

Regional School District 13

**Board of Education
Budget Work Session**

March 11, 2026

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 11, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. in the library Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board of Education Members Present: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Konstantino (arrived at 5:24), Mrs. Caramanello (arrived at 5:04), and Dr. Darcy (attended virtually)

Board of Education Members Absent: Mr. DelVecchio and Mr. Stone.

Administration Present: Dr. Leggett, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, to approve the agenda as presented.

All in favor of approving the agenda as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, and Dr. Darcy. Motion passed.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

2026-2027 Budget Discussion

Dr. Leggett shared positive budget news that the state health insurance plan increase was reduced from the originally projected 14% to 11.5%. This change results in approximately \$299,000 in savings for the budget. As a result, the gross budget decreased from an increase of 5.11% to 4.41% and the net budget decreased from 5.51% to 4.78%.

During the budget discussion, Mrs. Neubig reviewed 18 submitted questions. These included: one question about reduction of ABA services, questions related to class sizes and staffing, and 9 operational questions covering topics such as debt service, capital reserve, food service, security, managed print and audit costs.

Mrs. Cowan raised concerns about class size data, particularly at Strong School, noting that seventh grade appears to be one of the largest classes but the reported averages seemed low. Mrs. Cowan also questioned whether staffing levels are being adjusted appropriately given declining enrollment, pointing out that many high school classes are small; about 192 of roughly 280 classes have fewer than 15 students, and about 30 have fewer than five students.

Dr. Leggett explained that the district reviews staffing annually using a zero-based budgeting approach and typically looks two to three years ahead before making reductions, since temporary enrollment “bubbles” may rebound. Dr. Leggett also noted that high school programming, such as AP courses, electives, and intervention classes, naturally leads to smaller class sizes because maintaining diverse offerings requires more sections.

Dr. Leggett offered to show an example analysis prepared by school administrators demonstrating how reducing a social studies position would affect course offerings, emphasizing that it was only an example. Mrs. Cowan expressed interest in seeing a similar analysis for math, since math staffing had been increased in recent years to support intervention and improved achievement. Dr. Leggett confirmed that the math position had been added about two years ago to offer specific intervention classes for high school students.

Mrs. Trainer, CRHS Assistant Principal explained how the high school scheduling and staffing process works and how course offerings are determined. The process begins with student course registration from incoming 9th graders through current 11th graders. Administrators generate reports showing how many students request each class and share these with department leaders, who recommend the number of sections and full-time staff (FTE) needed. Most social studies courses are required core classes (Global, Western, U.S. History), so the number of sections is largely determined by enrollment and graduation requirements. For example, 34 students signed up for Western History, requiring two sections to keep class sizes reasonable. For electives, which include AP and college-credit courses (UConn or University of Bridgeport), administrators must decide whether to run classes with smaller enrollment or cancel them. This becomes a balancing act between class size, staffing, and maintaining program offerings. Administrators then showed what would happen if one social studies teaching position were eliminated: AP and college-credit courses would likely run every other year instead of annually, several elective courses would be reduced to one section or eliminated entirely, including: Criminal Justice (reduced), Genocide and Sociology (reduced), Art of Teaching (cut), and Economics (cut). Required courses like Citizenship could end up with very large class sizes (30+ students) if fewer sections are offered. There would also be more scheduling conflicts, making it harder for students to take desired courses.

Mrs. Cowan suggested that math, not social studies, appears to have the smallest class sizes when reviewing course data and suggested it might be a better area to analyze for potential staffing adjustments.

Dr. Leggett responded that there was a specific reason math was not chosen for the example, and administrators explained that math staffing had previously been reduced and then partially restored (to a 0.6 position). The additional math staffing is currently being used to support student intervention services, though that role could potentially be the first area reconsidered if reductions were necessary. There is also a possibility that the math teacher may be needed to help cover the new personal finance graduation requirement.

Dr. Darcy noted that some class sections could reasonably be combined to improve efficiency and equity by reducing the number of course tracks. However, collapsing a few sections usually doesn't eliminate enough classes to remove a full teaching position, which makes meaningful staffing reductions difficult. Dr. Darcy also suggested possible strategies such as offering some AP courses every other year and sharing staff between the high school and middle school to help manage class sizes.

Administrators explained that sharing teachers between schools has become more difficult because the middle school and high school now operate on different daily schedules, making coordination challenging. Dr. Darcy suggested that strengthening Tier 1 instruction (core classroom teaching) could reduce the need for the current level of intervention services over time. While Dr. Darcy emphasized that this cannot happen immediately, improving the effectiveness of core instruction could eventually mean fewer students needing extra intervention support. As part of a long-term, multi-year strategy, this approach could allow the district to gradually reduce the number of intervention positions, since stronger Tier 1 instruction would lessen the demand for intensive intervention programs. Dr. Leggett commented that she initially proposed reducing 1.0 full-time English teaching position (FTE) at the high school because it was identified as the only content area where a reduction would not significantly impact course offerings or programming. Instead of eliminating classes, the change would primarily result in larger class sizes for senior English courses.

The discussion continued with a focus on a proposal to add a 1.0 full-time Library Media Specialist (LMS) so that both the middle school and high school would each have a full-time librarian. This is the only staffing addition proposed in the budget. Dr. Leggett explained that the district currently has three LMS positions, and even when the schools eventually combine into the new Memorial building (with about 700 students), it is unlikely the district would reduce library staff. Therefore, waiting until Memorial opens would not significantly change the need for this role. Mrs. Lussier, Library Media Specialist at Brewster School described how modern library media specialists serve as instructional leaders, not just managers of books. Key responsibilities and benefits of library media specialists include: collaborating with teachers and curriculum teams, teaching media literacy, research skills, and responsible AI use, providing technology training for students and staff, supporting database and research tools, promoting a school-wide reading culture, and ensuring all students receive guaranteed research and information literacy experiences, especially in freshman year.

Faculty also emphasized the impact at the middle school, where a full-time LMS could be incorporated into the specials rotation, allowing instruction in executive functioning, study and research skills, organization and digital file management, and media and information literacy. Mrs. Lussier highlighted that these skills are especially important in middle school years, when students are developing learning habits and navigating increasing exposure to online information and AI tools.

Mr. Moore questioned how media literacy is currently taught. Mrs. Lussier responded that while there is a strong K-5 media literacy curriculum, the 6-12 curriculum needs improvement. The curriculum writing was interrupted by COVID. Mr. Roraback also questioned how success would be measured. Mrs. Lussier suggested metrics such as Increased library circulation, Higher use of research databases, Participation in curriculum planning, Collaboration with teachers, and Observations and evaluations tied to a clear job description that can measure success.

Mr. Roraback emphasized the importance of strengthening the district's culture and programs from the early grades through high school in order to encourage students to remain in the district rather than choosing other high school options. Mr. Roraback noted any investments that strengthen the school system and make it more appealing for students and families are important, even though doing so will be challenging.

Mrs. Cowan expressed support for the concept of adding a full-time Library Media Specialist, acknowledging that it could be a valuable addition to the schools. However, Mrs. Cowan argued that this is not the right year financially to add the position, which would cost about \$144,000. Mrs. Cowan noted a perception issue, pointing out that the board had previously discussed reducing librarian positions in the 2025-2026 budget and now the district is proposing adding another one. Instead, Mrs. Cowan suggested the district should prioritize investing in curriculum development first, believing stronger curriculum is more directly tied to retaining students and preventing families from leaving the district. Mrs. Cowan recommended revisiting the library position in a year or two once the district's financial situation is clearer.

Mr. Moore remarked that the library media specialist initiative is part of a broader effort led by Dr. Leggett to enhance curriculum development and instructional practices. Mrs. Lussier shared her experience attending the Bridging the Gap Conference, organized by the Connecticut Library Consortium, which included participants from higher education institutions like Quinnipiac, UConn Law, and the community college system. Mrs. Lussier highlighted that colleges can identify which high schools have strong library programs based on incoming students' preparedness, such as their ability to use databases and other research tools. Mrs. Lussier suggested that this data is valuable regardless of whether students pursue college or career paths, and recommended the board consider these findings as the district moves forward with the library media specialist initiative.

Mrs. Cowan expressed concern that the library media specialist initiative, while valuable, is competing with many other district priorities. Mrs. Cowan suggested that it might be easier to consider and implement as part of a longer-term, three-year plan rather than addressing this initiative in isolation. Dr. Darcy expressed that she supports the vision and role of the proposed library media specialist, acknowledging the clear description of the position and its potential impact. However, Dr. Darcy questioned whether it is the right time financially to commit to the position, noting that if the towns vote against the budget referendum, initiatives like this would likely be among the first to be reconsidered.

Dr. Darcy suggested that investments in Tier 1 instruction, which could reduce the need for interventionist positions over time, might create financial flexibility to support initiatives like the library media specialist in the future.

Mrs. Caramanello questioned if there were any employees who have the certification who could move into this position in the future. Mrs. Lussier and Mr. Bough stated that currently, no existing staff, not currently working under the certification, hold the 062 certification for library media science, though there is an alternative certification pathway that could allow current employees to transition into the role in the future.

Mrs. Petrella expressed trust in the administration's staffing decisions and support for the proposed LMS position, noting that they consider both financial impact and the educational needs of students.

Discussion shifted to the Director of Teaching and Learning position. Mrs. Cowan expressed support for keeping the role as is, noting its focus on curriculum development. The in-service budget for the position is substantial, and there may be some flexibility if needed, but the priority is to maintain the position for curriculum support. Historically, there was one administrator in this role, but additional support came via

consultants. With fewer FTEs, consultant usage increased, but overall spending was similar.

Mrs. Caramanello discussed proposed budget reductions that she would like to see added to the budget, including the grade 1 teacher position. Mrs. Caramanello noted that current class sizes are manageable (16–20 students), and the team performs well, but smaller classes are always preferable. Mrs. Caramanello suggested that if reductions are necessary, adding more targeted support, such as a paraprofessional that could offer daily classroom support or one-on-one or small group intervention. Mrs. Caramanello emphasized that early intervention and strengthening support in lower grades can reduce the need for intervention in higher grades later.

Dr. Leggett agreed with the importance of early intervention, noting that earlier support leads to better outcomes. Dr. Leggett also highlighted that classroom assistance at K–1 has traditionally been a common approach, but the district currently provides only special education teacher assistants in those grades. Dr. Leggett asked for clarification if Mrs. Caramanello was suggesting increasing special education paraprofessionals or reintroducing general teacher assistants in early grades.

Mrs. Caramanello clarified that students without IEPs or 504 plans can still “slip through the cracks” when teachers are overwhelmed, especially with increasing class sizes. Mrs. Caramanello emphasized the importance of general classroom paras (not special ed) to support small groups and foundational skills like phonics. Dr. Leggett reported that class sizes for Grade 1 with a potential reduction would be around 17 students. Dr. Leggett suggested this could be part of a larger, long-term discussion, potentially when evaluating changes related to Memorial and budget planning, as adding general paras would likely require 5–10 additional staff, which would be a significant budget increase. It was noted that Kindergarten paras assist in first grade during related arts times, roughly 2–3 times per week, but coverage also includes IEP-related duties.

Discussion shifted technology, addressing Chromebook protection program and potential budgeting for device repairs. Mr. Pietrasko explained the current policy, in which 5th and 9th graders are provided new Chromebooks and other elementary devices are refreshed via leasing. There is an optional protection program for take-home devices (Grades 5–12). This protection program covers repair parts and labor for devices, fully funded by participating families. Mr. Simmons questioned the possibility of shifting the cost from parents to the district budget to remove the optional fee burden.

Mrs. Caramanello also expressed that reducing social worker alignment feels like a significant loss, especially because these positions directly support student intervention and overall well-being. Mrs. Caramanello emphasized the importance of roles that contribute to restorative practices and whole-child support. Dr. Leggett agreed that the position is highly beneficial, providing critical intervention and student support. The position was originally funded through a three-year grant, including three summers. Dr. Leggett noted concern about the “cliff effect”: if the grant ends, the district would suddenly have to absorb the full cost, which is a common issue among many school districts. Dr. Leggett established that maintaining the position in the district budget without a stable funding source is a financial decision. Exploring other funding options or additional grants is possible. Dr. Leggett emphasized that the board ultimately decides whether to continue or add this position to the district budget. Mrs. Caramanello agreed if funding can be secured responsibly, the position should be retained.

Mrs. Cowan suggested a proposal to add a school-based clinician at the elementary school at no cost to the district: the partnering organization would fund the position. Administration was open to exploring partnerships for this, as it's mutually beneficial.

Board members discussed the budget timeline. Mr. Moore reported that a Board of Finance meeting is scheduled and the board hopes to reach an agreement there. A final budget must be ready for public presentation on April 1, but further adjustments are possible after public hearings if needed. So far, two budget meetings have been scheduled. A third session can be scheduled if the board feels more discussion is needed.

Adjournment

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to adjourn the meeting at 6:03 p.m.

All in favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Konstantino, Mrs. Caramanello, and Dr. Darcy. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio