \$35,000 for the purchase of cyber security software and other renewals. Other equipment increased by \$184,000 and included playgrounds at Lyman (\$50,000) and Memorial (\$100,000).

Dr. Serino mentioned that a comment had been made at the Finance Committee meeting that it seemed like it was a lot of money for playground equipment. She showed a picture of a playground option and Mrs. Booth explained that the equipment is \$28,000 and the remainder of the \$50,000 is for shipping and installation. They are also going to look into having a community build to possibly save money, but the installation would still need to be supervised by the company. There are also about 40 pieces of cement that may need to be removed at John Lyman. The committee has also found that it is better to get a full playscape rather than individual pieces. Dr. Friedrich suggested that the installation requirements are due to safety and liability.

Moving onto the field storage building, there is a placeholder for the shell of \$120,000. The Building Committee reached out to Apex Construction Group to review the original plans and their estimate for that is just over \$500,000. Mr. Moore explained that that includes 15 or 16 toilets, handicapped stalls, four or five sinks and urinals. The estimate did include unit prices. Mr. Moore will forward that estimate to the Building Committee and they will hopefully meet on March 23rd. Dr. Serino hoped that the board will have discussion about the placeholder in the budget and Mr. Moore added that the firm did confirm that the price of \$85,000 for the shell is correct.

Mrs. Geraci felt that the board should remove the \$120,000 from the budget and have the \$500,000 as a separate question. Mrs. Petrella agreed, especially since it has been voted down before. She did ask how the project went down \$300,000 and Mr. Moore explained that this proposal does not include the other rooms that were in the building, but did note that this is a huge amount of toilets. Mrs. Petrella did feel that it was worth putting it out to the voters again.

Dr. Taylor felt that whatever the price is should be moved into a bonding situation with an independent vote because of the prior vote on this. He does have concerns about the continued update or expansion of the building and would like to see it voted on that no further district money would be dedicated to expansion or other rooms, if that is what is decided. He does not want to be viewed as circumnavigating the process by putting it in the budget and slowly adding to it. Mr. Moore reminded everyone that other organizations have offered to help fund this.

Dr. Friedrich is also uncomfortable putting this into a non-bonding situation after the prior vote, but asked if they would they still be able to accept money to build other parts of the building. He felt there was a real advantage to presenting the smallest number possible to produce a bathroom facility, but have a plan to allow organizations to augment that. Dr. Friedrich stressed being transparent with this.

Mrs. Booth added that the Finance Committee is looking for the board to cut more from the budget and if it comes down to a teacher or a storage building, she would go with the teacher.

Dr. Serino explained that if the board agrees that this is not the process they would like to use in exploring the field house, then information needs to be prepared about bonding. Mrs. Neubig explained that it wouldn't necessarily have to be bonded as it would be expensive for a \$100,000 project, but there are bank loans and other things. Mrs. Geraci felt that most board members agree that the \$120,000 should not be in the budget and they should present the whole project again and let the people vote on it. Dr. Friedrich added that that would be for the shell and bathrooms, perhaps totaling less than \$500,000.

Mr. Moore added that this bond issue could move forward because it is not related to the closure of a building. Mrs. Geraci felt that this would be much more transparent and Dr. Friedrich added that it provides the opportunity for the sports organizations to outfit the building. Mrs. Booth felt that the district should do more than just the shell and it should include bathrooms and maybe a snack area.

Mr. Roraback asked about the yearly maintenance and upkeep on the building and felt it would easily dwarf the initial cost. He also asked if the CIAC requires bathrooms and Dr. Serino explained that they do not. Dr. Serino reminded everyone that there is still a school alteration project that will be out there and it may come down to prioritization. Dr. Taylor asked that the \$120,000 be removed from the budget for the next meeting.

Moving to the capital reserve account, Mrs. Neubig reviewed that the district is held to a 1 percent cap of their operating budget and that means they are allowed to reserve up to \$370,000. Priorities have been identified, including turf replacement and classroom furniture. Dr. Serino noted that furniture can really influence the way students work and collaborate with each other. Mrs. Neubig went on to review building, equipment and maintenance which was decreased by \$20,000 due to the energy project and the bonding package. Phase 1 of the sprinkler system is included in the bonding package, but phase 2 would be to bring it above ground. The gym floor needs to be replaced at Brewster.

F. Dues and Fees

Dr. Serino explained that both Strong and Coginchaug participated in robotics competitions over the weekend. The Coginchaug team won the rookie inspiration award at their first robotics competition and Dr. Serino reviewed the criteria for the award. The Strong team won the robot skills award which is given to the team with the highest combined score. Mr. Roraback added that it was a lot of teamwork and problem-solving.

G. Debt Service

Mrs. Neubig explained that debt service was level-funded to the previous year to accommodate the \$6.9 million bonding package. She reviewed a graph of the debt service, including the \$6.9 million package as well as the Brewster and Memorial bonding packages as an illustration. Mrs. Neubig noted that the existing debt service is gone by 2025. If the \$2.2 million is bonded for grade reconstruction, it will remain fairly level and then move back to declining. Both packages would retire in 2040.

Mr. Moore pointed out that the Brewster/Memorial bonding would not hit the budget until at least 2022, if approved. Mrs. Neubig reiterated that that bonding package is not included in the budget and is there just for illustration.

Dr. Serino explained that they had planned to have a technology presentation today, but that has been moved to the next meeting.

Committee Reports

A. Playground Committee Meeting - March 2, 2020

Mrs. Booth added that they are also looking at including some adaptive playground equipment at each of the schools. Once equipment is ordered, it can be installed pretty quickly. They have a meeting on Monday, March 23rd at Brewster School at 6:30 PM.

Communications

Mr. Moore has not received anything other than a lot of information on COVID-19.

Mr. Hicks reported that he read to second graders at Brewster School for Read Across America, which is one of his favorite events. Mr. Hicks also added that he attended the Selectmen's meeting on Monday and Mr. Eames has come up with a possible plan to use Korn School. Mr. Hicks felt that the project failed the last time mostly because of price (\$7 million) and the new proposal is at about \$1.3 million. Mr. Eames has also found ways to finance it without impacting the mill rate. The use will be as both an activity center and public safety. Mr. Hicks hopes that the board will have a decision soon. Dr. Taylor would like to be sure that fire trucks and ambulances will not be coming into the school area. Dr. Serino will reach out to Laura Francis for this information before the next Utilization meeting and Dr. Taylor suggested inviting George Eames to the meeting.

Mr. Hicks also reported that he has also reached out to Roger Passavant and is pleased with their discussion.

Mrs. Booth reported that she also read at Brewster and students mentioned the playground equipment at Memorial. Mrs. Booth also acknowledged the play put on by Paper House.

Mr. Moore reported that the girls' varsity basketball game was stopped because of no power and they never got to finish the state tournament. Dr. Serino stated that the cessation of sports has made a huge impact in the high school and the students are devastated. The pep band did have the opportunity to play at Mohegan Sun for the Wichita State team during the NCAA tournament.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Serino noted that she and Mrs. Neubig recently met with Dolphin Days about a possible partnership in a before- and after-care program. They continue to explore a number of possibilities. Dr. Taylor asked if there were any legal ramifications with private/public partnerships like this and Dr. Serino noted that BASREP conducted a before- and after-care program in district for many years.

Dr. Serino also mentioned that staff members visited the Renzulli School in Hartford and also Region 10. Dr. Serino felt it was a very successful visit and has reaffirmed that the district is on the right track with the development of their enrichment programming.

Director of Finance's Report

Mrs. Neubig reported that everything is running according to plan. Revenue is 68 percent received and expenses are at 63 percent. MTA is at 70 percent revenue and expenditures are at 54 percent. Mrs. Neubig will report projected surpluses at the next meeting.

New Business**A. Vote to change date for public hearing on the budget to April 6, 2020**

Mr. Moore explained that the original date had been for the start of Passover and needs to be rescheduled.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to change the date for public hearing on the budget to April 6, 2020.

In favor of changing the date for public hearing on the budget to April 6, 2020: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried unanimously.

B. COVID-19 planning and response update

Dr. Serino reported that the district is getting their information from the Director of Health of the Plainville-Southington Health District. They have met in person and had a conference call as well. They have also had a conference call with the Governor, the Commissioner and other state health leaders. While the information doesn't really change daily, it does intensify. The most recent recommendations were to decrease, if not completely eliminate, any mass gatherings of 100 or more people and achieve social distancing. Decisions to cancel or postpone events have been made. They were considering letting the students perform the play for just students and the Health Director said to not have an assembly that is not necessary. Dr. Serino also asked about outside agencies using school buildings and he encouraged her to keep school for educating students only and not introduce any more people into the school buildings than is absolutely necessary. She did note that some of the outside groups that use the buildings are not happy about her decision.

Parent-teacher conferences will not be held face-to-face next week and will be done by phone instead. Principals met with staff today. Dr. Serino added that students are starting to talk more about the virus and are expressing greater worry. Teachers are asking how they should talk to students about this and what to do if a student says they know someone who has been diagnosed. There is another conference call on Friday morning with the Health District.

Dr. Serino noted that people are talking about a two-week time frame for a school closure. District 14 has closed for four days, a school in Stratford closed and Westport has closed their schools today. She reiterated that the district's priority is to stay as safe as possible while in school and pushing the CDC recommendations in terms of proactive and preventative measures. They have received information from the State Department of Education about applying for a waiver if they can demonstrate that they can do distance learning that is equitable for all students. If that waiver is accepted, the students would not have to make up the days missed. Dr. Serino has a conference call tomorrow afternoon with the Commissioner to further look at distance learning and the statutory expectation of 180 days. The district's primary focus will be to make sure the students know that they are still thinking about them, even when they are not in school.

Dr. Serino explained that they have been gathering materials to be able to send home with children as well as opportunities for them to do some online learning. They have asked people to reach out to them if they do not have access to devices or the internet. Another consideration is the teachers' union and what can be expected of teachers while they are not in school.

Dr. Serino added that they have pulled a planning and response team together of about 20 people who have met once a week to discuss updates and create action planning. Four general categories, including communication, proactive planning and preparation, a focus on well-being and education continuity, have been identified.

Mrs. Booth asked if there was any possibility of not having the April break if closure happens and Dr. Serino felt that the Health Director would say that if there was time planned to be out of the building, they should be out of the building.

Dr. Taylor asked if they are getting any information from the State about when events can be rescheduled and Dr. Serino commented that they had originally said there would be no impact for a good month or more, with a lull in the summer. However, yesterday's call said it would be more like a couple of weeks for the impact and that it will be worse in the fall. They are trying very hard to listen to the experts and to be responsive, not reactive.

Dr. Friedrich felt that they needed to think about operating in the presence of multiple school closures, not just a two-week period. Dr. Taylor added that it could be for the entire rest of the year. Mrs. Geraci asked what would happen with outplaced kids or kids who receive a lot of services. Dr. Serino explained that they are working on that and a letter will go out to parents about that. It will certainly be a hard population to provide continual support to without being face to face, so they have begun to talk about expanding summer school. Dr. Taylor mentioned running partial schools to address kids with high needs as closure is basically to prevent a large number of people being in the same building. Dr. Serino stated that they are planning to talk to the Health Director about that on Friday.

Dr. Friedrich felt that school closures will occur more than once and Dr. Taylor relayed information from the CDC about spreading the infection over longer periods of time to not overwhelm healthcare resources. It also pushes back time for the development of vaccines. Dr. Taylor felt that Dr. Serino and her team have been doing an amazing job with all of this.

Dr. Serino also noted that the latest school would be in session, as of right now, would be June 30th. She was not sure about the graduation date at this point. SATs have not been rescheduled at this point and are currently on for March 25th, with a make-up date of April 14th. AP tests are scheduled for the beginning of May.

C. Review of Board of Education goals

Mr. Moore stated that he has not received any comments on the goals and that he will print a final document for the board to vote on at the next meeting.

Public Comment

Roger Passavant, from Durham, thanked Mr. Hicks for his courtesy in response to the package he had sent, however he is still insulted that nobody else has responded. He still has safety concerns in regards to

what was in the package. All of the information he had was given to him by the administration. A student violated the school's rules and the board has not followed up on those rules and regulations. Mr. Passavant also offered his help with removal of the concrete at John Lyman.

Michelle DiMauro-Murphy, from Middlefield, respectfully requested the board reconsider adding the \$120,000 back into the budget for completion of the storage facility. The request is based on the fact that, to date, the revenue generated from athletic fees has been \$173,950. If the board comes up with a plan to no longer have that fee, she would ask that they reconsider. Based on the May, 2013 CIAC recommendations, they suggested that the board come up with a time line.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, felt that funding the storage building would be throwing money at something that they're not sure will even be used. He felt that the district may even end up regionalizing with another district. As far as the operating costs, he felt you need to account for staff, heat and water. Regarding Korn School, Mr. Stoup was also at the meeting and has some great reservations about some of the costs. He also has concerns about any emergency vehicles responding from that location.

Anticipated Executive Session

A. Discuss personnel matter

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to enter into executive session for the purpose of a personnel matter, inviting Dr. Serino to join.

In favor of entering into executive session for the purpose of a personnel matter, with Dr. Serino joining: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Mrs. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
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