

Board of Education

Regional District 13

March 25, 2009

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 25, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. in the library at Strong Middle School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currilin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons.

Also present: Mr. Melnik, Mrs. Viccaro.

Mr. Hennick called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Public Comment: Mr. Hennick reminded the public about the three minute limit on speaking during public comment and told them he might give them a chance to speak again later in the meeting if he felt it was appropriate.

Libby Krall, a Lyman parent asked that the Board add another teacher at Memorial. She worries about her son going into a larger classroom at Memorial after he has thrived at Lyman.

Jeremy Renninghoff of Middlefield asked what the per student cost at the Thomas Edison Magnet School is and what the fund balance is as of today. Mr. Hennick told Mr. Renninghoff that he could get him this information tomorrow if he wanted it but it was not information that anyone had with them.

Lynn Stanwood, a Lyman parent thanked the Board for their service. She feels that adults should bear the burden of the budget. The children should not be asked to leave their school community to help to balance this budget.

Dave Marran of Durham is happy with the education his children have received in the Integrated Day program. Program choice is an attractive part of the school system. The ID program will have a hard time functioning with a larger number of students per class and there may be serious consequences for the students. He wants the Board to maintain quality and balance between the programs and to consider the long term implications. He has heard that the larger class size is more than a two-year problem, that there is another large class coming up from Lyman in a couple of years.

Spencer Richardson of Durham has a child being affected by the larger class sizes. He asked the Board to please consider adding the additional teacher. A class of 27 students is significantly larger than it should be.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held in the library at Cuginchaug High School on April 7, 2009. The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. and will adjourn to the Public Hearing on the 2009-2010 Education Budget in the auditorium at 8:00 p.m.

On a motion by Mrs. Flanagan, second Mrs. Adams the Board of Education unanimously amended the agenda to include a discussion of the draft proposal from DATTCO under Executive Session.

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

Mr. Hicks made a motion, second Mrs. Flanagan to approve the minutes to the meeting of March 18, 2009. Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mrs. Flanagan, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons voted yes. Mr. Currilin, Ms. Gara, Mrs. Golschneider abstained.

Communications: Mrs. Golschneider attended the Read Across America event at Korn School and had a wonderful time reading in a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class. Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks and Mrs. Viccaro also participated in the event.

Ms. Parsons hosted two chorus students from the New England Music Festival at her house and attended an excellent concert.

Ms. Gara questioned the Town Times article written by a student about the behavior of fans at basketball games. Ms. Gara said she has witnessed this behavior herself and wondered if the athletic directors from the area can meet to set a standard of expected behavior at all schools. Dr. Wysowski said that the Shoreline Principals Association has met about the issue and it is being addressed.

Superintendent's Report: Mrs. Viccaro announced that the Community Round-up scheduled for this Saturday, March 28, has been cancelled due to a lack of student volunteers. Only eleven teams of students have signed up to help. It has been decided that only one Round-up will be held in the fall between sport seasons.

Mrs. Viccaro said she received an email yesterday stating that the security grant money is being released. The District had 48 hours to sign and deliver our acceptance to the Office of Homeland Security. The acceptance was delivered to Hartford today. The grant format has been changed. They are issuing the money as a cash advance. All funds must be obligated by June 30, 2009 and the project must be completed by September 30, 2009.

Mrs. Viccaro received an invitation from Representative Rosa DeLauro's office to participate in a conference call on April 2<sup>nd</sup> regarding the federal stimulus money and how it can be spent. Mrs. Viccaro invited Mr. Hennick to be present during the call and told other Board members they are also welcome to attend.

Mrs. Viccaro shared a letter from Central Connecticut State University commending Rachel Lang, Allison Neuberger and Meghan Woolley, seniors at Coginchaug, for their presentation at a literacy conference held there this past weekend.

Judy O'Hare's 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ID class at Memorial presented at the Connecticut Educators Computer Association conference.

Mrs. Viccaro distributed a copy of a letter from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to Board members. The letter stated that they have accepted the five-year progress report on Coginchaug. With this letter was also a list of new requirements for the evaluation process from NEASC.

Mrs. Luckenbach explained that NEASC visits high schools every ten years as part of the high school accreditation process. There currently is a self study process that begins two years before the accreditation process. They now want schools to begin doing a pre-self study process as well a year before that. This includes a new level of reporting and new activities that are not currently funded. Coginchaug is currently in the sixth year of their accreditation and would need to have the pre-self study completed by next spring. NEASC has no oversight agency and no limits are imposed on them.

Dr. Wysowski said NEASC is very liberal in proposing changes but they are not always well thought out. The high school will have to address the changes to stay accredited.

Mrs. Flanagan does not feel that doing what NEASC is asking will improve the quality of the school and it is taking the focus off the school's primary function.

Board members were not comfortable accepting these requirements without question. It was suggested that a letter be sent to NEASC from the Board of Education.

Mrs. Viccaro said there were 450 students at the New England Music Festival this past weekend and they were housed by 110 local families. She also hosted students at her house and attended all of the concerts. Everyone she spoke to said they had a wonderful time with the kids. The District has been asked to host the festival again in four years and Mrs. Viccaro has accepted.

Last evening, Mrs. Viccaro attended the biennial District Choral Night for grades 5-12. Folk singers, Tom Callahan and Ann Shapiro led 450 students on the stage in Irish folk songs. It was a great opportunity for the younger kids to share the stage with the high school students.

Mrs. Viccaro met today with Travis Goodwin, a representative from Capturing Kids' Hearts. She will be pursuing additional grant opportunities to train teachers in the program. Mrs. Viccaro shared statistics on the decline in student referrals to the office from teachers trained in the program. She feels this is good evidence of how the program is working by promoting positive interaction between staff and students.

Regarding new budget information, Mrs. Viccaro reported that two students from Lyman will not be moving to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade ID program so the total number of students in the ID program in 5<sup>th</sup> grade has been reduced to 78. Class sizes would now be 26, 26 and 26. She also reported that 143 students have committed to attend Cuginchaug for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Thirteen students are still undecided.

2009-10 Budget: Mr. Hennick distributed a budget handout showing the cuts that were agreed to at last week's meeting and other potential cuts. Mrs. Viccaro said that in discussion with Mrs. Luckenbach and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers it was decided that purchasing the new 5<sup>th</sup> grade social studies textbooks is important. She said they have decided that because the budget has been frozen this year there will be enough money to purchase the books out of this year's budget money.

Ms. Parsons asked about the effect of the custodial cut. Mr. Melnik said that summertime help will get cut and some overtime hours will be cut.

Board members agreed to cut all of the items in column 1 (\$100,000) and column 2 (\$200,000) from the budget handout, reducing the net increase to 2.18%.

Mr. Hennick said that if the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Memorial is added to this reduced budget it will bring the increase up to 2.42%. He said the letter that was sent out to 4<sup>th</sup> grade parents asking them to have their child switch programs drew no responses. If there are four classes the class sizes will be 19, 19, 20 and 20. Mr. Hennick said he has also received two phone calls from people who said they do not support adding a teacher.

Mr. Brough said the projected class sizes in the Contemporary program will be 22, 22, 21, 21, and 21.

Mrs. Viccaro said she would consider the Contemporary Program closed in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and add any new students to the ID program until the class sizes are balanced.

Mr. Hennick was asked why the District doesn't just move the kids from one program to the other. Mrs. Viccaro said the District has been offering program choice for over 30 years. Parents choose a program that is the best learning style for their child. She would not want to force a child to go into another program. It is not productive to do this in their 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> year of schooling.

Mrs. Adams asked where the money might come out of if the Board doesn't want to increase the budget but wants to add the teacher. Mrs. Viccaro said she may consider cutting back on instrumental music for 4<sup>th</sup> grade, cutting a nurse and bringing in a health aide at one of the schools, or reducing art classes. She doesn't really know for sure without meeting with her administrative team. She is also hopeful that there may still be some savings generated from health insurance, the bus contract and from the federal stimulus money.

Mrs. Viccaro is concerned about cutting the .4 teacher at the high school. Class sizes will be increasing if this position is cut. The number of students attending private schools is much smaller than in the past few years and we still don't know what the 13 undecided students will choose.

Mrs. Flanagan asked if any changes are expected in the revenue side of the budget. Mr. Melnik said he is a little concerned about the excess cost money for special education; it could go up or down, but he is comfortable with the numbers as they are now.

Mrs. Emory attended a State meeting today where the stimulus money for special education was discussed. She said the rules seem to be equivalent to the rules for the current IDEA grant money. The money can't be added to the budget as new money or for new programs.

Mr. Hennick suggested asking Mrs. Viccaro and the administrators to find \$75,000 in cuts.

Mrs. Adams is concerned about where the money will be taken from.

Mrs. Viccaro was asked if the large class size is really only a two-year problem and if a teacher can be hired for only two years. She said that it is a bubble. She said it is always possible for the teacher to end up being moved to another position in a couple of years, but the teacher would be given a one-year contract.

Mr. Hicks does not think that a 2.42% increase is unreasonable; it is far lower than the District has ever seen before.

Mrs. Flanagan said the Board needs to remember that they are representing the entire community. She questioned if they will be willing to bear the burden of an additional teacher.

Ms. Gara said it is not fair for the kids who happened to be born during these years. She would rather give up the reading consultant.

Dr. Ochterski said the loss of the reading consultant would affect a much larger number of kids.

Mr. Currin asked how the Board would be able to monitor how the kids are doing if the teacher is not added. Mrs. Viccaro said class size policy was designed for this purpose.

Mrs. Golschneider questioned if a teaching assistant to float between the classrooms would be helpful. Mrs. Viccaro said an assistant can't provide direct instruction. She doesn't think that it will be enough help.

The bus contract proposal will be reviewed by the Board tonight. It will either be approved or the Board may be going out to bid and we won't have an answer for 90 days.

Dr. Ochterski and Ms. Parsons are not in favor of adding the additional teacher.

Dr. Ochterski made a motion, second Ms. Parsons to go to the Public Hearing on the 2009-10 education budget with a total gross Regional District 13 budget of \$34,130,853. Dr Ochterski, Ms. Parsons voted yes. Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currlin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mrs. Golschneider, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks voted no. This represents a 2.18% net increase and does not include the additional teacher for Memorial School.

Mrs. Adams made a motion, second Mrs. Golschneider to go the Public Hearing on the 2009-10 education budget with a total gross Regional District 13 budget of \$34,205,853. Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currlin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mrs. Golschneider Mr. Hicks voted yes. Mr. Hennick, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons voted no. This represents a 2.42% net increase and includes the additional teacher at Memorial School.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mr. Currlin the Board of Education unanimously approved to hold a referendum on May 5, 2009 on the proposed 2009-10 Regional District 13 education budget to be preceded by a District Meeting to be held on May 4, 2009.

Finance Committee: Ms. Parsons said the finance Committee met this evening. They are tracking as anticipated and the expenses are holding because the budget was frozen.

Building Committee: Mr. Currlin said the ED-049's for the projects have been accepted by the State. Rob Francis is working on the reading rooms. He has met with manufacturers and will make a final selection soon. The reading rooms are being built entirely from donated money, at no cost to the District.

Personnel Policy: Mrs. Flanagan said the committee met with the support staff this week and will begin meeting with the custodians soon. The food service negotiations are ongoing.

On a motion by Mrs. Adams, second Mr. Hicks the Board of Education unanimously approved to move into Executive Session to discuss the draft proposal from DATTCO.

The Board moved into open session.

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