

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone

Board members absent: None.

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Brough, Human Resources Specialist, Mrs. Quarato, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Development, Mrs. Siegel, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Accountability, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology, Mrs. Stone, Principal of Coginchaug Regional High School, and Mrs. Murray, Principal of Brewster School

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the special meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Ms. Betty made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Mrs. Dahlheimer welcomed everyone to the meeting tonight. All items that will be discussed or voted upon are included on the agenda. The board is here to set goals, listen to reports, approve budgets, contracts and personnel appointments as well as set policy for the district. The board is not intended to make management decisions or solve the problems of individuals which is the responsibility of the superintendent. Board meetings are open to the public, but are not meetings with the public. Therefore, comments from the audience will be confined to the time designated for the public to address the board. Due to the anticipated number of public comments this evening, the board will be limiting public comment to three minutes per person, for a total of 30 minutes. The board can then either continue or end public comment. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked that anyone who has submitted questions to the board please defer their time to others who may not have had a chance to address the board. She reminded everyone that decorum and courtesy are important and thanked everyone for their interest.

Presentation and Recognition

A. MTA & CRHS Presentation: Germany Special Olympics - Zack Ryer and Ethan Bufford-Cournoyer

Mrs. Stone, principal at Coginchaug, summarized that these two learners had the opportunity to have an authentic, experiential learning trip overseas. Mr. Bajoros, Zack Ryer and Ethan Bufford-Cournoyer traveled to Germany this summer as the North American representatives of Coginchaug, Special Olympics CT and Special Olympics North America at the 2023 Olympic Global Youth Leadership Summit. As a result, the Coginchaug Unified Sports Program was recruited to apply to be part of the unified exchange between

Special Olympics Latin America and Special Olympics North America. Mrs. Stone announced that, last week, Mr. Bajoros was told that they were selected as a finalist.

Zack Ryer reported that it was troublesome getting to Berlin due to a flight delay. He met many new people from around the world. They were divided into groups to work on meetings and projects. His favorite part of the trip was the cultural events where people shared their culture. They set up a booth talking about American sports. Zack shared what they love about Special Olympics and why it is so important. He felt very fortunate to have had the opportunity and will be forever grateful to Mr. Bajoros.

Ethan Bufford-Cournoyer noted that his favorite part was meeting with the US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and networking with organizations across the world. The Unified bowling trip gathered 120 athletes. They also met Miss America and Tim Tebow.

B. RSD 13 2023-2024 Teacher of the Year Recognition - Jenny Lussier

Mrs. Murray introduced Jenny Lussier, the RSD 13 Teach of the Year. This is a testament to her dedication, passion and unwavering commitment to education. She has exemplified the qualities of an exceptional educator. Her journey in the field of education has been nothing short of remarkable. She is not just a teacher, but is a mentor, a guide and a source of inspiration for both students and colleagues. Her library is not merely a place of learning, but is a sanctuary where students are encouraged to dream, explore and realize their full potential. She ensures all of the learners have personalized experiences at Brewster School and now again at Lyman. Mrs. Lussier is a leader of project-based learning, student-centered learning, technology and is an advocate of equity and inclusion. She seeks out professional development opportunities in library media, technology, STEAM and equity education. She has worked on curriculum development that is learner-centered and personalized for all. She works diligently to provide learners opportunities to meet with diverse authors and experience diverse texts. She encourages learners to lead, have voice in their learning and explore learning through a learner-centered lens. She is the heart of the learner-led assemblies each week.

Mrs. Lussier expressed that it was truly an honor and talked about the importance of connections and the importance of play. She became a classroom teacher in the district back in 1999 and continues to emphasize those things to this day.

Public Comment - at the beginning of the meeting public comment should refer to items on the agenda

A. In-person public comment

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that they have already received public comment from Allison Atkin, Jessica Scheff, Caroline Golschneider, Jill Soboleski, Matt Soboleski, Allison Alstead, Ryan Alstead, Jenny Szewczyk, Allison Kodos, Mark Simmons, Jennifer Simmons, Delia Regan, Lauren Biello, Vanessa and Chris Amoral, Sarah Robertson, Emma Quick, Brian Reed, Patricia Poll, Kristen Allen, Lori Fusco, Candace Burritt, and two others.

Christina Walsh, from Middlefield, stated that she is a parent of three children currently in the district. She is opposed to the interim reconfiguration plan proposed for the 2024-2025 school year. She felt it was unclear about what the BOE hopes to gain by imposing this plan when the plan for a K-5 school appears to be in the beginning stages and will likely take years to begin. Her kindergartner is a child who likes consistency and

has spent two years seeing the same group of children in a home daycare. She is only now just getting to more social and learning settings. She was nervous to begin school, but was able to walk in with her sister holding her hand. Requiring her to transition to a completely different school near year without her sister or the things she is becoming familiar with will cause her a lot of anxiety. Ms. Walsh felt that there would be no stability for her daughter or her peers at a time in their lives when they should be becoming more confident and comfortable with school and maybe even enjoy it. She felt that this interim plan will take that away.

Christy Dlugolenski, from Middlefield, noted that she has been a resident of the community for 40 years and came to town because of the education system. They came here because of the community that developed and that their children were able to go through the system feeling connected. She added that her husband was on the Board of Education for nine years and recognizes how hard the decisions are, but felt that this transition program is wrong. She felt that they should remain where they are or move quickly into the K-5 system and not have transitions every two years. She felt that it would not accomplish what the board is trying to do in the long run and is an error that should not be allowed to happen. She felt that children need to have multigenerational groups and teachers who can follow them through. Mrs. Dlugolenski felt it was important to think about the kids and not just the economics. She has always thought that the education system in the district is one of the best in the state and hoped that doesn't change.

Nicole Ercolani, from Durham, agreed that families in the district should have access to an equitable experience and the current configuration and schedule does not offer that. The ending of school choice has also not offered that. Bringing the students together would help to address this. With one student at Lyman and one at Brewster, it is clear there is a disconnect. While both programs are unique and special in their own way, she believes that bringing the best components of each program together as well as bringing the children together will actually give them the best experience possible. The interim plan does not address all of the issues but is only temporary and a segue to a more streamlined and equitable outlook for the district. Ms. Ercolani commended the board for the hours and hours of meeting minutes and research that has gone into this issue. She directed everyone to the minutes from the past several years to help understand the events that have brought the district to this point. If anyone needs evidence of the divide this has caused, Ms. Ercolani urged people to look at the community discussions online. She felt that some individuals have no interest in hearing any opinions that differ from theirs and that is not how to move forward. She has seen comparisons to neighboring districts, but they do not take into consideration the details specific to the district, such as the history of school choice, skyrocketing per pupil costs and low enrollment numbers. Ms. Ercolani felt that to compare the district to Wallingford, for example, where the current enrollment is more than double the district's, is a naive and irresponsible comparison. She encouraged parents to seek out their own information and form their own opinions, based on minutes and research that has been done. She also noted that, during the August 9th meeting, Dr. Schuch stated that the leadership of the district felt that the proposed plan was both doable and practical and that the district leadership is prepared to support the plan. She urged everyone to think about the years of collective experience the leadership in the district has and their unique perspectives. She felt that they deserved the community's support and trust. District leadership has asked the board to make a decision this Fall so that planning can begin. Ms. Ercolani felt that a goal without a timeframe is a wish and the district cannot keep wishing and hoping that the issues will fix themselves. She asked that the board take action with a vote or, at the very least, set dates for when a decision will be made.

Mary Ann Wellborne, a parent from Middlefield and a psychologist who has worked with kids for over 20 years, was very concerned about the reconfiguration. She stated there is a lot of research on high-frequency

school transitions, done with military, migrant and low-income families. What was found 100 percent across the board is that high-frequency transitions cause damage to kids. The collateral damage in math, literacy, emotional and psychological development doesn't feel acceptable to the children of the community. Ms. Wellborne noted several studies and explained that behaviors such as internalizing behaviors, acting out, self-harm, a reduction in math and literacy proficiency happen with high-frequency school transitions. She asked that they don't play naive. She stated that they know the ramifications and there is a preponderance of evidence showing the damage that is done. She had a list of references on the studies to submit to the board as part of the record. Ms. Wellborne felt it was unethical to make a decision, knowing the damage it will cause and moving forward anyway.

Mark Sherkofsky, from Durham, voiced his opposition to the plan to close Lyman and Brewster in order to house students in an \$80-plus million facility at Memorial. He felt that the resources should be used to improve both schools which would cost much less and cause fewer disruptions. Massive construction projects are consistently over budget and over time. He was concerned that the district is embarking on a project that will take 5-6 years to complete and an incredible cost to the taxpayers which will have to be put up-front in the hopes that the state will reimburse. Mr. Sherkofsky stated that there are 350 days until the next school year and there is no plan for how hundreds of students will be educated in years K-5. The board should slow down this massive undertaking until basic questions are answers. He asked what class sizes will be and if the schools can handle students from both towns. He asked about portable classrooms, how much it will all cost and whether it's budget-neutral. Mr. Sherkofsky felt that the citizens need to know how many kids will be in each class and where they will be learning. He also asked if the plan has been evaluated by any educational experts from outside the district and if the district has consulted anyone to provide advice or caution. He felt that most school boards would not attempt this because of its negative effect on student well-being. He also asked what the movement of classrooms and teachers would look like and if teachers will be required to move their classroom. If they are, will they have time to do that or who will move all of their materials. Will this move happen during the summer? How much time and what will the cost be to move several classrooms around? He also asked when teachers will know that they have to switch grades or buildings and how many teachers will be affected by that. He wondered if teachers will leave because of this. Mr. Sherkofsky mentioned the recruitment battle for teachers and feared that this plan may cause teachers to seek out other districts. He then asked about curriculum and how teachers will collaborate. School culture and well-being will be affected as a lot of students look up to older learners as role models. He asked the board to pause and consider all of this.

Janina Eddinger, from Middlefield, has six children in the district. She has been coming to board meetings for the past 12 years. She trusts the board but understands that there are a lot of questions and unrest. The end result of having one school for K-5 will be what everyone really wants for their kids. She asked everyone in the public to trust the board and believe in how resilient the kids are. She added that the net cost for the K-5 school will be around \$11 million.

Sam Eiding, from Middlefield, expressed her concern regarding the interim reconfiguration. She felt that the people in opposition to this plan have a right to express that opposition and have done it respectfully. Her specific concerns are about the impact on the learners and the community and what seems to be a troubling lack of data supporting the board's claim of a neutral impact on the budget. Ms. Eiding had asked for supporting documentation about the budget and received a response from Mrs. Dahlheimer and appreciated that. Mrs. Dahlheimer had stated that the leadership team does feel that this is doable and practical and would not have an adverse impact on the budget. She also noted that administration would work to analyze the plan as it moves forward. Ms. Eiding felt that that response was vague at best and this approach does

not feel dissimilar to what was seen in the attempt to close John Lyman and feels like it is putting the cart before the horse. It lacks pragmatism to move forward without knowing the full impact. Even if the interim plan has no budget impact, they are then left with a handful of hypothetical more permanent plans on which no final decision has been made. She also noted that reimbursement from the state is not guaranteed. Ms. Eidinger felt that if any of the pieces go awry, they could be stuck with this interim plan permanently. She felt that this plan is happening while current and real-time needs go unaddressed. Maintenance needs to happen now for the safety and well-being of the learners which is one of the board's responsibilities. As no schools have been voted to be closed, the focus should be on these concerns rather than 14 hypothetical uses of the budget. Ms. Eidinger added that it seems senseless to create disruption for the learners when they have only just regained some semblance of normalcy. On behalf of the learners, families, faculty and all petitioners who have expressed their opposition, she strongly requested the board postpone their vote and reconsider.

Chris DeGennaro, from Middlefield, noted that this was his first time addressing the Board of Education. He believed the interim plan will be disruptive and implored the board to show resolve in their decision-making and restrain their haste.

Mark Simmons, from Durham, firmly believed that the process surrounding the interim plan is flawed and urged the board to reconsider voting on it. He took issue with it being called an interim plan as that implies that there is a long-term strategy in place. He has seen no long-term plan, but is aware that the board is exploring options that could be years away. He wondered how informed decisions can be made without a clear understanding of where the district is headed. Students, parents and teachers deserve better than a temporary fix that may create more problems than it solves. A comprehensive, well-thought-out plan should consider the needs and aspirations of the community and should be a long-term plan. This proposal also appears to repeat past mistakes of the board by voting on plans without the necessary details. This summer, the board voted to end school choice with no plan as to how that would be handled. Right now, an incoming kindergartener's parent would not know what school they would be going to. Mr. Simmons stated that it is the board's duty to ensure that every decision is thoroughly researched, well-documented and supported by a comprehensive understanding of the implications. Voting on a proposal without sufficient details is a disservice to the community and undermines the trust that the community places in the board. He also felt that transparency and accountability are vital to the success of any educational reform. The lack of information has left parents, teachers, students and the entire district in the dark. He asked the board if the reconfiguration solves a clearly-defined problem, what the metrics for success are and how they will be measured and who will be held accountable for its success. Before making any decisions, he asked the board to show their work to the community and show that this really is the best plan. He urged them to ensure there is a long-term plan in place and to prioritize the best interests of the students and community by creating a comprehensive long-term plan. He hoped to work together toward a brighter future for the schools that truly benefits all stakeholders.

Russ Quick, from Durham, attended district schools from K-9 with the configuration that is being proposed. He thanked the board for ensuring that all students will receive an equitable educational experience. He acknowledged that the opposition comes out loud every time their school community will be faced with a change and have been successful at stopping any progress the board has tried to make, despite the fact that families at Brewster and Memorial have been shuffled around the district for years. The one-track plan voted on in 2019 aimed to bring the community together, integrating approaches from the HOT/ID programs with the contemporary program in all schools. Inequities were recognized back then and effort was put into delineating what the program would look like. The implementation of the one-track plan went by the

wayside when Lyman remained open and the inequities have continued to grow. He thanked the district for doubling down on the field trip inequities last year as that opened the door for parents to examine the differences further and recognize what programming was missing from Memorial and why. Mr. Quick presented a petition signed by 95 community members wanting to encourage the board to move forward tonight with the planned vote and interim configuration. Many of these people are afraid to speak up and Mr. Quick believes that is said and it is important to recognize that they can hold respectful conversations about topics that they disagree on. Everyone wants what is best for the children and it is okay to disagree on what that looks like. Parents should be able to advocate for their children without fear that the differing opinion will be taken out on the child and that should extend to board members as well. Good people are not going to want to run for positions if they have to worry about their child being excluded from events or their families being harassed. He has watched the board discuss all the plans while keeping in mind the effects of reconfigurations or construction on education as well as physical space and reviewing enrollment numbers. Mr. Quick believes this is one of the few plans for which the district has the physical space and will distribute students across all of the features at each grade level and allow for teachers to come together and work towards a one-track approach while they await the long-term plan.

Patrick Holden, from Durham, felt that many people have made very good points tonight and just wanted to express his thoughts that the interim plan is not robust enough to provide the best experience for everyone. He felt the board should halt the brakes to have more detailed discussions. He was not sure how the practicality will work out because it's an interim plan as opposed to temporary. He didn't understand why they would jump to this plan rather than figuring out the long-term goal. He encouraged the board to halt on this specifically until they know the end goal and the timing and then figure out the interim. Mr. Holden felt that the interim plan would be directly disrupted by any of the future plans for renovation, especially at Memorial. He noted that this has been an issue since before he left the high school and understands the desire to do something, but they shouldn't take action for the sake of action. He thanked the board for their dedication to this issue and hoped that there could be meaningful discussions.

Jen Simmons, from Durham, stated that her family will be directly affected by the interim plan, however her concerns extend beyond that. She asked the board via email how the plan fits into the district's strategic plan, she was told "the strategic plan for the district has yet to be fully completed and is currently still in the design phase." She stressed the importance of having a long-term strategic plan in place before making such significant changes at the elementary grade levels. Looking at RSD 17, decisions about their short- and long-term plans seem to be very well-aligned with their strategic plan and RSD 13 should be following similar best practices. She felt that the board needs to consider the short- and long-term consequences of this configuration, both for the students and the schools. Without a long-term plan, they risk making hasty decisions that may not serve the students' best interests in the future. The children's education is too important to be subjected to ad hoc changes without clear vision. She requested that the board address the questions and concerns raised by community members. Two petitions have been submitted, one with 158 signatures asking for a postponement of the vote and another with 32 professional attestations against this move. These petitions represent a significant portion of the community who feel these are crucial issues that need to be addressed. The board has yet to provide specific data, research or expert feedback on the proposed plan. The answers given appear that the board is unaware of the impact and implications of their proposed plan. Mrs. Simmons is uncomfortable with a vote on a plan with so few details. It is not good enough to say that the superintendent and his administration will figure it out once voted in. She reminded the board of their responsibility to prepare a comprehensive plan under Connecticut General Statutes, that includes short- and long-term goals and objectives. She implored the board to thoroughly address the concerns outlined in the petitions and provide clear, well-reasoned responses as the community deserves to

have all of their questions answered and concerns addressed before any final vote is taken. Mrs. Simmons urged the board to reconsider the proposed interim elementary grade level reconfiguration until a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan is in place.

Nick Angelo, from Rockfall, is a previous student of the district and wanted to voice his opposition for the interim plan. He believes it has been moved through very hastily without a lot of background investigation and the board should look at the information prior to the vote and have an end goal in line before imposing a temporary fix. He went to John Lyman and felt that they are doing a great job there.

Ryan Offord, from Middlefield, has two children at John Lyman and wanted to convey his concerns about the reconfiguration. He was concerned that it feels a little rushed and asked that the board slow down on a vote to allow for more questions and evaluation.

B. Remote public comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education Special Meeting - August 9, 2023

Mr. Roraback made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to approve the minutes of the special Board of Education meeting of August 9, 2023, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the special Board of Education meeting of August 9, 2023, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

B. Board of Education Special Work Session - August 29, 2023

Ms. Betty made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to approve the minutes of the special Board of Education Work Session of August 29, 2023, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the special Board of Education Work Session of August 29, 2023, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried, with Mr. Roraback abstaining.

Superintendent's Report

A. Start of school year update

Dr. Schuch stated that it was a really good opening to the school year which is great credit to a lot of people in the room. They did have to deal with unseasonably warm conditions last week and that did cause some things to be moved inside. District 13 was one of the only districts that didn't have to do early releases at his superintendents' meeting. The community is prepping for the Durham Fair and the schools will be very involved. He encouraged everyone to come out to see all the great things they children are doing and showcasing.

B. Other updates, if applicable

Dr. Schuch also reported that they have a new visitor log-in system that screens visitors for IDs. It is up and running at the high school and seems to be working well. It checks for sex offender registry and other things. It will streamline badges as well. He will send a Parent Square out tomorrow with details. Visitors will need to provide ID.

Staff Reports**A. Director of Finance Report - Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig reported that the general fund is 9.26 percent expended and 94 percent encumbered. The district has received 21 percent of budgeted revenue.

Mrs. Neubig added that the Raptor visitor log-in system will go live district wide on October 2nd. It has been rolled out at Coginchaug and has helped with parental pick-up authorization in Power School and the sex offender database, but also with emergency pick-ups and accountability.

Mrs. Neubig has received some parent feedback about long bus routes and, with the driver shortage, they had doubled a bus last year and Dattco scheduled the routes with the same number of buses. That is not the best way and may need to add another bus. They are trying to keep bus rides to 45 minutes or less, but are finding that the high school run is backing everybody else up.

Mrs. Neubig added that QA&M architects are going to be meeting with administrators on 9/19/23 to go over educational merits of the filtered down options. After that, the BOE and Building Committee will schedule another joint work session.

The independent audit field work was done in August and will be back in October to finish that up. Mrs. Neubig reiterated that Select Physical Therapy canceled their contract due to lack of staff and an RFP has been issued. The Athletic Director called different firms and providers and they got zero responses. Select covered the district through September 8th and they are now working with another vendor for the short-term covering games. There are several other districts with the same issue.

The HVAC grant has reopened and Mrs. Neubig will apply for that. It is a matching grant to reimburse the Memorial mechanicals which has already been expended. That would have ramifications on a renovate as new for Memorial.

Mr. Moore asked if there were any options for the athletic trainer, such as a doctor. Mrs. Neubig will ask Mr. Petronio that question as he has been doing the leg work. Mr. Moore thought they may be able to contact on a per game basis.

Dr. Darcy asked how Raptor handles an excused vs. unexcused check-in and Mrs. Neubig explained that would require intervention by the front office.

New Business**A. Vote to establish June 12, 2024 as the high school graduation date - Doug Schuch**

Dr. Schuch explained that the state changed the rules several years ago and now permits boards to establish a graduation date to allow staff, seniors and families to plan. He explained that this could mean that students in preK-11 would attend school past the graduation date, but the seniors can graduate. Mrs. Caramanello added that it is also helpful for Project Graduation to lock in a date.

Mrs. Dahlheimer added that she has had a lot of complaints about the start of school being on a Monday and hoped that they could discuss that issue when they discuss the calendar.

Mr. Stone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to establish June 12, 2024 as the high school graduation date.

In favor of establishing June 12, 2024 as the high school graduation date: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

B. Discussion and possible vote on the interim elementary grade level configurations effective 2024-2025 school year

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked Dr. Schuch to give an overview on the board giving direction to the administration. Dr. Schuch explained that at the July meeting, the board asked him to go back to the leadership team to talk about the feasibility and practicality of this interim plan. He reaffirmed his statement that it is doable, it is practical and everyone gave input as to the budget impact which they feel will be negligible. The teachers will follow the children and there should be no need for an increase or decrease in staffing. There may be a need for some nominal overtime for custodians to move folks around, but nothing significantly impactful. Dr. Schuch also reiterated that he had asked to be notified about the interim plan as soon as possible to allow for better planning. In his experience, the board would make a vote to make the change and the leadership team would immediately start the task of figuring out exactly how it will happen. That has not yet been done because Dr. Schuch would not want to put staff through the exercises if this is something that might not happen. He does stand behind the fact that they can do it and do it well.

Dr. Schuch felt that one of the first things that would need to happen is communication. He would send something out with basic information after a vote is taken. Immediately after, there will be a lot of questions from teachers in terms of their location. They would then work as quickly as possible to notify teachers and to obtain their input. They would also need to ask each of the principals how they would lay out their classrooms. He also reviewed that the board made the decision last year to decrease related arts staff at the elementary level. Typically, boards consider big decisions like this and once a decision is made, the leadership team is given their marching orders. Budget planning starts in earnest in November and knowing what grade levels will be where is important.

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to approve the interim elementary grade level configuration effective 2024-2025 school year with Brewster preK-1, Lyman 2-3, Memorial 4-5.

Mrs. Dahlheimer acknowledged the hesitation and confusion on this plan. Looking back over the past year and a half, there have been multiple conversations about school choice. There has been some criticism that this configuration was only brought up in July, but it wasn't. Most recently, in-depth conversations started at the May 10, 2023 meeting and was on the agenda again in June, but they didn't get to the discussion and it ended up on the July 5, 2023 agenda. A motion was made at the July 5, 2023 meeting to get feedback from the administration. The board did not vote on this at the August meeting as it wasn't on the agenda and it was put on tonight's agenda.

Mrs. Dahlheimer then read from state statutes regarding that a Board of Education member is a state official functioning at a local level. Duties of the Board of Education include that each local or regional Board of Education shall maintain good public elementary and secondary schools, implement the educational interests of the state and provide such other educational activities as, in its judgment, will best serve the interests of the school district. Educational interests shall include that each child shall have equal opportunity to receive a suitable program of educational experiences. Each school district shall finance, at a reasonable level, at least equal to the minimum budget requirement. In order to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation, each school district shall provide educational opportunities for students to interact and learn from teachers and people of other races and economic backgrounds and may provide such opportunities for students from other communities. And that the mandate in the general statutes pertaining to education within the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education be implemented.

When Mrs. Dahlheimer spoke with CUBE about the state statutes, they felt that it was more than curriculum and that the Board of Education has a duty to not only the curriculum, but to the educational experiences. If grades can be aligned in the hope of working towards K-5 and align the educational experiences, along with getting all of our kids along grade levels, Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that that is the best option.

Dr. Darcy noted that Mark Twain said there's three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies and statistics. The same thing can be said of research. She is very weary of weaponization of some of the research that has come up and did some deep diving herself. Because it's already been published on social media, people are under the impression that there is irrefutable evidence that multiple transitions are deleterious to students' psychological, emotional, and academic well-being. Dr. Darcy stated that that is not what the research shows, nor does it show that transitions are good for students. There is no research that is applicable to the current situation.

Dr. Darcy eliminated anything over 20 years old as immaterial. She felt that none of the research is relevant because of COVID and all of the studies were done on students that lived in a totally different world. There is a danger in looking at case studies and extrapolating that out beyond the case. She also eliminated anything that was not peer-reviewed. Three series of articles had been provided to the board and Dr. Darcy went through almost all of them. A lot of them were literature reviews which is basically a research paper of previous studies which is not research or evidence. Dr. Darcy looked at the citations of the papers that were provided and read the actual studies that were referenced.

Most of the research on the impact of transitions has focused on either transitions from elementary to secondary or from middle to high or on individual students. A huge sample of the research has been done on military families looking at individual students who have gone through multiple transitions which is totally irrelevant to what is being talked about tonight. The board is talking about taking groups of students and having them move. One of the papers provided to the board specifically states that "the lowest dropout rates were in school districts that were organized K-6 and 7-12 schools and one transition at seventh grade." That

says that putting a group of kids together when they are in kindergarten and keeping them together results in social structure and bonding that is far more important than previously thought. The negative impact is not moving from building to building, but from peer group to peer group.

Dr. Darcy went on to look at the citations from the petition and felt that the studies were fairly disingenuous representations of what the actual studies showed. She searched for transition within the document and it never showed up. She searched for change and did not find it. The article had nothing to do with transition, whether it be an individual or a grade level. The individual differences in behavior talked about students identified as highly aggressive and followed the impact on transitioning on this group of diagnosed, behaviorally-disordered students. Again, not relevant to this discussion. The peer experiences of anxious and socially-withdrawn youths who are transitioned does not appear. The most relevant study, in Dr. Darcy's opinion, was school transitions and students' achievement in the fifth grade. She felt that study was fairly relevant because it talks about groups of students and how multiple transitions prior to grade 5 impact academic achievement. The study actually showed that there were negligible differences in mathematics and reading, however there was a significant positive average treatment effect on science scores. They also state that there are too many other factors, including societal, individual, biological, genetic and economic, to say that transitions have an impact one way or another.

Dr. Darcy gleaned what was provided today and some were over 20 years old and others were not peer-reviewed. One took place in Greece and she questioned the relevancy of that. The first three studies look at individual students and the impact of transition on those individual students. This is not the same as asking a peer group of students to move from one location to another. Finally, the other articles really deal with COVID and its impact on kids which has yet to be truly seen. It does not talk about whether those issues are impacted by transitions.

Dr. Darcy summarized that the only findings across the studies is that there needs to be a very clear transition plan for teachers, families and kids. She agreed that kids are resilient and this will not be an issue for 80 percent of the children. Fifteen percent will require more intensive support and 5 percent will need serious intensive support. It may mean that their case worker loops with them or they hold a summer program for students who are going to be coming together for the first time. She emphasized that it is the peer group that is important; not the brick and mortar. She felt there are a lot of creative ways to support teachers, students and families.

Dr. Darcy stated that what has been missing is real talk. The board needs to hear what's in parents' hearts. They acknowledge that parents are afraid. It is easy to intellectualize the issue. If they were to make the decision based on what was heard today or from keyboard warriors on social media, it's unconvincing to oppose but that's not what is really important. Community is important. Peer groups are important for the kids. Dr. Darcy would like to hear more about peoples' fears about how this will impact the community and is torn because she'd like to vote as soon as possible to give the leadership team as much as possible.

Mrs. Dahlheimer hoped that, if this does pass tonight, those heartfelt honest opinions come to the administration and they are able to work through those issues. They can have community conversations or open up a Thought Exchange about the transitions.

Mr. Moore felt that the community is torn by this. He felt that the way to resolve it is to have some kind of community forum where the board can answer questions about cost, schedules, locations, etc. He felt that the board needs more time to bring the community in and didn't feel that that would hurt the long-term plan.

He felt that they should look at this interim plan with the same criteria that they are going to use to evaluate the long-term plan. Mr. Moore acknowledged that the long-term plan is expensive, but felt it was affordable. He believes that people are concerned that if this interim plan goes through, it will become the final plan rather than the interim plan. He reiterated that they had tried to build support for the closure of Lyman and that didn't work. Then, they didn't get approval to fix Lyman. He didn't feel the board was in a position to move forward on something that gets the community angry and then ask them to support a long-term plan.

Mr. Roraback thanked Dr. Darcy for her review of the studies. He also appreciated Dr. Schuch wanting to have time to plan and had full confidence that the district's administrators and staff will know what to do. He knows that District 13 has teachers that are committed and is quite sure that will not change. Mr. Roraback also knows that it needs to be one day at a time. He added that the board is light years ahead of decision-making than in prior years. He went through school in this district and had yearly transitions and it was exciting. Mr. Roraback is quite confident that the district has the support staff to help the students who need it during transitions. He affirmed that the district's children are served best when we don't look at a school as the do-all and end-all, but look at the entire community with so much more to offer than school. The district is blessed to have school communities and parent groups. He asked everyone to put trust in the administrators, maintenance and facilities to get the job done.

Mrs. Caramanello appreciated everyone's concerns, but also saw the 95-plus signatures that did not come to speak out in favor of this interim plan for whatever reason. She felt that that is the real decision-maker because it represents the huge divide that this has created. The board knows this will not make everyone happy, but nothing will. The contemporary side of the programming has made a lot of transitions. She also mentioned all the kids in the district that have been doing this for years, but Lyman has not been affected in the past. Mrs. Caramanello felt that the ultimate plan of a K-5 school is where they want to be, however they don't know when that will be. In the interim, she felt that this is what the district needs.

Mrs. Petrella added that how this gets portrayed to the children will affect how they will feel when these changes are made. Some children will not be happy with changes, but if it is presented as something exciting and new, then the children will pick up on that. Mrs. Petrella added that it is a lot of work to digest all of the input, make the decisions and then have it not get voted on. She felt it made sense to vote on it and is confident that the administrators will make it a priority to get parents' concerns and see how they can be addressed as much as possible. She also found it interesting that the state statute says that the Board of Education is charged with ensuring that students receive equitable experiences and this relates directly to the issue of field trips and others. She felt that bringing students together ensures that those equitable experiences will happen for all the grade levels. The board has been strongly committed since 2019 to the district having one education program that incorporates a number of the practices from the ID program. She emphasized that there are not two programs and there should not be two programs and this interim program will support that vote. She felt that if the students are all together, that will ensure they all get one program. This decision also supports the board's recent vote to eliminate school choice since all students in a grade level will attend the same school. Teachers and support staff will have the opportunity to collaborate and develop unified strategies.

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that her goal as chair was to have a decision made and presented to the community for the long-term. She had hoped to have that done by June of this year. They had the information for the K-5 school, but the cost was overwhelming, however that cost did not reflect savings from schools being closed. She still hoped that some options can be presented to the community by the end of the year and this interim plan is temporary. Mrs. Petrella felt they need to get this done as it has been out there for way too long.

Mrs. Dahlheimer clarified that she has not seen anywhere where state reimbursement hasn't happened in the amount that has been asked for. Mrs. Neubig added that it is not guaranteed that the state will fund it every year, but if a project is approved that is a commitment. No project will move forward without that approval.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked that if this passes tonight, she would like to see a monthly agenda item for an update on planning for it. Mrs. Roy hasn't heard much about feedback from the teachers and asked if anyone was concerned about that. She would like to be able to address their concerns as the district wouldn't want any good teachers to leave. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the administration would not have said they support the plan if they thought the teachers felt it was detrimental. Mr. Roraback noted that they did receive some comments about who would actually be moving the stuff. Dr. Schuch stated that, based on his experience, any change of this magnitude is going to cause some anxiety and some concern for the teachers and staff but that would also be true for the long-term plan. They have not yet asked the teachers, but he knows it will be hard for many. However, they are committed to the children and, while it is not popular, they have previously involuntarily transferred teachers. He also noted that there is a group of teachers who will probably not be impacted. Dr. Schuch emphasized that he would like to have more time than less to prepare the team to help everyone through the transition. Dr. Schuch has heard that the overall uncertainty about what is going to happen with the elementary buildings causes more anxiety in people than having a plan that they don't like. Dr. Schuch also emphasized the importance of having an entire grade level together. Mrs. Caramanello added that teachers move all the time and explained that she had three different classrooms during her 10 years at Brewster. She felt that this would go just as well as it went when they closed Korn School. Mrs. Petrella added that she was moved every two years when she was teaching.

Mr. Roraback asked Dr. Schuch if he was confident that the grade two teachers will be able to effectively communicate individual student needs as they move to a new building for grade three. Dr. Schuch stated that they do that now and he is confident that will continue. He added that the interim plan may not be perfect, but the current configuration is not perfect either. He has complete confidence in the staff. Mrs. Keane added that kids already transition and special ed students transition to a building for just four weeks during the summer.

Mrs. Dahlheimer related a story about Bloomfield where they reconfigured their intermediate and middle school every single year for five years and they made it work. The district is certainly not looking to ever do that. Mrs. Dahlheimer reviewed the years she spent fighting for the ID program and Lyman School but felt that the best thing they can do is to bring the programs together and grade levels are the best way to start doing that.

Mr. Stone felt there were two ways to look at this and, for him, it is the business side, plain and simple. The board trusts the administration to do what it necessary. Mrs. Neubig doesn't feel there would be much, if any, effect on the finances. He feels it would be of no use to do further research. Mr. Stone would much rather see the kids getting a better education than focusing on something that may be voted on or not six months down the road. From the heart side, Mr. Stone went through Brewster, Korn and Memorial as well. He loved all of the transitions. His parents were excited for the open houses. He is confident that the other 15 and 5 percent of the students will receive the needed support. He added that almost every public comment was about a particular child being affected. Mr. Stone's son is also going to be affected and will have to transition, if the vote passes, to Lyman in two years. He lost half of his friends to Lyman after preK and he has already asked if he will see his friends.

Mr. Mennone added that the board has asked for a lot of research to make this decision. The board has a fiscal responsibility with a lower enrollment and buildings that are dilapidated. In order for the district to be successful, he believes that they need three buildings that are what they need to be. He believes staff does a phenomenal job and the district has awesome teachers. Mr. Mennone also felt that everyone needs to look long-term at the money that will be saved and he didn't feel they will be successful if they keep five schools open.

Ms. Betty stated that she has a kindergarten student and when they were choosing Brewster or Lyman, they were told it was one track and everything was the same. It became evident when her child transitioned from second grade to third grade at Memorial that it is not the same. The kids at Memorial are not getting the same experiences and the time difference is so hard for kids at seven and eight years old. At this point, Ms. Betty called the vote.

Mrs. Dahlheimer reread the motion and called for a roll call vote.

In favor of approving the interim elementary grade level configuration effective 2024-2025 school year (Brewster preK-1, Lyman 2-3, Memorial 4-5): Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Stone. Motion carried, with Mr. Moore voting in opposition and Mrs. Roy abstaining.

Dr. Darcy felt that they need to be sure to have community forums to inform on the transitions. Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed and felt there needs to be community healing. Mrs. Caramanello felt that events during the summer would be helpful as well. Mr. Stone also asked for a monthly update on progress.

The board took a five-minute break at this point.

C. Policy review:

- 1. Second read and possible vote on series 4000 policies (part 1):**
 - a. Abuse and Neglect of Disabled Adults – Shipman**
 - b. Alcohol Tobacco and Drug Free Workplace 4118.231/4218.231**
 - c. Alcohol Tobacco and Drug Free Workplace – Shipman**
 - d. Athletic Coaches Evaluation and Termination – Shipman**
 - e. Certified Staff Development 4131**
 - f. Child Abuse Neglect or Sexual Assault Reporting 4119**
 - g. Child Abuse Neglect or Sexual Assault Reporting – Shipman**
 - h. Concussion Training for Athletic Coaches – Shipman**
 - I. Emergency Action Plan for Athletic Events – Shipman**
 - j. Employee Transfer – Reassignment 4214**
 - k. Employee Use of District's Computer Systems 4132/4232**
 - l. Employee Use of District's Computer Systems – Shipman**
 - m. Employment and Student Teacher Checks – Shipman**
 - n. Employment and Student Teacher Checks 4112.1/4212.1**
 - o. Employment of Teachers 4112**
 - p. Exertional Heat Illness Awareness – Shipman**
 - q. FMLA – Shipman**
 - r. FMLA 4151/4251**
 - s. Hiring of Certified Staff – Shipman**

- t. **Social Media – Shipman**
- u. **Social Media 4118.51/4218.51**
- v. **Wellness – Employee 4162/4262**

Mr. Moore explained that the board went through the above-listed policies at the last meeting and quickly reviewed them.

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to adopt the above-listed series 4000 policies, as presented.

In favor of adopting the above-listed series 400 policies, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

- 2. **First read of series 4000 policies (part 2)**
 - a. **Bloodborne Pathogens – Shipman**
 - b. **Bloodborne Pathogens 4160/4260**
 - c. **Employee Protection 4148/4248**
 - d. **Hiring of Non-Certified Staff - Shipman**
 - e. **Nepotism – Shipman**
 - f. **Nepotism 4112.8/4212.8**
 - g. **Non-Discrimination – Personnel 4118/4218**
 - h. **Non-Discrimination – Personnel – Shipman**
 - I. **Non-School Employment 4138/4238**
 - j. **Personnel Records 4112.6/4212.6**
 - k. **Private Tutoring 4134**
 - l. **Psychotropic Drugs – Shipman**
 - m. **Psychotropic Drugs 4161/4261**
 - n. **Section 504 ADA – Personnel 4142**
 - o. **Section 504 ADA – Personnel – Shipman**
 - p. **Sex Discrimination and Harassment – Personnel 4118.11/4218.11**
 - q. **Title IX Sex Discrimination and Harassment – Personnel – Shipman**
 - r. **Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness – Shipman**

Mr. Moore reviewed that the committee recommends that the board adopt the Shipman policy on bloodborne pathogens as it is more up-to-date. They have not recommended any changes to the policy on Employee Protection. Hiring of Non-Certified Staff is a new policy from Shipman. It is recommended to go with the policy on Nepotism from Shipman and the policy on Non-Discrimination - Personnel from Shipman. Non-School Employment has been recommended to stay as it is. Personnel Records was recommended to stay as is with a sentence added about access to personnel records under federal law. Private Tutoring has been recommended as is. The committee has recommended to replace Psychotropic Drugs with the policy from Shipman. The policy on Section 504 ADA has been recommended to be replaced with the Shipman version which is more up-to-date. The policy on Sex Discrimination and Harassment was updated in 2022 and they recommended it stay as is. The policy on Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness is a new policy.

Mr. Moore summarized that the changes from Shipman are mostly updates in language. He added that the committee will now start on the 9000 series, By-Laws, rather than the 5000 series.

Committee Reports

A. Building Committee Meeting - August 16, 2023 and September 6, 2023

Mr. Moore reported that Pickett Lane has been paved and paid for. There is a little left to do on driveway entrances and exits with more paving and they will coordinate with sidewalks in the future. Two crosswalks are temporarily taped. They are also going to discuss traffic calming humps in the future. The Little League apron has also been finished and the millings were spread.

The committee finally has an agreement on the design of the field house. Anchors will need to be put in every four feet due to the slab, but Mr. Weissberg expects the building to be completed by October 31, 2023. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that they just heard today that construction will start in mid-October and should take about 10 days.

They have not heard back from the Bond Commission about the interior work, but the legislation did pass. It would be good to get the district's reps involved in that.

It also appears that there is enough pressure in the public water distribution that the district can avoid building a new pump house which will save \$300,000 to \$400,000. The Building Committee talked about the building reconfiguration and Mr. Weissberg has recommended a software program for evaluating the criteria. Mr. Mennone noted that the Building Committee has been great with all of their projects, but also with the reconfiguration project. The knowledge that comes from that committee has provided a significant amount of detail and great recommendations. Mrs. Neubig didn't have a firm quote for the sprinkler system, but there is about \$660,000 saved. Any extra money would stay in capital and can be authorized for another project.

Mr. Moore also reported that replacement of the turf will begin on June 17, 2024 and will take about a month. There will be no access to the field or the track during that time period.

Dr. Schuch added that the Building Committee will begin meeting on the same night as the Policy committee, with Building at 4:00 and Policy at 5:00.

Communications

Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that, in addition to those communications she mentioned earlier, they received a media request from the Connecticut Examiner and both she and Dr. Schuch spoke to them. A reporter from the Town Times also contacted Mrs. Dahlheimer yesterday and she will call them tomorrow.

Mrs. Dahlheimer also reported that the Coginchaug Carnival was amazing, despite the weather.

Mrs. Caramanello has been told that high school kids leaving the high school has become an issue again. She heard that two were actually racing out of the school today. Mrs. Neubig noted that they do have cameras. Mrs. Caramanello was surprised that the SRO wasn't there.

Public Comment - at the end of the meeting public comment should refer to items not on the agenda

- A. In-person public comment**
- B. Remote public comment**

Patrick Holden, from Durham, noted that the interim plan has been voted on and passed, but he asked that the board think about this in conjunction with the long-term plan as well. He is concerned that the two plans will end up clashing, especially if the K-5 plan at Memorial happens which will cause further disruption. He also believed that being used to something should not be synonymous with okay and just because transitions existed, that doesn't mean they were a good thing. He is very disappointed with the passive aggressiveness that he feels is very toxic and rooted in this community. People are afraid to come out and speak their mind. He finds it incredibly sad and is becoming incredibly frustrated by it. He encouraged everyone to be better and follow the core ethical values. Finally, Mr. Holden stated that the board needs to convince people of the goal with K-5. There is still so much division about moving forward. He felt that there are a lot of people who are not convinced that closing the Lyman building and transferring the experiences of that program to other buildings is not the best way to go. He did not feel the board would see any change in the vote if it were to happen again tomorrow. The idea of a community conversation is brilliant and needs to be a cross-conversation between the board and the community. He reminded everyone to not talk down to people, to not accuse, antagonize or scapegoat them.

Adjournment

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Ms. Betty, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of adjourning the regular meeting of the Board of Education: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback, Mrs. Roy and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First