

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held a District Meeting on May 3, 2021 at 8:00 PM in the Julian Thayer Auditorium at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

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

Board members absent: Mrs. Caramanello, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino

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

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

District Meeting

Mr. Moore read the call to the meeting, warning of district meeting and return of the call into the record.

Ms. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich to nominate Tom Hennick as moderator of the District Meeting.

In favor of nominating Tom Hennick as moderator of the District meeting: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Ms. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hennick invited the Board to make a brief presentation on the proposed budget.

Mr. Moore introduced Dr. Schuch and asked him to say a few words. Dr. Schuch explained that he came to the district in the middle of the budget process and thanked Dr. Serino for her work at the beginning of the process. Dr. Schuch has tried his best to understand the process, but has had to depend on the wisdom of others and is very pleased with the proposed budget. He also thanked those that came out for the meeting.

Mr. Moore reviewed that the budget process began in October and has been through several iterations, meetings and a public hearing. Mr. Moore explained that the total gross budget being proposed is \$37,022,976, which represents a .93 percent reduction from last year. The net budget has gone up by 2.5 percent to \$35,470,647.

Mr. Moore then went on to explain the distribution of the budget between the two towns and noted that Durham is at 66.74 percent, with Middlefield at 33.26 percent. The allocation for Durham is \$23 million and \$11 million for Middlefield, minus the ECS grants from the state. The net cost to Durham is \$20,507,377 and \$9,960,033 to Middlefield. This net cost represents about a \$745,000 increase to Durham and \$122,752 increase to Middlefield.

Looking at the per pupil expenditure, Mr. Moore explained that it was \$20,510 in 2019, \$22,012 in 2020, \$22,712 in 2021 (estimated) and is projected to be \$23,960 in 2022. The increases in per pupil expenditure are because of a decrease in student population, with 77 students expected to leave the school system this year.

Mr. Moore went on to review the major budget drivers for this year's budget. Last year, the towns asked for a zero increase to the budget and the district used virtually all of the \$2 million surplus and fund balance to do that. That resulted in under \$600,000 being available in the fund balance to apply to this year's budget. Current year expenditures were frozen in March of this year many expenditures were not incurred, such as athletic events and busing, which resulted in another \$400,000 of savings. The initial proposed budget was a lot higher than it is today.

Salaries are up by 2.3 percent. Health insurance and benefits are up by 1.5 percent and capital needs have been funded at an increased level. Decreases were realized in debt service, primarily due to projects being delayed due to grant opportunities and an energy savings project. The budget shows a reduction of three FTEs in staff (two at John Lyman and one at Strong) and purchased services were reduced wherever possible. Capital has increased to \$360,000, as opposed to last year funded at approximately \$300,000. The Benchwarmers asked if the district would replace scoreboards at the baseball and softball fields as well as in the gym and agreed to provide \$15,000 towards that. The funds were re-allocated out of the ongoing turf replacement account to fund the scoreboards. The sprinkler system pump house on Pickett Lane is at the end of its life and needs replacement to operate with the water system from Middletown.

Mr. Moore then reviewed the history of the district's debt service and explained that it did drop this year because the debt was not issued due to other opportunities. Debt service will begin to rise again next year as debt is issued for the capital projects and then fall off as the debt drops off in 2025.

The district's budget has steadily decreased over the last six years. This year's budget is almost \$500,000 less than it was in 2015-2016 and the net budget is still below the 2015-2016 budget as well by about \$100,000. The large drop in 2016-2017 was due to Korn School closing.

Mr. Hennick thanked Mr. Moore for his presentation and asked for questions and/or comments from the public. He did explain that anyone watching the meeting online will not be able to ask questions.

Carl Stoup felt that the cost per pupil is very significant and he asked what causes that. He felt that excess building space is one cause of the increase. Mrs. Neubig explained that the per pupil expenditure is a state calculation. The district provides the yearly expenditures which is then divided by the number of students enrolled in the district. The denominator keeps getting smaller due to declining enrollment and the numerator isn't decreasing. Enrollment is based on certain qualifiers as well that increase the bottom number, but it's not enough to make a difference. The only way to move that number down is a large reduction in the numerator (millions of dollars). Mr. Moore added that the board has addressed that by continuing to look at the cost of keeping Lyman School open.

Richard Parmelee asked to clarify if the people viewing the meeting from home can ask questions and Mr. Whiting noted that there were 26 people online, but they cannot ask questions. Mr. Parmelee asked for a brief description of dues and fees and in-house tuition. Mrs. Neubig explained that dues and fees is memberships for professional organizations for administrators and teachers and dues for sports organizations. Mr. Parmelee asked if students have to pay fees to participate in different activities and Mrs. Neubig explained that these are district-paid fees. The district did not continue with the pay-to-participate for students. Mr. Parmelee asked if football was still part of the athletics program and Mrs. Neubig explained that it is and remains a co-op. Mr. Parmelee felt that football is a sport with cumulative injuries that may or may not show up later in life. He felt that football should be eliminated for the health and protection of the students.

Mr. Parmelee asked about the money in the fund balance and how it is moved out. Mr. Moore explained that the fund balance is moved back into the budget every year. Mrs. Neubig explained that state statute directs the fund balance to be used to offset the upcoming budget. Mr. Parmelee asked if the board can move money from the fund balance into certain line items. Mrs. Neubig explained that it does not offset any specific expenditure and is applied as revenue. This money is accounted for in the budget and is specifically noted under revenue. Mr. Parmelee felt that the general public is not able to control the spending like they can at the town level.

Mr. Parmelee felt that everyone in education has made their best efforts to contend with the times. He also noted that if the state adjusts the amount of money given to the school systems, the towns will have to absorb those differences. Mr. Parmelee asked if that has been changed and Mr. Moore did not feel anything has changed. Mrs. Neubig added that the governor's proposed budget held ECS funding flat and the appropriations committee proposed to reinstate the ECS formula. If that passes, Durham's ECS could be less by \$138,523 and Middlefield could be less by \$42,853. The town assessments were calculated using the Governor's proposed budget numbers. The legislature has addressed previous year hold-backs and that is no longer allowable. Mr. Parmelee felt that the state shouldn't be able to take back money that they promised.

Mrs. Neubig also explained that in-house tuition is the Middlesex Transition Academy program and the preschool program. Mr. Parmelee reiterated that he believes the taxpayers should fund all parts of the education system.

Carl Stoup also noted that the student population dropped last year which adds to the per pupil cost. He asked if they had any estimates for the coming year. Mr. Moore explained that they estimate losing an additional 47 students this year and 77 for 21-22.

There were no other questions or comments.

Ms. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to adjourn to the referendum.

In favor of adjourning to referendum: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanella, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

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Alwaz First