

Board of Education

Regional District 13

March 11, 2009

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 11, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. in the library at Strong Middle School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currlin, Mrs. Flanagan (8:05 p.m.), Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons. Absent: Ms. Gara
Also present: Mr. Melnik, Mrs. Viccaro.

Mr. Hennick called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Public Comment: Josh Stockdale of Durham spoke regarding the large class sizes projected for the 5th grade Integrated Day classes at Memorial for next year. There will be three classes with 27, 27 and 26 students. The Board guidelines state class sizes should not be larger than 25 students. Mr. Stockdale has a problem with the Board considering going over the limit. It is a two-year problem that will affect all eighty students. Transition to a new school is hard enough without the increase in class size.

Donia Viola said this is a critical time, different from past budgets and the Board should be looking to do more with less. She hopes the example set by the Durham Selectman will be considered by the administrators and they will consider giving back raises or benefits. She also asked that the negotiations with DATCO be scrutinized closely as the expenditures for the bus expenses were 15% over the contract last year.

Brad Jubelirer, of Durham has a son entering 5th grade. He respects the constraints that the Board is working with but he hopes they take seriously the class size issue at Memorial. It will be a terrible burden for the students and the teacher to have classes this large.

Lynn Stanwood, a Lyman parent asked whether a teacher could be moved from the Contemporary Program to the Integrated Day Program for the next two years.

Michele Rulnick has a 6th grader who will be leaving Memorial School. She would have seriously thought about moving her child out of the program if classes were that large for her child. The children need the extra support. She said these classrooms are crowded already with the number of students currently in them. She also feels that by going over the class size policy it will be setting a dangerous precedent. It will then become easy for the Board to go over limits. A change like this will take years to repair. Ms. Rulnick is also concerned about the teacher cut at Lyman. This will make class sizes of 24 students. She knows that Brewster has some classes of 16 students. She understands that cuts need to be made but she hopes that the cuts are equitable across all the elementary schools. All the schools should share the burden.

Janice Keeman of Durham has a Memorial and Lyman student. She came to the District because of the integrated track and that is based on the fluidity of the classroom. The teacher needs to be able to move about the room to work with all students. To expect teachers to be able to manage this with 27 kids is absurd.

Dave Marran of Durham said he reviewed the budget and is concerned that the dollar amount spent per student is very different in the two programs. He would like to see that the dollars spent per student are in sync and that the programs are treated equally.

Julie Morris asked what the dollar difference is between the two programs.

Vicki Climie of Durham commended the Board for the work done. She said she sees cuts in most all areas except salaries and benefits. She asked if the Board is looking at some of the options that are being pursued by other districts across the State before cutting positions

because all school districts are facing the same issues. One suggestion she gave is to give an incentive to employees to opt out of the health insurance benefit and to give them a one time benefit of \$4,000. That could save the District considerable money. She also said that because many districts have teachers working more than the mandated 180 school days some are taking days off that were scheduled as professional development days to save money. It is a give back from the teachers but they are working less days and saving jobs in the process. She encouraged the Board to look at what others are doing; there are many options out there and some might work for District 13.

Theresa Opalacz is a parent from the Contemporary Program. She suggested that the cost per student is higher in that program because the students are in two buildings. The overhead to run two buildings is higher. She also thinks that students with special needs are more prevalent in the Contemporary Program. Class sizes swing from one program to the other as the population changes. She feels the Board should hold sacred the class size policy, they shouldn't change now.

Lisa Tregoning of Durham has a student at Memorial and a 4th grader at Lyman. Her son at Memorial can't wait to come to school every day. The small class sizes play a part of his excitement. There is already not enough space in these rooms. If the classes have 27 students the teachers' stress level will get higher. Students will have less opportunity to communicate with their teachers. It will be detrimental to student learning for two whole years.

Julie Morris believes in the Integrated Program. It is important that the students have one on one time with the teacher and it is important to keep the classes small.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held at Strong Middle School on Wednesday, March 18, 2009.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mr. Currilin the Board of Education unanimously approved the agenda.

Ms. Parsons made a motion, second Dr. Ochterski to approve the minutes to the Special Meeting of March 4, 2009 as corrected. Mrs. Adams, Mr. Currilin, Mrs. Flanagan, Mr. Hennick, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons voted yes. Mrs. Boyle, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hicks abstained.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, second Mrs. Golschneider to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of March 4, 2009. Mrs. Adams, Mr. Currilin, Mrs. Flanagan, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons voted yes. Mrs. Boyle abstained.

Communications: Mrs. Golschneider attended and read at Brewster Loves to Read Night.

Mr. Hicks shared a health newsletter from St. Raphael's Hospital that features an article on Lisa and Charlie Larsen.

Mrs. Boyle said she attended the boys' tournament basketball game on Tuesday night. She is proud of the boys' team. They won and will be playing again on Thursday evening.

Superintendent's Report: Mrs. Viccaro said she has begun meeting with parent groups to discuss the budget. She met with the Memorial PTA on Monday, and the BKPTA and JLPA groups on Tuesday. She will be posting additional meetings on the website that she will be having in the buildings and in conjunction with the town selectmen.

Mrs. Viccaro shared an article written by Erika Anderson, physics teacher at Coginchaug, published in the Connecticut Journal of Science Education on the roller coaster project she

does in conjunction with Six Flags Amusement Park. There was also an article published in the same journal from a student in the class, Matthew DeRosa.

Mrs. Viccaro attended the Coginchaug Scholarship Ball this past weekend. She commended the scholarship committee for all the work they put into the event.

Mrs. Viccaro also worked at the Annual Exchange Club Spaghetti Dinner held on Sunday. The event benefits the music departments, the athletic department and the BKPTA organization. Mrs. Viccaro thanked the Exchange Club for all of their support.

Mrs. Viccaro said there are still nineteen incoming ninth graders that have not committed to a high school yet. Fourteen are going to Vinal, five to Xavier, four to Mercy, and two to other high schools.

Senior Class Trip to Washington, D.C.: Dr. Wysowski said this is basically the same trip that has been approved for years but this year the trip has been streamlined to be more cost effective. Educationally it is the same trip.

On a motion by Mrs. Adams, second Mr. Currlin the Board of Education unanimously approved the senior class trip to Washington, D.C. from November 18th to November 21st, 2009.

Mr. Hicks asked that it be communicated to the students that the Board reserves the right to cancel the trip if world situations change and homeland security warrants it.

2009-10 Budget Discussions: Mr. Hennick said that as he attended the parent organization meetings with Mrs. Viccaro last evening he was reminded of the Board's educational responsibility to the community. Kevin Brough was asked to speak regarding the ID classrooms at Memorial.

Mr. Brough said most of his concerns have been shared by the audience. These classrooms are very busy places and the large class size will definitely impact how instruction takes place. It will also impact the teachers and will make transition to the new school more difficult. He feels he can overcome the space issue if the Board chooses to add an additional class. Instructionally, it is the best plan to add an additional teacher.

Mrs. Viccaro agreed that they will be able to overcome the space issue.

Mr. Currlin asked if aides are used at this level. Mrs. Viccaro said an aide would not be able to replace a teacher and it would just be adding another person to the classroom.

Mr. Currlin said having small class sizes at the lower levels has always been important to the Board. They would be considering suspending the class size policy, not abandoning it, but he still has concerns doing it at a lower grade. It would be easier if the students were older.

Mrs. Viccaro said it has always been important to her to keep the class sizes low in grades K to 2. Because the District only has half-day kindergarten, the teachers are expected to provide three years of instruction in 2 ½ years. That puts a heavy burden on the K-2 teachers.

Dr. Ochterski asked what the current class sizes are in the Integrated Day program. There are three 5th grade classes of 23, 20 and 22 students and three 6th grade classes of 22, 21, and 22 students.

Parents had to select a program for next year for their child by February 1st. Traditionally some children have changed between programs but this year that did not happen and all eighty students in the fourth grade at Lyman wish to remain in the ID program at Memorial.

Mrs. Viccaro said that she has asked all of the elementary school administrators to provide her with current, projected and historical enrollment figures for their school. She will share the enrollment information at the next meeting.

Mrs. Adams questioned the consumable workbooks in the budget at Strong School and the high school. There is \$14,277 being spent on them. She asked if classroom sets could be purchased and students could be expected to write on paper instead.

Mrs. Adams would like to look at the money being spent on individual dues again. She acknowledged that most of these were taken out of the budget last year but she still sees some such as memberships for the nurses. She was told that some of these memberships are contractual obligations.

Mrs. Adams would also like to review some of the classes at the high school that have low enrollments. Mrs. Flanagan suggested looking at multi-year enrollments to see trends and to consolidate. Mrs. Golschneider suggested looking at students in two study halls to see if they would be willing to take some of the lower enrolled classes.

Mr. Hicks is sympathetic to the request for smaller class sizes because he personally knows that it is important. He is interested in the idea suggested tonight about the health insurance waiver and would like to pursue the idea as well as the idea about reducing the number of work days. It was mentioned that both of these items are contractual.

Mrs. Flanagan said she was having some difficulty with the budget because there were so many items reclassified again. Mr. Melnik explained that technology items were reclassified because of the new technology director. Because of changes in grant money, some things and people move in and out of classifications.

Mrs. Flanagan questioned the tuition increase for the Hartford Academy for the Arts. Mrs. Viccaro explained that they have begun offering a full-day program and some students will attend all day.

Mrs. Flanagan would like to look at the cost of stipends and coaches and to see how many kids are involved with the programs. She questioned the need for both a 7th and 8th grade coach for the same sport. She said the salaries established for stipends are contractual but positions could be eliminated.

Ms. Parsons asked if the new copier and printing program has been cost effective. Mr. Melnik said the copiers at the higher levels and Central Office are networked for printing but it doesn't work well at the lower levels. Ink cartridges are also ordered through a central location and the copier contracts are almost all aligned. The program has been cost effective.

Mrs. Boyle has been very interested in learning about the details of the budget as a new Board member. She wants to look more into the history before she asks more questions. She asked if copy paper will be a part of the reverse bid that the District will be participating in on-line.

Mrs. Viccaro said the District has agreed to bid on all technology equipment as well as some custodial supplies. She thought it might be easy to add copy paper and will look into it.

Mrs. Boyle asked what the cost will be if the Board should choose to add an additional teacher at Memorial School. Mr. Melnik said with salary and benefits the Board should count on about \$75,000.

Mrs. Golschneider asked if a list of partially and unfunded mandates could be put on the District website and possibly in the newspaper to remind the public of the constraints the Board has to deal with.

Mrs. Golschneider would also like to know what percentage of parents is receiving information by email from the schools. She also asked if the District bids on printing costs.

Mrs. Viccaro said the District does not bid on printing. A relationship has been established at a printer by Anne Coffey and their rates are very reasonable. The District does not really get a lot of items printed. Many items are done in-house.

Mrs. Golschneider questioned the HOT School membership fees that appear in both the Lyman budget and the Central Office budget. Mrs. Viccaro explained that the cost is a three-way partnership between Lyman, the Central Office and the JLPA.

Mrs. Golschneider questioned the cost of the late bus at Memorial. She said it is budgeted for 181 hours. Mr. Brough said the bus only runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays from October to May. Mr. Melnik will look into the number of hours budgeted to see if it can be reduced.

Mrs. Golschneider also questioned the total of \$81,000 for custodian overtime hours. Mrs. Viccaro explained that with snowstorms and opening the buildings for weekend activities it is difficult to reduce this figure. Mr. Melnik said that about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the overtime costs is able to be re-billed to outside organizations. Mrs. Golschneider asked if part-time custodians could be used to float throughout the District. Changes are being discussed but some of this is contractual. The custodian contract is being negotiated this year.

Mrs. Golschneider asked for an explanation of the several budget pages that reference homebound services. Mr. Melnik explained that the pages are for certified staff, non-certified staff and non-district employees that work with students on homebound.

Mr. Hennick reminded everyone that although they may be seeing lower budgets revealed in area towns; the towns don't have to carry debt service in their budgets. He is impressed with the budget at 2.91%. He said it appears that the Board would like to add a teacher at Memorial. He would like the Board to be mindful of cutting too much and remember that the budget has to be voted on by the public. He asked Mrs. Viccaro to share the 100-200-300 thousand dollars potential cuts that were asked of her last week.

Mrs. Viccaro said the list of cuts was difficult to compile. She also said that she is proud of both the Integrated Day Program and the Contemporary Program and that while the curriculum is the same in both programs the instruction is not. The cost of running the programs is different and things cannot always be equal.

Mrs. Viccaro distributed a handout showing potential cuts at the 100-200-300 thresholds. To get to the \$100,000 level Mrs. Viccaro suggested cuts of: Consortium fee (\$2,500 reduction for each participating town already agreed to by the consortium), Fingerprinting (\$200 – now required as a job expectation), Student Award Luncheon (\$275 – found to be a duplicate), K-4 in-school study (\$5,000 – won't do the study), MMS training (\$500 – took some training money out), advertising (\$2,700 – most done on-line and won't be doing that much hiring), athletic supplies (\$10,000 cut from total), computer (\$1,200 Mrs. Viccaro will not get a new laptop), Library books and periodicals (\$8,000 cut but can use bequest money for some purchases), MMS POS system (\$8,200 – this is a point of sale card system for the high school cafeteria, it can wait), legal special education (\$5,000 – a risk but Mrs. Viccaro is willing to take), Mileage (\$2,800 cut from account), and capital reserve account (\$50,000 cut from account). To get to the \$200,000 level an additional cut from the capital account would be made (\$25,000), Legal expense – general (\$5,000 cut), .4 teacher at CRHS (\$24,000 – may not be one position, but

fragments of several), custodial salary expense (\$25,000 cut, examining overtime use and using part-timers more), Finally to get to the \$300,000 level she would cut an additional \$25,000 from the custodial salary account, fifth grade social studies textbooks (\$23,145 – they feel they can wait an additional year), and the Reading Consultant (\$74,896) and benefits for the position (\$14,979).

Mrs. Flanagan asked if there is any data yet on the effects of having a reading consultant in the elementary schools. Mrs. Viccaro said the students are getting more consistent reading instruction and hopefully will get better reading scores on the Mastery tests. Dibbles assessments are being used at both elementary schools and they will begin using it at Korn School next year as well. It will take several years to know the impact of the reading consultant. Mrs. Luckenbach said there is no way to measure the impact yet. She is providing professional development, modeling and coaching and is developing relationships with teachers.

Mr. Hennick asked if there has been any information about changes in the revenue side of the budget. Mrs. Viccaro said the news on the federal stimulus money has been changing. Initially, the District was going to be receiving \$100,000 for construction money and \$230,000 in IDEA special education money in the 1st year and additional \$250,000 IDEA money in year 2. Now the construction funding is gone. The latest plan is that there will be \$440,000 distributed over a two-year period. The State will get all of the stimulus money and then will distribute it to the districts. There is a meeting next week to discuss the process for applying for the money.

The money from the State is also very unclear at this time. The District will only be able to guess on the State money, we will not know by the time this budget is voted on.

Mrs. Golschneider asked how the interns are working out at the schools and if we could use more to cut the substitute budget further. Mr. Melnik said they are working out well but the colleges can't fill our quota for interns. Limited colleges offer intern programs.

Building Committee: Mr. Currin said the Building Committee met this evening and voted to go out to bid for the Requests for Qualifications and Requests for Proposals for Architects and Engineers for the wells and the athletic complex.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Golschneider the Board of Education unanimously approved to adjourn.