

Regional School District 13

Board of Education Meeting

April 1, 2026

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, April 1, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the library at Cuginchaug Regional High School.

Board of Education Members Present: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, and Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio (arrived 6:03 pm), Mr. Konstantino (attended virtually), and Mrs. Caramanello (attended virtually).

Board of Education Members Absent: Mr. Stone

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

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Moore requested that the Finalize Budget for Annual Meeting is amended to Finalize Budget and Vote for Annual Meeting followed by a referendum. Mr. Moore also requested that the School Naming Committee Meeting – March 25, 2026 is amended to School Naming Committee Meeting – March 25, 2026 and possible vote to accept the school name.

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Lucy Petrella, to approve the agenda with the amendments as presented.

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

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Approval of Minutes

- A. Board of Education Minutes - Budget Work Session - March 11, 2026
- B. Board of Education Minutes - March 11, 2026
- C. Board of Education Minutes - March 18, 2026

Dr. Leggett commended the clarity, consistency, and thoroughness of the submitted meeting minutes.

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the Board of Education Budget Work Session March 11, 2026 Meeting Minutes, the Board of Education March 11, 2026 Meeting Minutes, and the March 18, 2026 Meeting Minutes.

All in favor of approving the Board of Education Budget Work Session March 11, 2026 Meeting Minutes, the Board of Education March 11, 2026 Meeting Minutes, and the March 18, 2026 Meeting Minutes as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Konstantino, and Mrs. Caramanello. Motion passed.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Leggett reported that the district is currently busy with several major efforts, including finalizing the annual budget, bidding the final phase of the school construction project, continuing strategic planning around the Vision of the Graduate and instructional goals, as well as monitoring the outcomes of this year's state legislative decisions affecting education. Dr. Leggett shared that the last day of school is projected to be June 18, assuming there are no additional snow days. Graduation will remain on June 12, unchanged.

Dr. Leggett presented a major legislative update that involves new state rules for kindergarten admission. While the district currently allows early screening for children under age five, the new law eliminates that option beginning in the 2027–2028 school year. From that point forward, all kindergarten students must be five years old by September 1, with no early admission exceptions. Because of this change, the district will need to update its policy, and families will be notified since it will affect childcare, preschool, and family planning.

Dr. Leggett shared that the Restorative Practice theme for this month includes responsibility, with a focus on moving from “me to we”, along with recognition of Autism Awareness Month and Earth Month.

Additionally, the district's Leader and Educator Evaluation and Support Plan was approved by the state, confirming compliance with state requirements.

Dr. Leggett provided an update on facilities and building projects in the district. A comprehensive ADA assessment report was recently completed for Strong School and the high school, identifying several accessibility improvements that will be needed. At Strong School, the main entryway will need to be completely redesigned to meet ADA accessibility standards. At the high school, there are significant accessibility issues in the auditorium that will need to be addressed. The district will begin seeking design bids to determine the scope and cost of the larger ADA projects. In addition to the major items, the report also identified smaller ADA-related improvements that may be addressed gradually over time.

Dr. Leggett also noted that the Building Committee recently discussed the condition of the tennis courts, and the district will continue exploring the most cost-effective long-term solution. Dr. Leggett then asked Ms. Liska, Project Manager from STV, to provide an update on the Memorial School construction project.

Ms. Liska reported that Phase II (abatement and demolition) began on March 16 and is progressing well. Asbestos-containing floor materials have already been removed, and significant demolition work has taken place. The bidding process for Phase III, which includes the main building and site work, is currently underway. Bids are expected April 9, after which O&G will review them and make award recommendations to the Building Committee. Following the bid review, a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) contract will be assembled to combine all phases of the project into one. Ms. Liska noted additional progress, in which QA+M has selected a vendor from the state bid list for Phase IV, which includes furniture, fixtures, equipment (FF&E), and technology. QA+M will soon begin meetings with school staff and administrators to determine the needs for new furnishings at Memorial.

Chairman Update

Mr. Moore presented recent school events and activities. Mr. Moore commended the production of *The Little Mermaid*, noting it was well-attended and highly successful, with impressive performances from the students. Additionally, Senior capstone projects were recently presented, and Mr. Moore expressed pride in the seniors for their hard work and strong presentations. A district-wide choral night took place, featuring students from grades 5–12 performing together. Mr. Moore noted there was a new all-boys singing group spanning those grades, and that all students did a great job. Mr. Moore concluded that there is an upcoming winter sports' awards event and that Charlie Dalles and the team recently participated in a meet in Virginia, where they performed well. Mr. Moore noted that the original agenda suggested a break for Public Hearing, but due to the early time, the Board continued to item 10 with a staff report from Mrs. Neubig.

Staff Report

A. Director of Finance – Kim Neubig

Mrs. Neubig reported that as of the end of March, 70% of the budget has been expended, 99% of funds have been encumbered, and 73% of expected revenue has been received.

New Business

A. Vote on Teacher Non-Renewals

Mr. Brough discussed the annual teacher non-renewal process, which is a routine part of the budget process. State law requires that all non-tenured teachers be notified of possible non-renewal by May 1. This allows the district to make staffing adjustments, if necessary, while the budget is still being finalized. Mr. Brough noted that the district works collaboratively with the teachers' association during this process.

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to move the contracts for the employment of the following individuals: Erica Flanagan, Mia Mazzola, Mark Scianna, Christy Fournier, Angela Boudreau, Lauren Hall, Christina Prekulaj, Gloria McClure, Amanda Romano, Carly Elman, Shannon Vendetto, Christine Todd, Amanda Smith, Amy Dow, Martha Jennings, Emily Kyle, Alvin Lewis, Maygan Morello, Hannah Burkins, Heather Almodovar, Katherine Adamaitis, Sonia Charpentier, Joseph Scalia, Marco

Olmedo, Peter Finch, Polly Amygdalou, and Brianna Schock not to be renewed for the following year and the superintendent of schools is directed to advise each of the persons in writing of this action.

All in favor of acceptance of the motion to move the contracts for the employment of the named individuals not to be renewed for the following year as proposed and that the superintendent of schools is directed to advise each of the persons in writing of this action: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Konstantino, and Mrs. Caramanello. Motion passed.

B. Vote on Healthy Food Initiative and Food Exemptions

Mrs. Neubig reported that the district participates in the National School Lunch Program. Participation allows the district to receive federal reimbursements for free, reduced-price, and paid student lunches at different amounts. To remain eligible, the Board must annually certify that all foods sold to students comply with Connecticut Nutrition Standards. These standards regulate the types of food and beverages that can be sold to students in places such as school stores, vending machines, cafeterias, culinary programs, and school-sponsored fundraisers. Mrs. Neubig also stated there are food and beverage exemptions, which allow certain items to be sold outside the school day (such as at after-school events) under specific guidelines. Two motions are required: to participate in the Healthy Food Initiative and certify compliance with state nutrition standards for the 2026–2027 school year and to approve the allowed food and beverage exemptions.

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, for Regional School District 13 to participate in the Healthy Food Initiative and that pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Board of Education of Regional School District 13 certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups.

All in favor of the acceptance of Regional School District 13 to participate in the Healthy Food Initiative and the certification of compliance with state nutrition standards for the 2026–2027 school year from the Board of Education of Regional School District 13 as proposed: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Konstantino, and Mrs. Caramanello. Motion passed.

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, that the Board of Education of Regional School District 13 will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example,

soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales.

All in favor of accepting the allowed food and beverage exemptions as proposed: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Konstantino, and Mrs. Caramanello. Motion passed.

C. Discussion on Senior Class Gift

Dr. Leggett discussed a proposed senior class gift for Coginchaug Regional High School. The Class of 2025 would like to donate a new welcome sign for the front of the school. Because the current sign at the school entrance was also previously donated as a class gift, the Board needs to decide how to handle the new sign. Possible options include replacing the existing sign with the new one, moving the current sign to another location and installing the new sign at the main entrance, or installing the new sign at a different entrance to the campus and keeping both signs, potentially placing one near the main entrance and another elsewhere on campus. The donating class also indicated they would be willing to include a plaque or acknowledgement honoring the class of 1998 that donated the original sign if the existing sign were replaced.

Mrs. Petrella noted the beauty of the proposed sign, as well as the option to find a different place for the sign rather than replacing the current sign. Dr. Darcy suggested placing the new sign near the gymnasium entrance rather than replacing the existing 1998 sign. This location would allow the sign to serve its purpose of welcoming visiting teams and guests while preserving the historical significance of the original sign.

Mr. DelVecchio acknowledged the thought behind the gift, as well as questioned past senior class gifts, which have included items like a grill or benches. Mr. DelVecchio agreed that the sign should be on display in front of the school. Discussion was then brought for high school administrators to share their perspectives.

Mrs. Stone, CRHS Principal, recommended the grassy area in front of the gymnasium, which is part of the athletic complex driveway. This location sees daily traffic for drop-off/pick-up and sports events, so it would be highly visible to visiting teams and families. Another option is the grassy area closer to the main road and driveway, which could also provide a prominent and accessible location.

Mrs. Cowan and Dr. Darcy noted that placing the sign in a high-traffic, visually appealing area could create a new tradition, with students and visitors stopping to take photos during events like graduation or after school concerts.

Mr. Roraback raised practical concerns about the durability of the new senior class sign, noting that signs like this can deteriorate quickly due to UV light, rain, and snow, potentially affecting their appearance after a few years. Mr. Roraback stated that some Connecticut signs include protective canopies to extend longevity, though this might increase cost. Additionally, while the pillars of the sign are likely permanent, the sign panels themselves may require replacement or maintenance over time.

Board members discussed placing the sign near the gymnasium entrance on the grassy area near the gazebo extending out to the road, positioned sideways so it is visible to cars driving around the loop. No final decision was made. Mrs. Cowan suggested creating mock-ups of the sign in multiple locations, both near the loop and in front of the building, for the Board to review and approve later.

Committee Reports

A. Finance Committee Meeting - March 18, 2026

Mrs. Cowan provided an update on the Finance Committee meeting with the Boards of Finance from Middlefield and Durham on March 18. The meeting focused primarily on reviewing the budget. Mrs. Cowan reported that feedback from the towns' boards was limited, with only minor questions. Mr. Moore shared that auditorium upgrades are a priority, particularly following exterior improvements. Dr. Leggett shared the ADA report is prompting additional facility work, and this must be balanced with other building needs. Strategic planning and budget discussions highlighted a push for the auditorium, alongside other priorities such as tennis courts, HVAC improvements, and energy system upgrades (chillers, heat pumps, antifreeze changes). Dr. Leggett emphasized that feedback from the strategic plan emphasized the importance of balancing priorities across all areas that aren't solely athletics, including academic spaces, art spaces, and general building infrastructure while allocating funds.

B. School Naming Committee Meeting – March 25, 2026 and possible vote to accept the school name

Before Mrs. Cowan presented an update from the School Naming Committee, she read a statement on behalf of the Committee:

On behalf of the School Naming Committee, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the work that has been brought to us to tonight's decision. The Committee was formed with a clear charge: to thoughtfully consider and recommend a name for our new K to Five elementary school, one that reflects our district's values, history, and future. This was not a task we approached lightly. Over the course of our work, Committee members dedicated significant time to researching, discussing, and evaluating potential names, always with the best interest of our students and community at the forefront. We carefully considered a range of perspectives, including the importance of tradition, the opportunity to unify our district, and the desire to reflect the character of our region. The three names brought forward were Three Oaks Elementary School, Wadsworth Falls Elementary School, and Veterans Memorial Elementary School. Each represent [sic] those values in different but meaningful ways. We also want to acknowledge that this process has generated strong feelings within the community, and that is not surprising. School names carry history, identity, and pride. However, while we respect that passion, we also want to emphasize that the work of this Committee was conducted with professionalism, respect, and a genuine commitment to serving the entire community. Our members engaged in a thoughtful, sometimes difficult conversation, always grounded in mutual respect and a shared goal: to recommend a name that would serve our students for generations to come. We ask that as a community, we model for our students the very values we hope this school will represent: civility, respect, and unity, even when we may disagree. Tonight's vote represents the culmination of a thorough and deliberate process. Whatever the outcome,

the new school will belong to all of us and its success will be defined not just by its name, but by the community that stands behind it.

-Members of our School Naming Committee

Mrs. Cowan reported that there were 1,232 votes, with 1,153 from school students and staff. The winning name is Three Oaks Elementary School with 472 votes, followed by Wadsworth Falls (398) and Veterans Memorial (362).

Dr. Darcy asked about the symbolism of “Three Oaks”. Mr. Roraback reminded the Board that the name originated from a community member who submitted the suggestion anonymously on the survey. Mrs. Cowan shared that “Three Oaks” represents the coming together of three former elementary schools under one roof. Like a young tree, the new school symbolizes shared roots, growth, and strength as a unified community. Oak trees, native to Connecticut, symbolize strength, resilience, and wisdom, with the white oak being the official state tree of Connecticut.

Mr. Roraback and Mrs. Cowan thanked committee members, which included representatives from Middlefield and Durham and staff members from the schools. Mrs. Cowan noted that future efforts include naming key areas of the new school such as the library, gym, and cafetorium after the three original schools to honor their legacy. Existing memorabilia, such as plaques and the Mustang mosaic from Memorial School, may be preserved and incorporated into the new school.

Mrs. Petrella reviewed Emma Quick’s provided history of the naming of Memorial School, identifying that in July of 1954, the school was named in honor of nine Middlefield veterans: Ernest C. Bell, Clarence Coe, Stephen Mesick, and Otto N. Miller of World War I, and Anton F. Czapiga, Bernard L. Jagoda, Joseph J. Kokoszaka, Frank Konefal, and Stanley Kowalski of World War II. Mrs. Petrella stated that there is a cornerstone honoring these men.

Mrs. Petrella questioned why the school is being given a new name, since it is a renovation of an existing school, not an entirely new building. Most of the exterior will look the same except for an addition in the back. Additionally, Mrs. Petrella raised the concern about ensuring that the nine veterans honored at the school since 1954 continue to be recognized under the new school name.

Mrs. Cowan responded that the plaque honoring veterans currently outside the cafeteria will be retained and properly displayed in the renovated school. Options include relocating it to areas like the Memorial Gymnasium or another prominent space, ensuring the veterans’ recognition remains visible and honored.

Mrs. Cowan offered that there are reasons why the school and community will benefit from a new name, identifying that while the building is a renovation of the former school, it also represents the consolidation of three former elementary schools: John Lyman, Brewster, and Memorial. Each school had its own history and identity, and the new school aims to bring together students from both Middlefield and Durham under one unified program and culture. Mr. Roraback iterated that the naming and consolidation symbolizes a new beginning, establishing shared roots, continuity, and school spirit for all students. Dr. Darcy noted that combining the schools allows students to feel ownership and a sense of being “home team,” rather than visitors in a pre-existing school. Mrs. Cowan emphasized that no matter the name chosen, there would be some pushback, but the Committee’s recommendation represents a forward-

looking step for the district, while still planning to honor the history of the schools being consolidated. Mr. Roraback also addresses past practice, in which Lyman School was previously called Chestnut Hill Elementary School, indicating that new school names are not a new occurrence in the district.

Mrs. Cowan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, for the approval of Three Oaks Elementary School as the name of the new PreK-5 school.

All in favor of the acceptance of Three Oaks Elementary School as the name of the new PreK-5 school as proposed: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Konstantino, and Mrs. Caramanello. Motion passed.

Mr. Moore thanked the Committee members for their work, and Mrs. Cowan recognized not only the Committee Members, but especially the school staff members for their efforts.

Mr. Moore called for a brief recess before the Public Hearing on the Budget at 7:00 p.m.

Public Hearing on the Budget

Mr. Moore called the Public Hearing on the Budget to order at 7:00 P.M.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Dr. Darcy read the Return of the Call. Return is hereby made that the undersigned on the twentieth day of March twenty twenty-six cause to be posted on the public signpost in the towns of Durham and Middlefield a written warning by the Board of Education and on the twentieth day of March twenty twenty-six cause to be published in the Hartford Courant, a newspaper having a circulation in the towns of Durham and Middlefield, a like warning of the public hearing district meeting on the education budget to be held the first day of April 2026.

Dr. Darcy read Notice of Public Hearing. Notice is hereby given to the residents of the Towns of Durham and Middlefield, which are the member towns of Regional School District 13 of the State of Connecticut, that a Public Hearing/District Meeting will be held and conducted by the Regional School District 13 Board of Education on Wednesday, April 1, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School for the following purpose: To present and discuss the proposed budget for the next fiscal year, July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027. At such time any person may recommend the inclusion or deletion of any expenditure. Robert Moore, Chairman Regional School District 13 Board of Education State of Connecticut Dated in Durham, Connecticut this 6th day of March, 2026.

Mr. Moore presented an overview of the proposed budget. Mr. Moore presented that the gross budget of \$44,456,570 includes all district expenditures: salaries, benefits, transportation, and debt. This budget represents a 4.5% increase from this year. The net budget is \$43,081,128, which is the amount the towns actually pay to the school district after subtracting other revenues and resources, such as: fund balance from prior years, grants, or other external revenue sources. The net budget shows a 4.87% increase

because there's less fund balance available this year to offset costs, making the percentage increase slightly higher than the gross budget.

Mr. Konstantino reviewed the breakdown of the 4.50% budget increase, which includes salaries, benefits, operating services, debt service, and other items. The largest portion of this increase comes from salaries, which account for 2.44% of the total. Salaries are budgeted at 100%, with contractual obligations contributing an additional 1.15% increase. Benefits, primarily health insurance, account for a 0.38% increase. Operating services, which include tuition for magnet and special education programs, technology, copier, energy, bus, and truck leases, as well as various insurances and transportation costs for students, field trips, athletics, and out-of-district programs, contribute 1.04% to the increase. Debt service represents a 1.44% increase to cover the district's financial obligations. The "Other" category sees a decrease of 0.8%, reflecting reduced spending on facilities and grounds, supplies, capital, and dues and fees. The net budget increase is slightly higher than the gross increase due to a lower availability of fund balance to offset expenses this year. Memorial School funding continues, although it is reduced and focused solely on building maintenance and construction purposes.

Mr. Moore reviewed the detailed expenditures for the budget, which reflect several key areas. Salaries are now budgeted at 100%, compared to 98% in previous years when adjustments were made for staff attrition. This increase, combined with the new teacher contracts, has raised the salary budget by approximately \$1 million, or 4.34%. Benefits, which include health insurance, pension, unemployment compensation, and federal tax withholdings, have increased by \$159,561 from the prior year. Purchased services, covering legal and audit fees, technical supplies, occupational and physical therapy, and other related services, have increased by \$86,212. Facilities and grounds expenses, which include maintenance such as lawn care and snow plowing, are also part of the operating costs.

Operating services encompass leases, snow removal, waste disposal, water, transportation, insurances, and travel, all necessary for running the schools. Capital expenditures will be detailed in a separate report, while dues and fees cover participation in various organizations and supplies, including textbooks. The proposed 2026–27 budget represents a total increase of \$1,914,023, or 4.5%, compared with the current 2025–26 budget.

On the revenue side, sources include adult education fees, facility and ground rentals, interest income, in-house tuition, prepaid revenues, student activity fees, and special education excess funds, which are around \$700,000.00. Additional grants totaling about \$13,000.00 supplement the budget. Overall, total available revenue is modest but helps offset expenses.

Dr. Darcy discussed staffing changes that affect the budget, resulting in a net reduction of 3.4 FTE positions despite some additions. The proposed additions include a full-time library media specialist and a social worker position (potentially grant-funded) to address student mental health needs. Staff reductions include half a PE/health position, one first grade teaching position, one music position (without impacting performance groups), one speech pathologist, and a part-time administrative assistant to the athletic director. Dr. Darcy clarified that the director of teaching and learning position remains in the budget but has not been filled, with discussion focusing on whether to fill it for the upcoming year.

Mrs. Cowan presented changes in the budget over time. From 2015 through the proposed 2026-2027 budget, the district's expenditures show a notable trend. Between 2015 and 2022, there was an overall decrease in spending. Several factors contributed to this reduction, including the closure of Korn School and significant expense reductions during the COVID-19 years, when transportation and athletics costs were significantly reduced. These measures allowed the district to maintain flat budgets and even achieve decreases in certain years. Recent budget increases are largely attributable to salary and benefit growth, the removal of the previous vacancy factor, and higher outplacement costs for students. Even with reductions in staffing, these factors have driven an overall increase in the budget. Additionally, the district has been contributing to its capital reserve, which supports future projects such as a bleacher automation system and facility improvements like chiller pumps. Previously, as a regional school district, the budget for capital reserves was capped at 1% of the budget, but over the last few years, the legislative change allowed up to 2%. This is an important consideration for the public, as it affects how the district can plan for and fund long-term needs across the schools.

Mr. Moore reviewed the cost to towns. Recently, the district worked with the State Department of Education to implement a five-year averaging method for budgeting the towns' share of costs. Previously, the allocation was based solely on enrollment from October 1st of the previous year, which could cause significant swings from year to year, sometimes with no increase in one year and a million or two in the next, depending on just a few students. By averaging over five years, the district can smooth these fluctuations, giving towns a clearer and more predictable picture of their financial obligations. Under this method, last year's distribution was 65.57% to Durham and 34.43% to Middlefield. For the current year, it is slightly adjusted to 65.38% for Durham and 34.62% for Middlefield. The proportional expenses are therefore \$28,142,237.00 for Durham and \$14,901,869.00 for Middlefield. In addition, the district has estimated an ECS (Excess Cost Special Education) grant of \$3.2 million, though this could change depending on the state budget. Based on current estimates, the net cost to Durham is \$24,849,005 and to Middlefield is \$12,801,510, representing net increases of \$1,183,861 for Durham and \$752,683 for Middlefield.

When compared to other districts, RSD 13's proposed budget increase of 4.5% falls between the state average of 5.06% and the regional school average of 4.18%. For reference, a larger collection of comparable districts (DRG C) had an average increase of 4.95%, though the district no longer actively uses that grouping for comparisons.

Mr. Moore also reviewed debt service. The district is currently paying off \$6.9 million from the last bond issue, with payments scheduled to decrease by equal amounts each year. In terms of per-pupil expenditure, RSD 13's budget for 2026-27 is estimated to increase by about \$100 per student. For context, the state average per-pupil expenditure is \$24,251, while the regional school average is \$28,648. RSD 13's actual per-student spending last year was \$29,509. Mr. Moore noted that RSD 13, as a regional school district, has additional maintenance responsibilities compared to typical towns, including upkeep of roads and other shared facilities, which contributes to overall costs. Mr. Moore concluded the presentation by reminding the public that the next district meeting is scheduled for May 4th, with the referendum voting taking place on May 5th.

Eileen Buckheit, a member of the Board of Finance of Durham, explained that she was not speaking with an official position from the board, but shared general concerns about keeping the budget increase as low

as possible. Mrs. Buckheit noted that the town is currently facing financial challenges because many infrastructure costs have been postponed for years. Durham also does not issue bonds, which makes it more difficult to address large expenses. As a result, the town may need to use its undesignated fund balance again this year to help cushion the mill rate increase. If that happens, the fund balance would drop to about 15%, which is the minimum the town is willing to maintain. Mrs. Buckheit emphasized that this would likely be the last year the town could rely on that reserve to soften tax increases.

Mrs. Buckheit acknowledged that many school costs are not easily reduced but encouraged the district to focus on lowering the cost per pupil, which is currently higher than average. She expressed hope that school closures and restructuring would eventually help bring costs closer to the state average. As a possible cost-saving measure, Mrs. Buckheit suggested delaying the addition of a library media specialist for another year in order to keep the budget closer to a 4% increase instead of 4.5%.

Speaking also as a parent, Mrs. Buckheit stressed the importance of maintaining strong academic leadership, particularly at the high school level. She noted that the high school serves as the district's flagship and plays a key role in preparing students for college, trades, or careers. Mrs. Buckheit argued that the district should prioritize having a director of curriculum to guide academic programs and support high-achieving students, noting that some strong students have chosen to leave the district in recent years.

Lastly, Mrs. Buckheit raised concerns about the culture and atmosphere at the high school. Mrs. Buckheit urged the district to refocus on supporting the "whole child" and ensuring that staff are approachable and supportive of students across the school community. Mrs. Buckheit concluded by noting that this would likely be her last budget hearing as a parent and wanted to share these final concerns and recommendations.

Jim Irish, a resident from Middlefield, asked what changes the Board of Education made to the budget between the superintendent's initial proposal and the version being presented at the meeting.

In response, Mrs. Neubig explained that the original proposal from the superintendent included a higher projected increase for health insurance costs. That estimate was later reduced and presented to the Board of Education in a budget workshop. Aside from that adjustment, the Board made only one notable change: they added back a 0.6 FTE social worker position that had previously been scheduled for reduction. The position is currently funded through a grant, and the board strongly supported maintaining it because of the importance of student mental health services. The hope is that the position will continue to be funded through grant support.

Carol Kleeman raised a concern about transportation and bus usage in the district. She noted that during school drop-off times at both the elementary school and Strong Middle School, there are long lines of parents driving their children to school, with traffic extending onto Main Street in Durham, which is a state highway, and onto nearby secondary roads. Because of the large number of parents dropping off students by car, she asked whether the district has reviewed bus scheduling and routes to determine if they could be reduced or adjusted due to the apparent decline in students riding the buses.

In response to Mrs. Kleeman's question about bus scheduling and whether routes could be reduced due to the number of parents driving students to school, Mrs. Neubig explained that bus routes have been

reviewed very closely over the past two years, especially because of the school reorganization and swing space. Most buses are actually full and that ride times are already significant, with the district aiming to keep trips around 45 minutes or less when possible.

Mrs. Neubig also noted that the district is required to provide a bus stop for any family that requests one. Each year, usually in June, parents are asked whether they want a bus stop and whether there are alternate arrangements such as daycare locations. Many families choose to keep their bus stop option even if they do not regularly use it, which means the district must continue to include those stops in planning.

Additionally, Mr. Moore noted that transportation schedules were adjusted this year so that Strong Middle School no longer shares the same bus tier as the high school. Previously, buses served both schools at the same time, but now the routes are staggered. As a result, it may appear that there are more buses because one group of buses arrives at Coginchaug High School and then another set arrives about 45 minutes later at Strong. Mr. Moore also acknowledged that many families still prefer to drop off their children by car, which contributes to the heavy traffic during morning arrival times.

Mrs. Buckheit also spoke in support of investing in the district's music program and auditorium facilities. She noted that after a previous subcommittee meeting, some parents had looked at the auditorium equipment, including the sound system and control boards, and felt that upgrades were needed. While she acknowledged that the district has been planning and setting aside reserve funds for athletic facilities such as turf fields, she encouraged the board to similarly prioritize improvements for the music program and performing arts spaces.

Mrs. Moore responded that they would look into the costs associated with upgrading the equipment. Mrs. Neubig explained that the sound system itself is relatively new, but the lighting control board has failed and replacing it could cost around \$30,000.00. Additional improvements, such as replacing auditorium seating and other upgrades, were also mentioned as potential future needs. Mr. Moore noted that an ADA accessibility report had identified additional work that must eventually be done in the auditorium to meet accessibility requirements. However, these improvements would likely be part of a longer-term and more expensive project.

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to adjourn the Public Hearing.

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

Mr. Moore called for a return to the Board of Education Meeting.

2026-2027 Budget

A. Discussion on Public Hearing/District Meeting

Mr. Roraback addressed rumors that the district was encouraging parents to drive their children to school instead of using buses. He clarified that this is not true, emphasizing that every student has the right to transportation and that the district does not discourage bus use. Mr. Roraback expressed concern that such

rumors were circulating and wanted to make it clear that the district remains committed to providing transportation for all students.

Mr. Moore also noted that once school reorganization is fully implemented, transportation may become more efficient because routes will be simpler, with clearer tiers for elementary, middle, and high school students, which could lead to fuller buses.

Mr. Roraback referenced the renovation project on Hubbard Street, noting that the new design includes a long entryway behind the school intended to improve bus circulation and student drop-off. This design is expected to help reduce traffic congestion on nearby roads during arrival and dismissal times.

Mr. Simmons reflected how cost per pupil comparisons are made between RSD 13, the state average, and other districts. He suggested that because regional school districts like RSD 13 must provide additional services, such as maintaining roads, facilities, and other shared responsibilities, the district might consider adjusting its comparisons by removing those costs when analyzing per-pupil spending. This would allow for a more accurate comparison with the state average or other public-school districts. Mrs. Neubig responded that this type of adjusted comparison had been done in the past and agreed it would be useful to provide again in the future.

Dr. Darcy also commented on the per-pupil cost increase, noting that it is projected to rise by an estimated \$90 per student, which she described as impressive given current economic pressures. Dr. Darcy acknowledged that community members often expect budgets to decrease as enrollment declines, but emphasized that the district has already been making adjustments.

Mr. Roraback also touched on the growing number of state mandates placed on school districts, noting that these requirements often require additional services without providing additional funding from the state, placing extra pressure on local budgets. Dr. Leggett mentioned receiving a list of education-related state mandates alone that totaled about 60 pages, highlighting the scope of required obligations.

Dr. Darcy also praised school administrators for careful budgeting, particularly in reviewing supply lines and identifying about \$106,000.00 in reductions, which required a very detailed review of spending at the school level. School administrators were praised for their budget reviews.

Mr. Moore commented that over the past 10 years, student enrollment has dropped by about 28%, while staffing has been reduced by roughly 14%, showing that the district has gradually reduced staff while still maintaining academic programs.

The discussion continued to address budget priorities. Mrs. Caramanello agreed with earlier comments from community members that the district should prioritize essential needs over new initiatives this year. Specifically, Mrs. Caramanello suggested that hiring a library media specialist might be postponed so that the overall budget increase could potentially fall below 4%, emphasizing that the current year may require extra caution when considering new expenditures.

Mrs. Cowan questioned how the district would address declining enrollment, specifically students leaving the district before high school. Dr. Leggett explained that while about 20 students may initially leave, roughly 10% of them return the following year, and additional students also move into the district, often

balancing enrollment numbers. To better understand families' decisions, the district plans to survey parents of sixth and seventh grade students about their high school plans. The district is also working to redesign high school open house events to highlight programs such as robotics and other opportunities in order to attract and retain students. Dr. Leggett also reported that as of now, there are only 6 students who will not attend the high school, though this number will fluctuate. Mr. Roraback also commented that students today have many more high school options than in the past, making the process more competitive and requiring the district to actively promote its programs while maintaining a strong sense of school community. Dr. Leggett will continue to investigate and report back to the Board with her findings. Mrs. Cowan emphasized the importance of maintaining and strengthening the school community. Mr. Roraback expressed hope that the new school model, where students begin together earlier, will help build a stronger shared culture and encourage students to stay in the district.

B. Finalize Budget and Vote for Annual Meeting followed by Referendum

Mrs. Caramanello favored the 3.74% budget increase, which eliminated the proposed library media specialist position and the additional curriculum position, leaving one director of curriculum.

Mrs. Petrella believes that it is not the right time to cut a second curriculum position, noting the importance of having two strong curriculum leaders, especially with a new superintendent. Regarding the library media specialist, Mrs. Neubig clarified that with the library position removed, the budget increase would actually be 4.16%.

Mrs. Cowan agreed with Mrs. Petrella, strongly supporting that the additional curriculum position remain in the budget, noting it is an investment in both students and staff.

Mr. Moore reflected on the historical impact of curriculum leadership and support. Before COVID, strengthening curriculum leadership and adding coaches boosted student achievement significantly, particularly in math. Post-COVID, scores dropped, and recovery has been slow. Cutting curriculum leadership now could stall progress. Mrs. Cowan also stressed urgency: rather than cutting, the district needs to accelerate improvements.

Mrs. Caramanello noted that the district did lose a Curriculum Director. However, Dr. Leggett clarified Dr. Siegel has directed curriculum this year with a contract for support from ACES, and there were two positions last year and the year before. Board members noted that there was a change in direction, but the district has continued in its curriculum work and made adjustments where necessary.

Mr. DelVecchio questioned how teachers felt about the additional curriculum position. Dr. Leggett responded that the majority would like the second position. Mrs. Cowan commented that she has observed that staff are described as excited and welcoming of the extra help this position could offer. Mrs. Caramanello agreed with the need for strong curriculum leadership, but raised caution about budget constraints, questioning whether a second curriculum position is necessary at this time given the present fiscal pressures.

Mr. Moore strongly supports keeping the library media specialist in the budget. Mr. Moore reflects that this role brings energy, leadership, and expertise that will help students adapt to new challenges like AI, while supporting staff through ongoing change. It's a strategic investment in the future of both the students and curriculum.

Dr. Darcy supports leaving the decision in the hands of the townspeople, reflecting that the Board has thoroughly discussed and debated the budget, and it's now up to the community to vote on the budget and guide the next steps. Mr. Konstantino, and other members, agree with Dr. Darcy, believing that there are clear reduction choices if the people vote against the budget.

Mr. Moore believes the community will support the budget, understanding the importance of the school and how reduction in staff is not a benefit to the community.

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Konstantino, to go to a district meeting on May 4, 2026, followed by a referendum on May 5, 2026, with the 2026-2027 Regional School District 13 gross education budget of \$44,456,570.

All in favor of accepting the motion of going to a district meeting on May 4, 2026 followed by a referendum on May 5, 2026, with the 2026-2027 Regional School District 13 gross education budget of \$44,456,570 as proposed: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, and Mr. Konstantino. Mrs. Caramanello opposed the motion. Motion passed by majority vote.

Board Communications and Professional Development

Mr. Moore reviewed that the Board has received communication regarding the tennis courts, in addition to a complaint to the Freedom of Information Commission by Rhonda Riggott-Stevens.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Discussion regarding confidential attorney-client privileged communication regarding joint representation for real property matter (proposed for executive session)

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, for the Board to invite Dr. Leggett into executive session regarding confidential attorney-client privileged communication regarding joint representation for real property matter.

All in favor of the Board inviting Dr. Leggett into executive session regarding confidential attorney-client privileged communication regarding joint representation for real property matter as proposed: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, and Mr. Konstantino and Mrs. Caramanello. Motion passed.

At timestamp 8:04 PM, the Board and Dr. Leggett returned from Executive Session

Adjournment

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, to adjourn the meeting.

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

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio