

Board of Education

Regional District 13

March 17, 2010

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 17, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the library at Strong School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currilin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks and Dr. Ochterski. Absent: Mrs. Golschneider and Ms. Parsons. Also present: Mr. Melnik, Mrs. Viccaro.

Mr. Hennick called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

Public Comment: Mr. Hennick asked for Board members to start public comment with any correspondence they may have received from residents concerning the budget.

Mrs. Adams received emails regarding keeping class size down and getting rid of “pay to play” for sports and extra curricular activities. She also received a call asking for no increase in the sport activity fee.

Mr. Currilin spoke with Durham Selectman John Szewczyk regarding the crossing guard and how this position will not be picked up by the Town of Durham in next year’s budget. Selectman Szewczyk thinks it should be the responsibility of the District and not the Town to pay for this position because she is not on Town of Durham property.

Mr. Hennick and Mrs. Adams were at Perk on Main on Saturday, March 13, 2010 and spoke with many residents and teachers. Mr. Hennick thanked Katie Hughes of Perk on Main for letting them hold this public meeting. He said the main topics of discussion were class size and athletics.

Mrs. Flanagan attended the Durham Board of Finance meeting on Saturday, March 13, 2010 and felt it was a positive meeting. She is looking forward to the Middlefield Board of Finance meeting this Thursday.

Jim Bannack of Durham spoke out in support of the high school football program for next year. Mr. Bannack is the President of the Durham/Middlefield Falcons youth football league. Mr. Bannack said that when the league was started in 2006 there were 105 football players and 35 cheerleaders. The league currently has 140 football players and 75 cheerleaders from 2nd to 8th grade. Approximately 200 families are involved in the league with it being equally split between both towns. Mr. Bannack hopes that people recognize that football is an up and coming thing for both communities. He also asked that there be no staff or program cuts in next year’s budget.

Phuong Oanh Stephan of Durham asked that there be no cuts in staff from grades K through 4. Mrs. Stephan provided the Board with research she gathered supporting the need for small class sizes at the elementary level. She asked that the Board not look to increase class size as a way to reduce the budget.

Noelle Durkin 4th grade teacher at Korn spoke regarding class size and how teachers are finding it hard to meet state and federal guidelines.

Carrie Sullivan asked that the elementary health teacher position cut from this year’s budget be added back into next year’s budget. She also asked that the math and cursive workbooks be added back into the budget. She did not understand how making copies of pages for each student saves money. Laurie Sinder, Principal of Korn School said that buying master workbooks lets the teacher use only the pages they need instead of having several workbooks with unused pages.

Donia Viola of Durham feels that residents are over taxed. Mrs. Viola does not agree with having students pay to participate in sports. She also feels that if the students have to pay to park then the teachers, support staff and administrators should also pay. Mrs. Viola asked the Board to look into offering an early retirement package and feels this could help reduce the salary figures. She also would like the salary and benefits to be split up by school.

Several parents and a student spoke regarding smaller class sizes and the impact a larger class size would have on teachers, students and parents.

Joan Zito of Durham complimented the Board on its attentiveness to each person who has spoken. Mrs. Zito feels that the teacher salaries are excessive and feels the tax dollars should be spent on the children not salaries. Mrs. Zito also feels the sports complex should not happen.

Scott Wheeler of Middlefield asked for more detail on the operating expenses and supplies line item. He also had several questions regarding the long range planning capital fund and the logic behind when projects were scheduled to be worked on. Mrs. Flanagan said she would meet with Mr. Wheeler to discuss these questions.

Mr. Hennick explained to the public that a "NO" vote to the budget will almost guarantee cuts to items that many people do not want cut.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held at Strong School on March 24, 2010.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second by Mr. Currlin, the agenda was unanimously approved.

Mr. Currlin made a motion, second by Mrs. Flanagan to accept the minutes of the meeting of March 10, 2010 as amended. Mr. Currlin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mr. Hennick, and Dr. Ochtersk voted yes. Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle and Mr. Hicks abstained.

Superintendent's Report: Mrs. Viccaro attended a service for Howard Kelly this past Sunday.

Mrs. Viccaro attended the Durham / Middlefield Exchange club meeting last Thursday where the seniors from the National Honor Society were honored.

Mrs. Viccaro attended an assembly at John Lyman School on Martin Luther King by presenter Victoria Christow. Mrs. Viccaro thanked Lucy Meigs and the JLPA for funding the assembly.

Mrs. Viccaro attended the Scholarship Ball on Saturday night.

Mrs. Viccaro met with Francis Willett of Everbridge Communications on Monday. Her plans are to have all staff set up on the emergency notification system by the spring.

Mrs. Viccaro said that Connecticut did not receive funding in the Race to the Top program from the federal government. The state will be holding a series of workshops across the state to try and gain support from towns and reapply for funding in late spring. Mrs. Viccaro will provide the Board with more information once it becomes available.

Mrs. Viccaro passed out 2 letters from Cliff Gibson of DATTCO regarding DATTCO's maintenance performance for 2009 and the 7th annual DATTCO EXPO on April 1, 2010. The EXPO will hold a seminar with the latest information on seat belt use in school buses.

Mrs. Viccaro will be attending the unveiling of the basket weaving backdrop at John Lyman on Thursday, March 18, 2010.

Mrs. Viccaro has been contacted by parent groups who would like to have the policy on fund raisers increased from what it is currently. Mr. Hicks said he will bring this subject up at the next Policy Committee meeting.

Mrs. Viccaro talked about the issue of the crossing guard and how the Town of Durham will not be paying for that position out of the town budget next year. She asked the Board if they feel it is a position they would like to pick up in next year's budget. Mrs. Viccaro said the cost for this position is \$5,797.00. Mrs. Adams asked if it would be safe not to have a crossing guard on Pickett Lane. Dr. Nicol, Principal of Strong Middle School feels the District would be fine without one.

High School Principal Search Committee: On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Adams the Board of Education unanimously approved to have Mrs. Viccaro create a High School Principal Search Committee.

2010-2011 Regional School District 13 Budget: Ms. Gara and Mr. Currlin both agreed that there wasn't a lot of excess in this year's budget. Ms. Gara asked about the increase in the Dues & Subscriptions line item and Mr. Melnik said it was just an increase in the annual cost and that nothing new was added.

Mr. Currilin thanked Mrs. Stephan for the information she provided the Board during public comment and feels the District has maintained its class size policy.

Mrs. Viccaro pointed out that the District is currently over in class size in 3rd and 4th grade at both Korn and Lyman.

Mr. Melnik said that the District has saved money by going out to bid for energy and health insurance contracts and renegotiated the bus contract. He said they have looked into early retirement and there were 9 teachers who have over 30 years experience. Of the 9 eligible teachers, 2 were already retiring, 4 were under 60 years old and 3 were under 63 years old. Mr. Melnik said these teachers are relatively young and it would be hard for them to agree to take an early retirement because of the cost of insurance seeing they would not be Medicare eligible.

Mrs. Adams asked about selling the portables. Mr. Melnik said that the portables at Memorial and Brewster will be paid off next year and the portables at Coginchaug and Korn would not have a lot of resale value in moving them.

Mrs. Flanagan said that she has not found anything to cut in athletics. She is looking into the costs spent on each sport per student. She also feels that the activity fee issue needs to be resolved. Mr. Hennick agreed and thought that next week's budget discussion should begin with athletics and a decision should be made.

Mrs. Viccaro said the language lab teachers were hoping to acquire a class set of iPods for individualized instruction. Mrs. Boyle asked if they could purchase MP3 players instead of iPod's as the cost of iPods were much higher than MP3 players. Mrs. Viccaro said she believes that would be fine.

Mrs. Viccaro passed out a handout on enrollment at the elementary school level comparing this current school year and the projections for next.

Mr. Melnik answered a question Mrs. Golschneider asked at the last Board meeting regarding why the oil consumption at Memorial was higher than the other schools. Mr. Melnik said it was because Memorial is the only school with a steam heating system and this system uses more oil to heat.

Ms. Gara asked about legal fees and what was budgeted for this current school year and what we actually have used so far. Mr. Melnik said the District budgeted \$75,000.00 for the 2009-2010 school year and as of right now has used \$111,000.00. He expects this figure to increase by the time the year is over. Mrs. Boyle asked what was budgeted for next year and Mr. Melnik said it was \$110,000.00.

Mrs. Flanagan asked for Board members to email any recommended cuts to Mrs. Viccaro and Mr. Melnik before the next Board meeting.

Committee Reports:

Building and Grounds Committee: Mr. Currilin said the Building and Grounds Committee recently met with CL&P in an effort to reduce energy costs. Mr. Currilin said the District qualifies for a government program that would assist in the purchase and upgrading of equipment. Mr. Melnik said they are looking at this program and will need to get more info from them before they can move forward.

Curriculum Committee: Mrs. Adams said the Curriculum Committee met on Tuesday. She said that the state has mandated that the District would need to pay for substitutes when teachers involved in TEAM meet. She also discussed the NEASC accreditation and how summer curriculum should not be cut out next year in order to allow teachers time to prepare for these evaluations. Mrs. Adams also discussed the \$18,000 for textbooks in the budget and how it was the bare bones needed.

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

Virginia Antonelli