

Board of Education

Regional District 13

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 24, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the library at Strong Middle School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons. Member absent: Mrs. Golschneider  
Also present: Mr. Melnik, Mrs. Viccaro.

Mr. Hennick called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

Public Comment: Jeremy Renninghoff of Middlefield said he has been reviewing the chart of accounts given to him by Mr. Melnik at the Middlefield Board of Finance meeting. Mr. Melnik said the surplus expected at the end of the year is estimated to be \$750,000. The budget for next year reflects a carry-over of \$600,000. He knows this amount is not a final figure but he would like to see the budget amount adjusted up.

Laura Francis, 1<sup>st</sup> Selectman of Durham, thanked the Board for their presentation to the Board of Finance in Durham. She feels they now have a better understanding of how the budgeting of the District is done. She also has concerns about the fund balance. She thanked the Board for beginning to look at facilities utilization. If we may some day be able to consolidate schools we would see savings in many areas. Regarding the activity fees, she supports an increase in them. As a parent she would have been willing to pay more, but she asked the Board to be mindful that they don't try to offset the entire cost and to make sure they have an umbrella to cover families who can't pay. She hopes the percentage increase is brought down by the Board.

Donia Viola of Durham said she read an article in USA Today about schools generating money by selling ads on their websites. She thanked Mrs. Viccaro for getting her the information on the number of classes with 22 or less students. She asked if the District replaced a vehicle with the new van or if it is an additional vehicle that will require additional costs. She asked if care is being taken to replace staff with people at lower pay levels.

Susan Michael, a teacher at CRHS spoke as a club advisor to ECO. She is concerned about the possible increase in activity fees. ECO is a service organization that helps clean-up around the school, raises money for hunger relief and does many other service activities. She does not feel it is right to ask these students to pay a higher fee to participate. She is also a parent of an athlete and understands the need to raise the fees for athletics.

Rick Hanley of Durham supports this budget. The increase is minimal and we need to maintain a good educational system.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held at Coginchaug High School on April 7, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. A Public Hearing on the 2010-11 Education Budget will be held in the auditorium at 8:00 p.m.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Boyle, the Board of Education unanimously approved the agenda as amended to include a Resolution on the pension under New Business and a discussion of a Potential Facilities Lawsuit under Executive Session.

Mr. Currin made a motion, second Mrs. Adams, to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 17, 2010. Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski voted yes. Ms. Parsons abstained.

Communications: Mrs. Adams said she has had calls from Memorial School parents. They have some concerns that they would like to bring to the Policy Committee.

Mrs. Boyle has had questions from people regarding the hiring of the football coach. Mr. Hennick told her that the selection process has started. He is on the committee as well as Dr. Wysowski, Mr. Hauser, Mr. Lombardo, Mrs. Penney and two parents. She also asked about the principal's selection committee. Mrs. Viccaro said she has had a great response. She will be sending out a timeline to all those selected for the Committee and will ask all the rest of the volunteers to participate in focus groups. The meetings and interviews are closed to the public.

Mr. Currilin attended the meeting with the Middlefield Board of Finance and felt that it was very worthwhile and suggested that the Board plan to do this every year.

Mrs. Boyle suggested that along with having a meeting at Perk on Main, the Board should meet at Lyman's Apple Barrel for Middlefield residents.

Mr. Hennick said he received a letter from Representative Matt Lesser regarding the education initiatives before the State legislature. Mr. Hennick asked Representative Lesser to provide funding to implement seat belts on school buses should it become a law.

Superintendent's Report: Mrs. Viccaro said she, Mr. Melnik and four Board members attended the Middlefield Board of Finance meeting. It was a very positive interaction.

Mrs. Viccaro said she has received over forty emails from parents regarding not raising class sizes or cutting staff.

Mrs. Viccaro is attending a meeting on March 31<sup>st</sup> regarding the Race to the Top funds. She will get more information on participating and report back to the Board.

Mrs. Viccaro said Coginchaug is one of about 100 high schools in the state that participates in the UCONN early college experience program where students earn college credits. The program is looking to branch out.

Senior Class Washington D.C. Field Trip Request: On a motion by Mr. Currilin, second Mrs. Boyle the Board of Education unanimously approved the senior class field trip to Washington, D.C. from November 17 to November 20, 2010.

Mr. Hicks said the Board reserves the right to cancel the trip at the last minute if there are issues of homeland security.

Long Term Facilities Study: Mrs. Viccaro said that after the budget process is complete she would like the Board to form a committee to complete a long-term facilities study. The District needs to look at enrollment projections into the future and make decisions about how we will be using our buildings.

Pension Resolution: Mr. Melnik explained that the employee pension plan is changing as of July 1<sup>st</sup>. Along with this change a resolution needs to be approved to allow the contributions to be tax deferred until retirement.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mr. Currilin the Board of Education unanimously approved the resolution regarding the Defined Benefit Pension Plan. A copy of the resolution is attached to these minutes.

#### Budget Discussions:

Mrs. Flanagan began the discussion by saying that she did not even consider looking at the cost of clubs in her analysis on the cost of athletics. She tried to annualize the cost of each sport per student.

Mr. Hennick asked the Board to decide where the analysis was leading them; whether we're looking at this because it is the fair thing to do or because we are looking to raise a certain amount of revenue for the budget.

Mrs. Flanagan feels it is unfair to the taxpayer to support the full cost of athletics. She would like to mitigate costs and fund maintenance and keep all sports.

Other Board members shared their views and ideas on pay to play. Some were in favor of increasing the fees and others were not. Many ideas were shared but philosophically many were apposed to the fees and have voted for them in the past only out of need. There was concern that by increasing the fees across the board the students who are only in service clubs would suffer. It was clear that the Board needed to have a clear plan before they could determine what budget impact an increase would make. After much discussion the Board decided to hold off on making a decision about pay to play until they had further discussion on other budget reductions.

Members felt that there was a clear message from the Boards of Finance that the budget needs to be lowered some.

Ms. Gara asked for an explanation of the down side of moving more of the fund balance. Mr. Melnik explained that there is really nothing left to take. The difference of \$150,000 is really not that much when projecting out to the end of June.

Mr. Melnik read a list of cuts suggested by the central office: The dental insurance quote came in less than projected so \$7,474 can be cut; a \$50,000 deposit for the new medical insurance is being made during this fiscal year (coming from the fund balance) so that can be deducted from the insurance account for next year; the fixed audit (\$7,000) is going to be completed this year (from the fund balance) and can be deducted; \$5,000 for special education legal fees; \$411 for dues and fees at Memorial School, \$546 for a foreign language stipend that hasn't been used at Strong School, \$12,000 from the substitute budget, \$4,000 in custodial overtime, and \$400 for filters for the deionizers in the science rooms. These cuts total \$91,831.00. If only these cuts are made the gross budget would increase by 3.22% and the net budget by 2.59%.

Mr. Melnik handed out spreadsheets showing substitute usage and custodian overtime. He explained that substitute expenses are up this year but there have been many long-term illnesses and pregnancies. He said a plan is being discussed to bring in on-call workers to help reduce the amount of custodial overtime but he wanted to illustrate how much contractual time the District is required to cover.

Mrs. Flanagan asked questions regarding the increase in the software licensing fees. Ms. Gara also thought that these fees were high and questioned why the technology consultant services budget is still increasing even though we have a full-time IT Director. Mrs. Viccaro explained that we have two part-time consultants that each work two days per week. The software fees have increased. We are replacing the student information system. The assessment component of the software is being purchase through AARA funding.

Mrs. Flanagan asked why spending in the operating budget of Buildings & Grounds is not going down when we have a budget in place for capital expenditures. She feels that some of the items budgeted can be paid for through the capital reserve account. Mrs. Flanagan feels that the supplies accounts for maintenance can come down. If money is needed for repairs that fall under "building envelope" the funds can come out of the capital reserve fund if necessary. She suggested reducing the accounts by \$20,000. If that is agreed to the gross budget will be an increase of 3.16% and the net increase will be 2.53%.

Based on this discussion the Board agreed to leave the pay for play fee structure alone for now. It was agreed that they will revisit it again for further discussion and if the budget fails at the first referendum it will be seriously considered further.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mr. Currlin, the Board of Education unanimously approved to go to the Public Hearing on the 2010-11 education budget with a total gross Regional District 13 budget of \$34,836,872.00.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Dr. Ochterski, the Board of Education unanimously approved to hold a referendum on May 4, 2010 on the proposed 2010-11 Regional District 13 education budget to be preceded by a District Meeting to be held on May 3, 2010.

The Board thanked Mrs. Flanagan for all the work she did in putting together the information on the cost of athletics.

Committee Reports: There were no committee reports.

On a motion by Mr. Currlin, second Mr. Hicks, the Board of Education unanimously approved to go into Executive Session to discuss Teacher Non-renewals and a Potential Facilities Lawsuit.

The Board moved back into regular session.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mr. Currlin, the Board of Education unanimously moved that the contracts of employment of Jeffrey Bernabeo, Maura Caramanello, Rachel Mann, Cassandra Montepara, and JoAnn Pantalena not be renewed for the following year upon its expiration at the end of the 2009-2010 School Year and that the Superintendent of Schools is directed to advise such persons in writing of this action.

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