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Board of Education

Regional District 13

May 12, 2010

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, May 12, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the library at Coginchaug High School. Board members present: Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currlin, 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 7:31 p.m.

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

Naviance Presentation: The guidance counselors from Coginchaug High School and Strong Middle School presented an update to the Board on the progress of the use of Naviance, the software program in use in the guidance office at both schools. It was introduced at Strong School this year and is being used primarily for career exploration and to get the students familiar with the program prior to their transition to the high school. The guidance counselors are very pleased with the use of the program by the students and expect its use will continue to increase. At Coginchaug they have found the college search process and the process for which students request transcripts to be very streamlined. Everyone is accountable and electronic tracking of documents is very easy. The ability to reach out to the students or parents by email groups through this program is another important feature of this program. The counselors do not feel that this program takes them away from the students; it allows them to connect with the students and have areas to focus on right away from the information they have inputted into the program.

Public Comment: Joan Zito of Durham asked what the Board has done to adjust the budget since the vote. Mr. Hennick responded that nothing has been done yet; decisions would be made at this meeting.

Rebecca Adams, Chair of the Middlefield Board of Finance said that the Middlefield BOF all came to the same conclusions that Bob Yamartino stated in his article in the Town Times. She has reviewed the tapes from the meeting several times and she is still trying to understand if there was a misconception from that meeting. Ms. Adams understands that there still needs to be wiggle room in the budget but she would like the District to stop building in large surpluses. The two towns are responsible for having a fund balance to cover any catastrophic events in the towns. She is sorry if there was a misunderstanding.

Ms. Parsons explained the fund balance. Ms. Parson explained that there was a surplus in the audit of Dec 09 from the prior year through June 09 of \$2,200,000. Of that \$1,015,000 is being used in this year's budget. The other \$1,200,000 is proposed to be used as revenue for 2010-11. At the end of this June it is estimated that a surplus of \$600,000 to \$700,000 will be left in the operating budget. It is proposed to also apply \$600,000 of that money to the 2010-11 budget as well. It is possible that the unencumbered fund balance for 2010-11 will be zero.

Mrs. Flanagan is very concerned about the 2011-12 budget. It will be starting out with \$1.2 million dollars less without a fund balance carry-over. Budgeting for the 2011-12 school year will be very difficult.

Mr. Melnik said if the District does not have a fund balance and we need to borrow money, bond counsel and lending institutions are going to look for the towns to have a higher percentage in their fund balance. Durham has lowered their percentage from 11% to 8% and Middlefield's is at

6%. The average municipality fund balance is 12%. Bond ratings will be affected and interest rates will be higher if we need to borrow money.

Romano Ameletto of Durham said the budget defeat of 18 votes is not much of a mandate. The attendance at the polls was abysmal. He is concerned that parents did not vote but he did not see many notifications or signs to remind people. People are angry about things that are beyond the control of the Board. He asked the Board to not cut teaching staff or raise class size. He would hate to see the quality of education suffer.

Donia Viola of Durham said she spoke with a lawyer today about the amount of money that Districts are allowed to have in their capital fund. She was told that 1% of the District budget can go into a capital fund. She doesn't think that the District needs to keep any more money than that from year to year. She feels the teachers should have agreed to concessions. Many other districts have opened contracts and the teachers have given back. The average person does not have a guaranteed raise every year. She would like the Board to look again at the stipends. She feels they are too numerous and too high.

Scott Wheeler of Durham voted yes to this budget for the first time. He feels that promises were kept by the Board and he appreciated it. He feels that it would be helpful if the cuts were explained better. Mr. Wheeler also would like to give recognition to Jeffrey Bernabeo, a teacher at Brewster School. He said he has been communicating with him on a weekly basis about his son's progress and he thanked him for that.

Mrs. Viccaro said the budget cuts will get posted on the District website.

David Montgomery of Durham said as moderator of the meeting last week there were a few things that were obvious to him. People find the surplus confusing, it needs to be cleared up before this budget will pass; a year ago teachers rejected giving up a furlough day and the public is still upset with them; and the public doesn't understand how the sports complex became a \$1,000,000 project. This Board needs to be sure they understand where the money is going in the next ten years, but not be paralyzed by past mistakes.

Jeremy Renninghoff of Middlefield said he understands the surplus now and he thanked the Board for the explanation. Mr. Renninghoff said a petition has been circulating in the towns regarding the fund balance and the funds left each year in the salary line item account. He did not submit the petition because he now understands that some of the information is inaccurate. He is still concerned that the salary line item is over budgeted. He is not looking for cuts of people but he believes this account can be reduced.

Kristen Prout of Durham voted for the budget and would like it to remain level without any cuts.

Leon D'onofrio of Durham is concerned about the years 2020 and 2015. He asked what the Board is doing to reduce the budget by using technology. The District percentage of the town budget is going to continue to rise. Most people can't afford it along with the other increases they are facing. The Board needs to figure out how to mimic the private sector because people can't afford a continual increase.

Theresa Opalacz of Durham supports this budget, she doesn't want services cut. She feels it is important for the Board to better communicate the fund balance and the information about the surplus in the line item accounts.

Mr. Melnik distributed a spreadsheet regarding the salary line item account. He explained that since they have been budgeting with actual salaries, not averages, the salary account variance has been very small. He also explained where the rest of the surplus in this year's budget is expected to come from. A major savings of approximately \$208,000 was seen when the bus contract was settled after last year's budget was finalized.

Mrs. Opalacz is also very nervous about next year; by stripping away the fund balance she is afraid we will be looking at a very large increase.

Mr. Hennick thanked the public for their comments. He feels a vote like this is the hardest to interpret. The margin was close and the voter turnout was very low. He asked Mr. Melnik and Mrs. Viccaro to work with the administrators on possible cuts.

Mrs. Viccaro said the administrative team did not want to cut staffing or programs.

Mr. Melnik distributed a handout and reviewed the listing of proposed cuts from the administrative team. They include: Elimination of the annual fee for MMS, the student data base that will no longer be supported (\$9,100); elimination of the annual fee for Classroll report cards (\$9,720); elimination of current student information system (\$20,490); a reduction in tuition for out of District magnet schools (\$44,419); and a reduction of \$10,000 in electricity costs. Mr. Melnik explained that a new student information system (Powerschool) has been purchased with AARA grant money and will be eliminating the need for MMS and the Classroll report card system. The magnet school tuition budget can be reduced because we now know the actual number of students that will be attending the magnet school. Twenty-two slots have been budgeted for and only twelve students have enrolled at the Thomas Edison Magnet School. There are additional students attending the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and one is registered at a magnet school in New Haven. We have to budget for some fluctuation in the numbers but the budget can be reduced. The reduction in electricity is due to the solar panels being added to the roofs at Memorial and Lyman Schools.

Mrs. Flanagan said a lot of discussion about reducing the salary line item has taken place. She does not agree that there is extra in this account. For the last two budget cycles the Board has been using actual salaries. It has been off by a very small percentage of the total. If this area is cut further the risk of going over budget is great.

Most Board members agreed that it would be foolish to cut further into this account but Ms. Gara cautioned that the funding from the State is going to be flat and to brace for more reductions next year.

Mrs. Boyle feels that something needs to be cut to show the public that the Board is listening. She suggested a cut of \$25,000 from the salary line item.

The capital fund account was discussed. The Board does not want to take out an overall amount and disrupt the capital plan so they discussed the need for the items scheduled for next year. It was decided to cut \$15,000 from the \$48,000 in the plan for cafeteria equipment. This money is for software that will be used connected to the new Powerschool program. It was decided that no further cuts would be made into the capital account.

Each Board member was polled as to whether they felt comfortable with the reductions suggested to this point. Some were comfortable and some felt that the \$25,000 should come out of the salary account. It was suggested that the additional cut of \$25,000 be left to Mrs. Viccaro and Mr. Melnik to find with the help of the administrative team. If they cannot come up with places to make the cuts, they were instructed to take the money from the salary account.

With the addition of the \$25,000 the deductions total \$133,729. The gross budget increase will be 2.77% and the net budget increase will be 2.10%.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Dr. Ochterski the Board of Education unanimously approved to hold a referendum on May 25, 2010 on the proposed \$34,693,143 gross 2010-11 Regional District 13 education budget preceded by a District Meeting to be held on May 24, 2010.

Next Board Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held on May 26, 2010 at Brewster School. Prior to the meeting, beginning at 6:45pm there will be a celebration for the completion of the new strategic plan. Board members are invited to attend.

On a motion by Ms. Parsons, second Mrs. Flanagan the minutes to the meeting of April 28, 2010 were unanimously approved.

Communications: The Board congratulated members, Ms. Parsons, Ms. Gara, Dr. Ochterski and Mrs. Adams for their reelection to the Board of Education from their respective towns.

Mrs. Adams said she attended the production of Annie at Memorial School. She enjoyed the show and thought the students were a wonderful audience. She also attended the instrumental night at Cuginchaug and said the music was wonderful.

Ms. Parsons hired students from the National Honor Society to perform yard work for her. She said they were a wonderful group of kids that worked hard and were raising money for a child that they sponsor.

Superintendent's Report: Mrs. Viccaro said the District received an award for our support of the United Way.

Mrs. Viccaro reported that as a result of the State budget cutbacks the School Resource Officer Program will be defunct as of June 30, 2010. She encouraged people to write to their representatives to support keeping this program in the schools.

Regarding Race to the Top funds Mrs. Viccaro has learned that the commission will allow school districts to pool their money through their Regional Education Service Centers (RESA) for professional development purposes. If districts sign-on to the plan they will have ninety days to see the finished plan and then change their mind if they want to.

Mrs. Flanagan made a motion, second Mrs. Boyle to support the District's participation in the Connecticut State Department of Education Race to the Top Phase II grant application. Mrs. Boyle, Mr. Currin, Mrs. Flanagan, Ms. Gara, Mr. Hennick, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Ochterski, Ms. Parsons voted yes. Mrs. Adams voted no.

Mrs. Viccaro said the high school will be receiving an award from the State and will be honored at the Capitol for the Community Round-up.

The District Art Exhibit is currently on display at the Durham Public Library and will be throughout the month of May.

Mrs. Viccaro said the Search Committee for the high school principal is going well. The two finalists will participate in focus groups with students, parents, staff and administrators.

Support Staff Contract: Mrs. Flanagan said the contract has been finalized. This is a three year contract for July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2012. The Board worked hard to finalize this contract and would like to acknowledge the support staff for recognizing the difficult economic times. The salary increases negotiated are as follows: SY 09-10 (2 ½%), SY 10-11 (0%). SY 11-12 (2 ¼%). The co-pay for insurance is increasing by 1% in year 09-10, 0% in year 10-11 and 1% in year 11-12.

On a motion by Mrs. Flanagan, second Mr. Currin the Board of Education unanimously approved to accept the agreement between the Regional District 13 Board of Education and the Regional District 13 Support Staff Association for the period July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2012.

Policy Committee: Mr. Hicks said the Policy Committee met last week and had a discussion with several parents regarding the policy on bullying. They discussed the consistency of how the policy

is applied in the buildings. The committee is also reviewing a policy on alcohol detection testing for possible inclusion as one of the District policies.

Building Committee: Mr. Currin reported that the bid for the athletic project and bid for the well systems at Memorial and at Lyman were in the paper this past weekend. A meeting with the Durham Planning and Zoning Commission on next Wednesday is the last step to finalize the agreement with the resident in Durham. The Inland Wetlands Commission met earlier this week and did not feel that they had to vote to approve the site changes made.

Mrs. Flanagan explained that even though the projects are going to bid now, the District went out to bond for this money a long time ago and the taxpayers are not going to see an increase in their taxes because of it. The debt payments are less because the District has been retiring debt. From this year forward the debt payments will continue to go down.

Communications Committee: Mrs. Boyle asked whether members thought it would be a good idea to set up a time to meet with community members at a public location again to talk with them about budget concerns. The Apple Barrel was suggested as a location. The Board also discussed taking out another ad in the Town Times to better explain the fund balance and the salary account.

On a motion by Mrs. Flanagan, second Mrs. Adams the Board of Education unanimously approved to go into Executive Session to begin discussion of the Superintendent's Evaluation.

The Board moved back into regular session.

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