

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 10, 2021 at 7:00 PM remotely.

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

Board members absent: None

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mrs. DiMaggio, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology, Mr. Whiting, Network Systems Manager, Mr. Falcone, Principal of CRHS, Mr. Ford, Principal of John Lyman School, Mrs. Melillo, Dean of Academic & Student Services at CRHS, Mrs. Murray, Principal of Brewster School, Mr. Sadinsky, Principal of Strong Middle School and Mrs. Stone, Principal of Middlefield Memorial School

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 Dr. 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, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education regular meeting - February 24, 2021

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education regular session meeting of February 24, 2021, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education regular session meeting of February 24, 2021, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion carried.

Next Board Meeting - March 24, 2021 at 7:00 PM

2021-2022 Budget Discussion**A. Operating services**

Mrs. Neubig began by explaining that operating services has an overall decrease of \$24,904. This area incorporates transportation which includes a 3.5 percent renewal fee this year, tuition, maintenance, repairs and leases and insurance and travel. New this year is a lease for a used van to replace the district's van which is aging out. Sealing and painting the courts at Memorial is also included under repairs and leases represents a full year of lease payments for the energy project. The playground repairs done last year also result in a decrease in this object code.

Property insurance renewal rates can go between 4 and 7.5 percent and has been budgeted at 7.5 percent this year. Travel has been reduced due to COVID and using Zoom more.

B. Supplies

Mrs. Neubig stated that the overall decrease in supplies is \$76,739. There has been an increase in athletic supplies, specifically in football for new uniforms. Decreases include classroom supplies, health supplies, curriculum and instructional support, office, buildings and grounds as well as textbooks.

C. Capital Equipment

There is an overall increase of \$50,210, to fully fund the capital reserve fund at close to 1 percent. There was also an increase in software license renewal fees.

Turf replacement is proposed to complete the funding cycle at \$109,150. Phase 2 of the sprinkler system pump house is \$180,840, with phase 1 being bonded. Classroom furniture replacement is at \$40,000 and unanticipated building maintenance and repairs is at \$50,000.

D. Dues and Fees

There is an overall decrease of \$21,000, primarily due to paying for robotics competition fees out of a grant. Those fees will appear again next year if there is no grant. There were also some reductions in dues and fees in other areas as well.

E. Debt Service

Mrs. Neubig explained that there is an overall decrease of \$673,000 in debt service this year. The \$6.9 million bonding had been structured to start early in the 2021 year, but was delayed to prevent project overlap with the energy project, pushing the bond issuance out into next year. For 2022-2023, debt service will bump up again, providing the bonding is issued, but more in the area of \$130,000 to \$200,000. Debt service will then steadily decline and all old debt will be retired in 2025-2026 and the 6.9 million bond will continue on a declining schedule.

Mrs. Neubig explained that at the next meeting on March 24th, Per Pupil Expenditure, Town Allocations and MTA and will be discussed. The public hearing will be on April 7th, the district meeting on May 3rd and the referendum on May 4th.

Mrs. Neubig then reviewed questions she had received from board members, with the first being a clarifying question about the difference between tuition - special ed and tuition - special ed - public. With the State of CT EFS reporting, the district had to create a new line for one of the outplacement facilities. This is not a new expense for the district.

Another question was about the increase in supplies for football and that was the uniforms for the six-year uniform replacement cycle.

Mrs. Petrella asked why curriculum has gone up and what is included in that line item. Mrs. Neubig explained that that is curriculum supplies, such as teacher reference resource books, books for the Director as well as consumables.

Mr. Roraback asked if the cost for football uniforms is shared amongst the towns in the co-op and Mrs. Neubig explained that that is done through the \$650 co-op fee that is charged per participating co-op student.

Mr. Moore added that the board will need to approve the budget at the March 24th meeting so that it can go to public hearing on April 7th. Mrs. Neubig added that they could meet on March 31st, if necessary.

Dr. Taylor asked about any potential grant money for summer school. Mrs. Neubig explained that it would depend on what type of grant it is, such as a reimbursable grant that reimburses general fund expenditures and would be shown in the general account or a grant like the ESSER II funds which will appear in the Grant account. Mrs. Neubig also explained that they have started the grant application for summer school. Dr. Taylor would like to hear what the plan is at a future meeting. Mrs. Petrella mentioned that it will be on the agenda for the Student Achievement committee meeting on March 17th.

Dr. Taylor also asked about the uniform expenses and whether that included pads and equipment or just the external uniforms. Mrs. Neubig explained that it would just be for the uniforms. Dr. Taylor asked how many students participate in football and cheerleading. Mr. Falcone thought there were approximately 20 cheerleaders and 60 football players.

Mrs. Geraci asked if it would make sense to delay the uniform purchase for a year and possibly put that money toward something else. Mr. Falcone noted that the uniform cycle has already been pushed from four to five to six years, so it is already stretched.

Mr. Moore asked about the property insurance increase which is at 13 percent. Mrs. Neubig explained that that is not just property insurance in that line item, it is also student insurance, auto insurance, etc. The property insurance itself is budgeted at a 7.5% renewal rate.

Mr. Moore also asked if outplacement tuition had been brought down this year due to moving some kids back to the district and Mrs. Keane explained that it had. She stated that it is working very well, even through COVID.

Committee Reports**A. Utilization Committee Meeting - February 25, 2021**

Dr. Taylor reported that they had two major agenda items focused around buildings, Korn and Lyman. There was continued discussion around Korn and they are waiting on the Selectmen from Durham to make a move. Mr. Moore and Dr. Schuch did have a meeting with Laura Francis on Monday. Dr. Taylor stated that he listened to the Board of Selectmen meeting on Monday and felt that they were still debating, but they plan to vote on it at their next meeting.

Mr. Moore explained that Mrs. Francis had stated that they will bring it to a vote and then move to referendum. The district should have an answer by March 31st about whether they are moving forward or not.

Dr. Taylor added that they had a lot of discussion around language for potentially bringing a vote to referendum for closing John Lyman School. Dr. Schuch added he, Mrs. Neubig and Mr. Moore met with bond counsel and the district's attorneys as well. He reviewed that the idea was to try to separate all of the different issues around the potential closing of John Lyman and get to the point where a question can be put to the voters about just the closing. Dr. Schuch explained that they have to ask a single question on referendum and that question would be different from what was asked previously. He understands that the question should be to amend the charter specifically to close John Lyman Elementary School, but unfortunately that cannot be done by the referendum in May. They also discussed hiring a PR firm and got guidance from the attorneys on that as well. Mr. Moore felt that the question will amend the description in the charter to no longer include John Lyman School. All of this would need to be done by late August, 60 days ahead of the referendum. They also discussed having an independent auditor evaluate the costs for the maintenance of Lyman over the next 10 years.

Dr. Taylor asked why the attorneys felt that they couldn't just take this question to the towns at this point. Mr. Moore explained that the rejection was about the board's authority to close a school and that would need to be approved by both towns. The attorneys felt that because that failed, the board does not have the authority to close a school unless the plan is changed. Dr. Schuch felt that the charter probably had never anticipated a school having to close and the voters would also not have the right to close a school since the charter doesn't support that. Voters could give the board permission to do that through a change in the plan. Dr. Schuch added that the attorney is willing to come to a Utilization Committee meeting or a board meeting to provide further details. Mrs. Neubig felt that the difference between this and the previous referendum is that the prior question asked to give the board approval to close schools and this would be specifically about John Lyman.

Mr. Yamartino stated that this feels like total lunacy. The lawyers first said saying that the board doesn't have the authority to close a school and that they needed to ask the voters to give them the authority to do that. He asked why it needed to wait until November since there is a potential buyer for John Lyman School. He is afraid that the school will not close by the end of the next school year. Mr. Yamartino felt that they then need to ask the voters in May for the capital improvements necessary to keep John Lyman School operating since pushing the referendum off will obligate the district to operate the school for two more school years. Mr. Yamartino felt that the capital improvements have been kicked down the road and should have been done last year. He feels it is just too much of a risk to not do the necessary improvements.

Mr. Yamartino then asked why they needed to wait until November for the referendum and felt that it could be done in July or August. Mr. Moore stated that they picked November to allow for enough time to get the question right and felt that they would get more voters in November. It would only require 30-days notice if it is not being done with the general election. Mr. Yamartino hoped that the process could be accelerated or he would not feel comfortable moving forward with a budget that doesn't include the capital improvements needed.

Dr. Schuch did not see any reason that they could not close John Lyman the summer following the referendum. Mrs. Booth thought that they couldn't close the school until there was room for the kids at the other schools.

Dr. Taylor stated that they may be exceeding the discussion of the Utilization Committee update at this point. Mr. Hicks felt that they are beyond the scope of a committee report and have moved into an agenda item that doesn't appear on the agenda.

Dr. Friedrich agreed with Mr. Yamartino that sooner is better than later, however he felt there would be a real advantage to have the bonding issue for capital repairs at Lyman on the same referendum as the request to close the school. He thought that they should give people a choice between the two alternatives. Mr. Yamartino asked what would happen if the voters said no to both options. Mr. Moore stated that the bond counsel had told them that they could not have two questions. Dr. Friedrich felt that it could happen regardless of whether the questions were on two different referendums or not. He also hoped that the PR firm could make the choices clear.

B. Well-Being Committee Meeting - March 9, 2021

Mrs. Caramanello reported that Joanna Curry-Sartori joined the committee and shared what she has been doing in the world of well-being. She has been working on a self-leadership model with teachers. She also mentioned that District 13 is the first district in the world to implement this approach in school culture, with Strong School piloting it for the last year. Steve FitzGerald, Amy Schaefer and Scott Sadinsky shared what they have been doing, including the P.A.U.S.E. program. They reported that they have seen great improvement in morale and connections with students and other staff. The program will be going out to the other schools in the district as well.

The Well-Being Committee also met Leslie Paoletti, the vice-chair of Durham's Equity, Diversion and Inclusion Committee. The committee also touched on the equity policy and it will go to the Policy Committee next week, followed by the full board.

Mr. Roraback felt that the roundtable discussion they had was a great engagement tool that works with adults as well as kids. Mrs. Caramanello explained that Mrs. Schaefer and Mr. Fitzgerald presented a question and everyone shared their thoughts.

Communications

A. Board member elections

Mr. Moore noted that he had received notice from the Town Clerk that Dr. Taylor's term is up as of May 10th and an election will be held at the town's annual budget meeting. That election would be for a term that lasts through November, when four seats will be voted on. That would include three with four-year terms and one with a two-year term. The remaining two board members would be up for election the following year.

Mr. Moore also stated that he has received two concerns about COVID vaccinations and Dr. Schuch will answer those questions. Mr. Moore also stated that Henry Bugai, from Benchwarmers, is offering to buy new scoreboards for at least one sport but a formal proposal has not been received.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Schuch reported that he has continued with his transition work and thanked Meg Maloney for all of her work scheduling all of his meetings as well as keeping his schedule balanced. He had two really good meetings in the last week, one with a group of eighth graders and one with a group of recent graduates. He felt that they all shared some really important information. He does intend to keep holding these kinds of meetings and will also move forward with a document review, looking at policies and reports. Dr. Schuch is still targeting May or June to be able to share his information with everyone.

Dr. Schuch reported that the vaccine administration plan he presented at the last meeting was changed for the better just 24 hours after he presented it. Hartford Healthcare offered to run a dedicated clinic for the district. The first dose of the Pfizer vaccine will be given this Saturday for the district's employees, with the second dose scheduled for April 3rd. They continue to encourage everyone to get the vaccine, either at the clinic or somewhere more convenient for them. Dr. Schuch is encouraged by the fact that almost all employees intend to get vaccinated. He also thanked Shane Lockwood, the local Health Director, who helped to secure this and Mr. Brough in HR who has dealt with lots of questions. He also thanked the district's employees for their patience.

Dr. Schuch also felt that the district is in a position to move the Board of Education meetings back to in-person meetings and would recommend starting that on April 7th. He felt that that could be safely done in the auditorium at the high school and continue with meetings most likely in the library.

Mrs. Petrella asked if they will be holding committee meetings in person as well and if they will meet at various schools. Dr. Schuch explained that this is just his recommendation and noted that Mrs. Maloney needed to know the plan for the public hearing because of the notices that need to be published. He and Mr. Moore discussed that the full board meetings will go in-person, but committees could be either way. Mr. Moore added that they will also have to consider the governor's guidance of 100 people in public meetings. Dr. Schuch explained that the governor's executive orders go through April 19th and there may not be a choice. He added that the 100-person limit may even be smaller as they have to maintain six-foot distancing as well as wear masks. He would also hope that the only public who comes to an in-person meeting will be people who specifically want to participate and that everyone else continues to watch virtually.

Mr. Yamartino stated that he will not be fully immunized by April 7th. He has been severely limiting his travel into public places and would be concerned about holding in-person meeting with everyone not being fully vaccinated. Dr. Taylor felt that any board members who are not vaccinated should not be forced to attend any in-person meetings and they should have the option to be remote. Dr. Schuch stated that they could definitely facilitate any board member who prefers not to attend in person. He added that they can also hold the budget public hearing remotely, but wanted to let everyone know that they are prepared to meeting in-person. Many districts are moving in that direction.

Mr. Hicks also mentioned the variants of the virus and felt that the jury is still out on them. He was quite hesitant about meeting in person as well. Dr. Friedrich added that he would like the option of attending on Zoom and is not sure he would attend in person.

Mr. Moore added that he has put an item on the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting about a remote meeting policy. He added that they could hold the Public Hearing with a few people present and the public distanced, with everyone else on Zoom. Mr. Hicks also mentioned that the town has had several live town meetings at the high school and seats are blocked off in the auditorium.

Mr. Moore summarized that Dr. Schuch, Mrs. Neubig and Mr. Moore could be in person at the board meeting and public hearing with other board members remote. They could allow public both in-person and via Zoom. Dr. Taylor offered to come to the meeting as well. Dr. Schuch reminded everyone that sometimes the technology doesn't work as well with a hybrid situation. Mr. Pietrasko agreed that any sort of hybrid can be an audio nightmare and people tend to get talked over. He stated that it is doable, but not advisable. Dr. Friedrich stated that they did hold a hybrid board meeting and he agreed that it was a nightmare, but hoped that they have more experience now. Dr. Schuch felt that it was more an issue for the public than for the people on Zoom and agreed with Mr. Pietrasko. He thought maybe they should just hold the meeting and public hearing on Zoom due to the technology issues. Dr. Schuch also mentioned that the schools have been in-person for quite some time now and it would be up to the board as to how they wish to present themselves.

Mr. Moore stated that the problem he had was that the town has been holding public meetings live and they may expect the board to do the same for the hearing, but he would be comfortable on Zoom as well. Dr. Friedrich stated that he would be happy with a meeting for whoever might want to participate, but the overflow people lined up outside would not be able to hear the presentation. He would be present via Zoom at that meeting as most board members are not required to speak. Mr. Moore suggested they check with the selectmen and see what they expect of the district. He also suggested that any speakers speak directly into a computer rather than a microphone.

Mrs. Booth asked to confirm that the town has used the high school for a meeting because she thought that the district's buildings were closed to the public. She would be fine with an in-person meeting, but also believes that if it can be accomplished via Zoom that would be safer.

Mr. Hicks felt that they were now having a discussion that is not an agenda item. Dr. Schuch will check with the towns and they will proceed from there.

Mr. Falcone followed up with the answer to Dr. Taylor's question that there are between 18 and 22 cheerleaders for next year and 56 participants in football this year. They expect to be close to that same number next year.

Mr. Falcone then reported that they are looking at putting together a senior celebration at Quassy Amusement Park on May 15th. This will be a four-hour event, including a formal dance and dinner as well as the rides opening up for the kids. The park is reserved for just the district that evening. They have reviewed these plans with the kids. The prom at Aria has been canceled because it was an indoor event. They are also looking to hold a senior picnic which has usually been held at Holiday Hill. That is not possible this year, so they are looking to possibly team up with the Durham Fair and have the Mr. Cuginchaug contest there as well. Mr. Falcone had suggested a hypnotist, but the kids didn't like that idea and wanted to have a field day instead. They will look to do some sort of lunch for the kids that day as well.

They are also looking into a possible spring outdoor band and choral concert. They are looking at awards assemblies to be possibly outside or live streamed. They have also worked with the Project Graduation Committee and they are going to keep the normally-scheduled celebration at the Shelton Sports Complex on graduation night.

Mrs. Caramanello thanked Mr. Falcone for making sure that the senior class has some fun.

Director of Finance's Report

Mrs. Neubig reported that MTA is 39 percent expended and 53 percent revenue received. The general fund is at 64 percent expended and 68 percent revenue received. The application for the ESSER II funds is about 80-85 percent ready to be submitted. The American Rescue Plan was passed through Congress today and the district will be allotted \$483,000 from that plan. There are many allowable categories to expend the funds.

Mrs. Neubig has the information about the security vestibules, but will wait until the next meeting since she did not get it on tonight's agenda.

New Business

A. Vote to authorize Doug Schuch, Superintendent, to enter into agreements and sign claims for reimbursement with the CSDE Child Nutrition Programs

Mrs. Neubig explained that this is just a vote to authorize Dr. Schuch to be the primary point of contact on the National School Lunch Program.

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hicks, to authorize Doug Schuch, Superintendent, to enter into agreements and sign claims for reimbursement with the CSDE Child Nutrition Programs.

In favor of authorizing Doug Schuch, Superintendent, to enter into agreements and sign claims for reimbursement with the CSDE Child Nutrition Programs: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino.
Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

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

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

Meeting was adjourned at 8:31 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First