

**Regional School District 13**

**Board of Education**

**May 13, 2026**

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

Board of Education Members Present: Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mrs. Caramanello (arrived at 6:15), and Mr. Konstantino (attended virtually)

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

Administration Present: Dr. Leggett, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance  
STV: Ms. Cahill (attended virtually)

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 noted that the Board will need an executive session at the end of this meeting for a confidential student matter.

*Linda Darcy made a motion, seconded by Christine Cowan, to approve the agenda as amended.*

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

**Presentation**

**A. CRHS Student Presentation – Kaelyn Connell Capstone Overview**

Debra Stone, Principal of Coginchaug Regional High School, introduced Kaelyn Connell to present her Capstone project for the Board. Kaelyn explored the question of how to pursue a career in military medicine by combining interests in healthcare and the military. To answer this, she completed four major experiences: a professional interview, earning a national Army ROTC scholarship, becoming a certified EMT, and gaining hospital shadowing experience. In Kaelyn's interview with Dr. Bokhari of Yale, she learned that the core purpose of medicine is serving humanity. Dr. Bokhari also shared insights about radiology being a highly accountable field and explained that AI is helping with routine tasks, allowing doctors to focus on more complex work. Kaelyn earned a four-year Army ROTC scholarship after shadowing programs at UConn and UNC Chapel Hill, where she ultimately committed. Through these visits, she experienced military training exercises and learned about leadership opportunities like Ranger Challenge. Kaelyn became a nationally registered EMT, gaining hands-on experience through coursework, patient interactions, and emergency response training. This included learning to take vital signs, track patient conditions, and pass both practical and national exams. Finally, Kaelyn completed hospital shadowing at Middlesex Hospital, where she observed real-world medical procedures, learned about hospital operations, and explored different units, including the psychiatric ward. She also participated in a STEM workshop where she practiced orthopedic procedures and suturing techniques.

Kaelyn explained how she found and secured her capstone opportunities, emphasizing that many came through school programs and teacher support. Opportunities like the EMT course and other experiences were shared through classes such as a class with Mr. Thompson, where postings and announcements

helped students learn what was available. Kaelyn reflected that making connections was a key part of the process. The hospital shadowing experience was the most difficult to obtain, but Mr. Thompson played a major role by reaching out to Middlesex Hospital for over a year before successfully arranging limited student placements. Similarly, Mr. Brown helped connect Kaelyn to the EMT program and ride-along experience.

After her presentation, Kaelyn highlighted the importance of the initiative, actively pursuing opportunities and relying on teacher mentorship and established connections. Kaelyn reflected positively on her experiences, confirming that nothing discouraged her from pursuing medicine. In fact, she enjoyed every part, even though the pace of real-world emergency work was slower than expected, with many routine cases. Overall, the experience reinforced her interest and enthusiasm for a future in medicine and the military.

Kaelyn's presentation concluded with brief remarks about her upcoming start at UNC Chapel Hill, including a shorter-than-expected summer before reporting on August 10. Dr. Darcy thanked Kaelyn for her future service, and Dr. Leggett shared a personal connection to University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, noting her son currently attends and has enjoyed his experience.

Mr. Moore emphasized that the capstone project is a requirement for all high school students and represents a significant commitment, often involving at least two years of work. Students put in a great deal of effort, and many change their direction or focus partway through the process. Mr. Moore specifically praised the student for staying committed to her chosen path, noting that deciding to pursue both military service and a medical career at such a young age is a difficult and meaningful decision. Mr. Moore also noted that he has seen a shift in capstone projects, where students have recently become more invested in pursuing public service.

Mrs. Petrella shared that the most exciting part of watching the capstone presentations was seeing how students developed deeper insights into their interests. Through the process, students refined their goals, sometimes confirming what they liked, adjusting how they wanted to pursue it, identifying areas for improvement in a field, or even realizing a path wasn't right for them.

Mrs. Cowan praised Dr. Bokhari's reflection on medicine as a humane, service-driven field. She shared her own experience working in healthcare administration, focusing on community health and programs that support underserved populations, including military families. Mrs. Cowan highlighted that there are many lesser-known career paths, like community health centers and military support programs, that align with the same mission of service. Mrs. Cowan emphasized that this area is growing in popularity and presents a meaningful alternative or complement to traditional clinical roles in medicine. The Board thanked Kaelyn for her presentation and her work.

**B. CAFE Student Leadership Award Recipients – Addisen Buckheit, Charles Dalles, Leah Ozycz and Gino Tammaro**

Mr. Moore introduced the presentation of CAFE Student Leadership Awards. Debra Stone, Principal of Coginchaug Regional High School, introduced Addison ("Addie") Buckheit as an outstanding student and natural leader who consistently demonstrates enthusiasm, positivity, and purpose across academics, the arts, and leadership roles. Academically, she has challenged herself with a rigorous course load, including honors, UConn ECE, and AP classes, earning a 4.12 GPA and induction into both the National Honor Society and Spanish Honor Society. She's also a visible presence in the school, delivering daily announcements with confidence. In the arts, Addie is deeply involved in music and theater as a vocalist, instrumentalist, and actress. She has participated in multiple choirs and bands, earned lead roles in musicals, captains the show choir, and received recognition such as selection to the Shoreline Choir and

CMEA Southern Regional Choir. As a leader, she has served as class president all four years and holds multiple roles, including NHS Secretary, Student Government Senator, Eagle Club President, and educator ambassador. Beyond school, she is active in Girl Scouts, leading a community project to build a “Kindness Coalition” in partnership with local organizations to promote a culture of kindness.

Mr. Moore asked Addisen about the end of the year. Addie shared that things have slowed down toward the end of the school year, though she is currently busy planning prom as part of her role as class president. She noted that once the decorating and preparations are finished, she’s looking forward to enjoying the event. She also confirmed her future plans, stating that she will attend Trinity College and major in political science. The Board congratulated Addie and thanked her for her work.

Mrs. Stone introduced Charles Dalles as an exceptional student-athlete known for strong character, leadership, and academic excellence. He has completed a rigorous course load including honors, UConn ECE, and AP classes, earning a 4.1 GPA and induction into the National Honor Society. Athletically, he has competed in cross-country, indoor track, and outdoor track since freshman year and serves as captain of all three teams. He has earned multiple honors, including MVP, all-conference, all-state, all-New England, and all-American recognition, and recently placed second in the 400 meters at a national-level competition.

Beyond competition, Charlie mentors younger runners through a local youth program and contributes to community sports initiatives. He also has experience in skiing and volleyball coaching, where he helped design training and support athletes.

Mr. Moore noted that Charlie is also involved in school operations such as serving on the building committee. His future plans include attending the University of Rhode Island Ocean Engineering Program. The remarks concluded with memories of Charles from earlier school years and thanks and praise for his work and leadership.

Leah Ozycz, an eighth-grade student, was recognized as a strong student leader known for collaboration, maturity, and consistent reliability. Teachers described her as someone who approaches challenges with focus and supports the success of others, not just her own academic growth. In athletics, Leah was highlighted for her poise and leadership on the girls’ basketball team, where teammates relied on her steady presence and decision-making under pressure. This same dependability carried into the classroom, where she is seen as a supportive peer and consistent contributor. Her participation in softball further demonstrated her willingness to take on challenges and work in team environments. Overall, Leah was described as a quiet but strong leader whose actions positively influence those around her.

After the recognition, there was a brief conversation acknowledging Leah’s readiness for high school, her involvement in basketball and softball, and praise for her leadership style. Mrs. Cowan emphasized that her impact is clearly recognized and valued, as she has witnessed Leah’s talents and leadership in basketball. The Board congratulated Leah for her excellence.

Gino Tamaro, an eighth-grade student, was recognized as a kind, respectful, and consistently positive individual who earns the trust of both teachers and classmates. He is described as warm, approachable, and always willing to uplift those around him. In robotics, he plays a key leadership role by mentoring newer team members and supporting the group’s long-term success. Teachers noted that he leads by example, helping others rather than simply directing them, and consistently puts the needs of the team first. In the classroom, Gino is known for integrity and reliability, following through on commitments and frequently helping peers stay on track by offering support and answering questions. He also joined the cross-country team, showing a willingness to try new challenges outside his comfort zone.

The recognition concluded with light conversation about Gino’s readiness to leave middle school and the Board recognizing him for his excellence.

### C. CAPSS Superintendent Student Award Recipients – Spencer Babbitt and Jenny Zaelli

Mrs. Stone presented Spencer Babbitt as a CAPSS Superintendent Award recipient. Spencer was recognized as an outstanding student with strong academics, character, perseverance, and consistent involvement in both school and community life. He has taken a rigorous schedule of honors, UConn ECE, and AP courses, earning a 4.16 GPA and receiving multiple academic honors, including induction into the National Honor Society and Spanish Honor Society. He also served as treasurer of NHS and received the Xerox Innovation Award for leadership and integrity. Beyond academics, Spencer is highly active in the arts and extracurriculars. He is a musician who performs in concert band, pep band, jazz band, jazz combo, and orchestra, and he earned the Esprit de Corps award. In his senior year, he also expanded into theater by playing King Triton in *The Little Mermaid*. He has been involved in robotics since freshman year, contributes to track and field (including throwing events), and has meaningful service experience as a camp counselor at a camp supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities, earning an Outstanding Volunteer Award. He is also active in Boy Scouts and other community service efforts.

Spencer plans to attend Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Mechanical Engineering Program to study mechanical engineering. Mrs. Cowan also included appreciative remarks about his volunteer work at Camp Nerdin, highlighting its importance to the community. Discussion concluded with Spencer's interest about his role in the school musical and his decision to try something new in his senior year. Jenny Zaelli was also recognized as the CAPSS award winner for her exceptional academic achievement, leadership, and resilience. She is described as a highly driven and conscientious student who has completed nine college-level courses while maintaining an outstanding 4.47 GPA. Her academic excellence has earned her multiple honors, including the Yale Book Award, AP Language and Composition Award, and an award from the Rochester Institute of Technology in Humanities and Social Sciences. She has actively explored medicine through programs such as UConn workshops, neuroscience events, and shadowing experiences, with an interest in becoming an anesthesiologist. Despite a demanding schedule, she has remained focused and motivated by curiosity and a strong commitment to learning. Jenny's resilience was emphasized as a defining trait, as she has navigated significant family and personal health challenges while continuing to excel academically. She is also a first-generation college student and holds several leadership roles, including NHS president, student council vice president, and varsity team captain.

Jenny was recognized for her musical talents in her performance in the school's musical. Jenny plans to attend University of Connecticut on a pre-med biology track, while also awaiting decisions from other colleges.

### D. Valedictorian – Kaelyn Connell and Salutatorian – Thomas Wickwire

Mrs. Stone recognized the Salutatorian Thomas Wickwire. Tommy was recognized as one of the top students in the graduating class, distinguished by exceptional academics, leadership, and character. He completed 10 college-level courses and earned a 4.54 GPA, with particular strength in math and science. His academic achievements include the Rensselaer Medal, the RIT Science and Math Award, and the Harvard Book Award. He holds leadership roles as vice president of both the National Honor Society and French Honor Society and was selected for the Shoreline Athletic Leadership Council. He is also a four-year varsity soccer player and two-year captain, serving as a goalkeeper. Beyond school athletics, he mentors younger athletes as a volunteer and paid goalkeeper coach. His ability to balance rigorous academics, leadership, and athletics was highlighted as a defining strength. He was recognized as the salutatorian and has committed to play soccer at Nichols College while continuing his studies there. Kaelyn Connell, Valedictorian, was recognized as an exceptional student with outstanding academic achievement, character, and leadership. She earned a 4.6 GPA while completing a very rigorous course

load, including AP and UConn ECE classes, and is a member of both the French National Honor Society and National Honor Society. She also earned EMT certification. She is a three-season athlete, competing in soccer, indoor track, and outdoor track, and served as captain of the soccer team. She is described as a strong leader who ensures teammates feel included and supported. In addition to athletics, she gives back as an assistant coach for a local soccer program and has been active in student leadership and community volunteer work. She has also been involved in theater and performed in *The Little Mermaid*. She plans to study science, participate in ROTC, and pursue a career as a medical officer through military service. She is the recipient of an ROTC scholarship and was recognized as a CIEC Scholar-Athlete for both academic and athletic excellence.

Kaelyn concluded with remarks about her strong friendships and reflections on how far she and her peers have come together since early schooling, expressing pride in their shared growth and community. The Board commended Kaelyn for her achievements.

Mr. Moore called for a 5-minute break before the meeting resumed.

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order and presented the opportunity for Public Comment.

### **Public Comment**

Lori Helmedach, a Middlefield resident, presented a petition with her estimate of 475 signatures opposing the renaming of the school and requested that it be formally included in the Board of Education minutes. Ms. Helmedach resented the petition at the School Naming Committee meeting. She urged the board not to ignore the petition and asked for it to be acted upon, emphasizing that those who signed deserve a response. Ms. Helmedach also encouraged the board to share more information publicly and take advantage of communication opportunities offered by the Town of Middlefield, such as the town newsletter.

In response, she was told that the petition and related concerns would be addressed during upcoming board discussions.

Anne Malcolm of Middlefield, a graduate of the first class of Coginchaug, spoke about the proposed school renaming. She shared her strong personal and family ties to the school system and community, including connections to veterans and healthcare service. She urged the Board of Education to carefully reconsider the renaming decision and emphasized the importance of preserving historical memory. Ms. Malcolm referenced the original 1953 vote naming the school and suggested that, rather than removing historical names, the community should consider expanding recognition, potentially to include a broader “Veterans Memorial” designation honoring veterans from Durham and Middlefield across past, present, and future generations.

Ms. Malcolm encouraged transparency, public communication, and respect for the school’s history and namesakes, while acknowledging appreciation for the board’s and teachers’ work.

Public Comment concluded with one participant adding that one referendum is cheaper than two on the register.

### **Approval of Minutes**

A. Board of Education Meeting - April 22, 2026

*Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, to approve the April 22, 2026 Meeting Minutes as presented.*

*All in favor of approving the April 22, 2026 Meeting Minutes as presented: Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mrs. Caramanello, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.*

### **Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Leggett provided updates ahead of the upcoming Student Achievement Committee meeting, noting it will be longer than usual due to expanded spring topics. A major focus is the district's ongoing work on artificial intelligence in education. After studying AI throughout the year, the district is beginning to integrate tools such as Gemini and NotebookLM within a secure Google-based environment, particularly through Google Classroom, prioritizing student data safety. The district is also emphasizing restorative practices centered on respect and shifting from individual ("me") to collective ("we") responsibility. As part of this, monthly recognition awards will now highlight teams rather than individuals. Additional initiatives include Mental Health Awareness Month, Staff Appreciation Week, and recognition of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Plans were also announced for a new digital wellness team for next year, focused on AI in learning, screen time, and social media use, funded through an existing stipend allocation. Dr. Leggett discussed upcoming district events which include a groundbreaking ceremony on the 20th at 4 p.m., with logistical notes about a building committee meeting being held on-site afterward. Finally, there were updates from a recent Middlefield meeting, including the appointment of a new board member and one remaining vacant seat.

Mr. Simmons emphasized the importance of ensuring strong oversight and collaboration from the technology team, especially Ken Pietrasko, Director, in all decisions involving new AI tools. Dr. Leggett assured that IT is involved with training and AI implementation. Additionally, Dr. Darcy referenced participation in an AI consortium through ACES, which brings together educators, administrators, and technology experts to collaboratively guide responsible AI integration in schools.

Additional updates included mention of a recent "screen-free week," where teachers explored non-digital learning activities and resources were shared with families to support reduced screen use at home. Dr. Leggett introduced Ms. Cahill to provide a construction update. Ms. Cahill noted that major demolition work has been completed, including rooftop equipment removal, with remaining smaller demolition tasks still underway and on schedule. The project is currently in the scope review phase for major trades, about halfway through, and letters of intent have been issued to mechanical, electrical, and plumbing subcontractors to keep the timeline on track. Hazardous material abatement is also ongoing in designated areas such as pipe tunnels. Bid reviews are in progress for additional contracts, including independent stormwater monitoring. Overall, the project remains active with multiple workstreams moving forward.

Mr. Moore questioned if the project was within the budget and Ms. Cahill confirmed the project is within the budget. Mrs. Cowan questioned if language could reflect that the project is "currently on budget," to clearly communicate this status to the public to address concerns or misinformation. Mr. Simmons asked if this language could be incorporated into the construction schedule as well. It was also suggested that this information be shared through channels such as the Middlefield newsletter for better public transparency. Dr. Leggett shared that an upcoming newsletter (scheduled for the 15th) will include notice regarding the construction project with a QR code directing readers to a more detailed update page on the district website due to limited space. Dr. Leggett noted that the project can be clearly described as "on schedule and on budget," and emphasized that the district is legally required to stay within its approved

budget. If costs become an issue, adjustments or reductions would need to be considered, since spending beyond the allocated amount is not permitted.

### **Chairman Update**

Mr. Moore described a large-scale mock accident exercise conducted through the school's EMT and fire science programs, featuring a simulated crash with multiple injuries and a staged fatality. The drill was designed as a hands-on learning experience for students, particularly those in EMT and fire science courses, and was adjusted to occur earlier than planned due to weather concerns. The exercise involved collaboration with the Durham-Middlefield Fire Department, local emergency responders, Middlesex Hospital, State Police, and LifeStar. Students participated directly in patient care, vehicle extrication practice, and emergency response procedures, including cutting apart a vehicle as part of training. There was an emphasis on the value of real-world, interactive training in preparing students for emergency situations and it was noted that such simulations help reinforce the importance of safe decision-making, especially ahead of prom season when accident risks are higher. Strong community and institutional support for the program was highlighted, including school administration and emergency services, and there was expressed appreciation for the success of the event. Lastly, Mr. Moore shared musical events in the district, including a concert last week and upcoming jazz concert.

### **Staff Report**

#### **A. Director of Finance – Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig provided a financial report for the end of April, noting that 77% of the budget has been spent year-to-date, 99% encumbered and 82% of projected revenue has been received. The district is currently focused on closing out the fiscal year by finalizing and limiting new purchase orders in order to determine the final year-end position. Mrs. Neubig explained that purchase orders typically are not carried over into the new fiscal year and will be closed out at year end.

Mr. Simmons questioned whether the 77% of the budget expended aligns with the portion of the fiscal year completed. Mrs. Neubig acknowledged that this is a reasonable comparison, though not always tracked that way. Mrs. Neubig noted that the district is on track, with about 99% of funds encumbered. However, there is uncertainty around revenue, particularly from the special education excess cost grant, which comes in lower than projected. She expects overall revenue to reach the mid to high 90% range. Mrs. Neubig also explained that any shortfall in revenue must be offset by expenditures, making year-end financial planning a careful balancing process to ensure the budget remains stable through the fiscal close.

### **New Business - Discussions and Possible Votes**

#### **A. Vote to Approve the Award of RFQ/P 2026-002 Stormwater Monitoring for the Regional School District 13 School State Project #213-0051 RNV/EA to Weston and Sampson for the Base Bid Not to Exceed \$27,600.00**

*Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the Award of RFQ/P 2026-002 Stormwater Monitoring for the Regional School District 13 School State Project #213-0051 RNV/EA to Weston and Sampson for the Base Bid Not to Exceed \$27,600.00 as presented.*

Mrs. Neubig reported on the stormwater monitoring contract bids, which were reviewed and vetted by the project architects, O&G and STV. The building committee also participated in reviewing the scope and ultimately approved the recommendation to move the contract forward to the Board. The stormwater

monitoring work will involve tracking runoff from the construction site, beginning with establishing required baseline environmental measurements and completing other early-stage compliance tasks.

*All in favor of approving the Award of RFQ/P 2026-002 Stormwater Monitoring for the Regional School District 13 School State Project #213-0051 RNV/EA to Weston and Sampson for the Base Bid Not to Exceed \$27,600.00 as presented: Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mrs. Caramanello, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.*

#### B. Update on Additional Revenue from the State

Dr. Leggett explained that additional state funding was received at the last minute in the form of a Supplemental and Temporary Aid Grant totaling \$215,744.00 across both towns. This funding is treated as a one-time grant and is not part of the regular ECS education funding formula. Mrs. Neubig noted it does not reduce the official gross budget or count toward the next year's Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR), meaning it cannot be relied on for future planning. While it is considered non-recurring revenue and not something to build into future budgets, it does provide a helpful short-term offset and benefits taxpayers by reducing net expenditures for the current year.

Mr. Moore also discussed state reimbursement for the school construction project. Mrs. Neubig clarified that it is separate from the annual operating budget. The district recently received an increased state reimbursement rate for the school construction project, rising by 15 percentage points from 53% to 68%. This increase represents roughly \$10–11 million in additional state support, significantly reducing the local share of construction costs providing substantial financial relief.

Mrs. Neubig noted that while one bonding effort has already been completed, there may still be a need for a smaller additional bond in the future. Mr. Roraback also explained that the state's broader policy goal is to encourage districts to evaluate building usage and consider consolidation where appropriate, reflecting a statewide trend toward efficiency in school facilities.

#### C. Discuss and Vote on Revisions to the District's 2026-2027 Fiscal Year Budget

Dr. Leggett reviewed recent budget adjustments discussed at a special meeting, focusing on reducing the proposed budget increase to under 4%, a target that was important to the community. To achieve this, the district proposed eliminating a vacant 1.0 library media specialist position and making additional smaller reductions across multiple budget lines, totaling about \$94,000.00. These adjustments reduced the overall budget increase from 4.5% down to 3.94%. With these changes, plus previously mentioned state funding, the net budget increase is now 3.77%. Dr. Leggett noted that a fact sheet will be prepared for the public explaining the adjustments. Dr. Leggett also shared that both towns preferred scheduling the annual meeting for June 1, followed by a referendum vote on June 2.

The revised gross budget total was reported as \$44,218,342 and the revised net budget was reported as \$44,627,156. Dr. Darcy questioned whether towns vote on the net or gross budget. Additionally, Mr. Simmons questioned if both towns have to pass the budget or if it's based on a numerical majority. Dr. Leggett clarified that the towns vote on the gross budget and the outcome is determined by numerical majority; the budget does not need to pass in each town. Both towns must vote on the budget again, even though it previously passed in one town and failed in the other. Dr. Leggett emphasized that there is confusion in the community about whether only one town needs to vote, and stressed that the final budget decision requires approval from both towns. Mrs. Cowan also commended the leadership team to make budget revisions without touching capital.

*Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, to approve the revised District's 2026-2027 Fiscal Year Budget as presented.*

Dr. Leggett reviewed the specific line-item reductions used to achieve the \$94,000.00 budget adjustment.

<b>Department / Area</b>	<b>Reduction Amount</b>	<b>Notes</b>
IT – Cybersecurity	\$4,500.00	Software
IT – Print Management	\$4,500.00	Efficiency adjustment
Administration – Unemployment Compensation	\$5,000.00	Benefits adjustment
Administration – Office Supplies	\$5,000.00	Supply reduction
Administration – Strategic Planning	\$10,000.00	Initial planning phase reduced
Administration – Legal	\$20,000.00	Reduced legal contingency
Administration – Travel	\$5,000.00	Admin travel cost reduction
Administration – Lease/Operating Services	\$10,000.00	Service contract reduction
Curriculum / Instructional Support	\$30,000.00	Reduced outside consultants; offset by internal staff
<b>TOTAL REDUCTIONS \$94,000.00</b>		

Dr. Leggett emphasized that several reductions are operational efficiencies or timing adjustments rather than service cuts, such as reallocating cybersecurity coverage within existing contracts and relying more on internal staff instead of external consultants.

Mr. Moore raised a question about increased tuition costs, which was confirmed as an actual rise driven by current outplacement students and additional placements at MTA. This increase totaled approximately \$387,000.00 and was identified as a significant budget pressure point.

Mr. Roraback appreciated the budget reductions' minimal impact to students and families. Additionally, Mr. Simmons questioned the lease reduction cost. Mrs. Neubig clarified that the reduction was made in special education/student services by decreasing the lease allocation for FM (audiological) systems, which were not currently needed based on student use; this adjustment was made with consideration of

actual usage rather than anticipated need. Leadership was thanked for their work in identifying budget reductions that have minimal impact to students.

*All in favor of approving the revised District's 2026-2027 Fiscal Year Budget as presented: Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Mrs. Caramanello opposed the approval of the revised District's 2026-2027 Fiscal Year Budget as presented. Motion passed by majority vote.*

D. Schedule a District Meeting to Present the District's Revised 2026-2027 Fiscal Year Budget and to Approve the Warning of the District Meeting and Referendum Vote

Dr. Darcy read the Warning of the District Meeting and Referendum Vote as follows:

Regional School District 13 of the great state of Connecticut, Durham and Middlefield, warning of annual meeting and referendum vote. Notice is hereby given to all those eligible to vote in town meetings in the member towns of Durham and Middlefield that the annual meeting of the Regional School District 13 of the state of Connecticut will be held on June 1 at 7:00 p. m. in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut, for the following purpose: To present the proposed budget for the 2026-2027 fiscal year as prepared by the Regional School District 13 Board of Education. The moderator shall adjourn the annual meeting at its conclusion and the budget shall be submitted to a vote upon the voting tabulators in the district member towns of Durham and Middlefield on June 2, in accordance with Section 10-51 of the Connecticut General Statutes, between the hours of 6 a. m. and 8 p. m. Under the following heading: Shall the proposed budget of \$44,218,342 for the 2026-2027 fiscal year as prepared and presented by the Regional School District 13 Board of Education be approved? Those in favor shall vote yes. Those opposed shall vote no. Voting will be at the following places. Town of Durham, Durham Community Center, 144 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut. Town of Middlefield, Middlefield Community Center, 405 Main Street, Middlefield, Connecticut. Copies of the proposed budget will be mailed to every postal patron in Durham and Middlefield. dated May 13, 2026, signed by Robert Moore, Chairman of the Regional School District 13 Board of Education.

E. School Naming Committee Information and Update

Mrs. Cowan updated the Board on the school naming committee process, noting that multiple meetings were held and community feedback was reviewed, including concerns from Middlefield residents and a petition with approximately 377 local signatories (students and adults combined). Mrs. Cowan commended the work of the school naming committee, emphasizing that the committee followed board policy and made efforts to engage respectfully with the community. After receiving feedback, Mrs. Cowan explored a compromise, including reaching out to Middlefield resident Carol Schilling, that would include a name that would retain "Memorial" in the school's title. The proposed option, "Three Oaks Memorial School," was introduced as a potential resolution, with some discussion about possible legal or structural concerns. Legal counsel advised against pursuing a referendum, noting procedural limitations such as the binary nature of referendum questions, timing constraints, and the fact that naming authority rests with the Board rather than the broader community vote.

Dr. Leggett also addressed concerns that the petition might be ignored; Dr. Leggett emphasized that revisiting the name and incorporating "Memorial" reflects that community input was heard and considered. Mrs. Cowan also clarified that historical elements such as the cornerstone and other preserved items would remain in place. There was broader reflection on honoring not only the original veterans associated with the school's name but also all veterans and public servants from Durham and Middlefield, like John Lyman, Frederick Brewster, and Francis Korn.

*Mrs. Cowan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to amend the Three Oaks Elementary School name to Three Oaks Memorial School.*

Mr. Moore noted that the board's return to the school naming discussion was prompted by the formal petition and other community correspondence offering alternative naming suggestions, all of which has been noted in the official meeting records. Mr. Moore commended the naming committee for its efforts to balance historical recognition, student involvement, and community input. Mr. Moore emphasized that the proposed addition of "Memorial" is intended as a compromise that recognizes both tradition and community sentiment, and may help unify perspectives around the decision. Mr. Moore also reflected more broadly on the regional school system, noting that it has taken many years to evolve and that the current structure represents a long-standing goal of having students from both towns attend the same school throughout their full K-12 experience within a shared regional system.

Dr. Darcy reflected on the school naming discussion, emphasizing the importance of honoring both historical legacy and future generations through the final naming decision. Dr. Darcy also addressed the value of direct written communication (especially emails with identifiable senders) as a meaningful way for board members to gauge community sentiment, as opposed to anonymous or less reliable sources such as social media. Dr. Darcy thanked the school naming committee, community members, and all individuals who submitted feedback through emails and the petition process.

Mr. Roraback noted that emails are taken seriously, read carefully, and sometimes followed up with direct responses, while online social media comments are not considered part of the official record. There was also broader discussion that some community members who support the school naming decision may be reluctant to publicly share their views due to fear of criticism or negative reactions in the current climate. It was suggested that this may contribute to reduced participation or visible support in public forums or civic engagement, noting it as a possible reason for an open seat on the board.

Mrs. Caramanello shared she personally is not in favor of the name Three Oaks. She reflected on the naming process and questioned whether the outcome might have been different if "Memorial" had originally been offered as a formal option on the ballot. Mrs. Caramanello raised the possibility that earlier inclusion of "Memorial" could have influenced voting results, particularly among students who participated, and suggested that greater historical context about the original school name may or may not have been fully understood during the voting process.

Mrs. Cowan explained that students were given consistent information and the committee devised a one-page document that was distributed and read aloud as part of the naming process. Mrs. Cowan noted that additional explanations were also provided, including classroom discussions in the younger grades where teachers reviewed the options and reasoning behind each name. Mrs. Cowan added a personal observation that even within her household, students considered the information differently and made different voting choices, suggesting that students were engaged and thoughtful in the process.

Mrs. Caramanello also raised concerns about the financial impact of changing the school's name, arguing that it may create unnecessary expenses for signage, branding updates, and replacement of existing materials. Mrs. Caramanello emphasized the importance of considering fiscal responsibility in the decision and asked whether the district would calculate and report the total cost associated with implementing the name change.

Mrs. Neubig responded to concerns about costs and materials related to the school name change, noting that updates (like signage and printed materials) would need to be replaced regardless and were already included in the renovation budget. Much of the district's communication is now digital, so letterhead is only printed when needed. Mrs. Neubig acknowledged that PTO groups may have leftover branded materials, but suggested these could still be used during the transition period.

Board members also reflected on the broader impact of consolidation and name changes on school traditions, volunteer groups, and community identity, noting that long-standing school names and associated events may eventually phase out. Despite this, Mr. Roraback suggested consolidation could possibly make it easier to find volunteers for school-related activities.

Mrs. Petrella argued that the main issue surrounding the school name change is not the decision itself, but the lack of effective communication to the broader community. She noted that while parents received updates through ParentSquare, many community members outside the school system were likely not adequately informed. Mrs. Petrella reflected on past efforts to improve district-wide communication, including an attempted communications committee that did not move forward as intended. Mrs. Petrella emphasized that multiple communication channels are likely needed to effectively reach residents who are not directly connected to the schools. Mrs. Petrella praised the committee for their work and compromise efforts, which shows their commitment to listening to the community.

Mr. Roraback discussed existing tools such as town newsletters, supplemental mailings, and other outreach methods, noting both their limitations and benefits. While acknowledging that no method will reach everyone, Mrs. Petrella stressed the importance of expanding outreach efforts and continuing to explore additional ways to better inform the public. Mrs. Cowan commented that she had reached out to both towns more than once and questioned the best ways to reach the community tax payers, with correspondence left unanswered.

Dr. Leggett provided an update on communication efforts for the upcoming Middlefield newsletter, noting that space is limited but QR codes will be included to help residents sign up for ParentSquare and access construction updates. ParentSquare is open and available to everyone. Dr. Leggett also mentioned key information such as student activities, athletics updates, etc. will be included.

Mr. Simmons emphasized ParentSquare as an effective and immediate communication tool and encouraged expanding its use so more community members can receive updates directly, noting that multiple channels are needed to reach residents. Mrs. Petrella also referenced broader outreach efforts, like mailed budget information, are needed to reach residents.

*Mrs. Cowan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to amend the Three Oaks Elementary School name to Three Oaks Memorial School.*

*All in favor of approving the amended Three Oaks Memorial School name as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Mrs. Caramanello opposed the approval of the Three Oaks Memorial School name as presented. Mrs. Petrella abstained from the vote. Motion passed by majority vote.*

## **Policy Review**

### 1. Non-Resident Students 5118 - Regulation Changes

Mrs. Cowan noted that a recent change regarding non-resident students is a regulatory update rather than something requiring a formal board vote. Mrs. Cowan clarified that the item is informational, and the purpose of bringing it up is to invite any comments or feedback from others rather than to take action on it.

### 2. First read

#### a. Graduation Requirements 5127

Mrs. Cowan discussed a proposed shift from a four-year to a three-year English Language Arts (ELA) requirement for graduation, along with the possible use of a waiver to clarify student understanding and ensure compliance with college expectations. The policy changes, including formatting updates like asterisks and clarified language, were developed with input from the policy committee and legal guidance.

Mrs. Petrella raised questions about formatting and language in the graduation requirements section of the policy, specifically the use of asterisks and corresponding explanatory notes. There was agreement that one redundant asterisk should be removed to improve clarity. Mrs. Petrella also questioned whether the policy should explicitly state who approves waivers. Dr. Leggett stated that this responsibility would be handled at the school level, with school counselors managing the waiver process.

Dr. Darcy raised concerns about the waiver system, particularly how it might create unintended barriers for students who meet credit requirements but may still need formal approval to graduate. She argued that it could place unnecessary administrative or familial burden on students, expressing disagreement with the need for stricter requirements than those mandated by the state, suggesting that the district should avoid adding additional barriers beyond state guidelines.

Mrs. Cowan explained that community feedback influenced concerns about the English Language Arts (ELA) graduation requirement change. She described a potential misunderstanding where students and families might assume that taking three years of ELA is sufficient, only to later discover that it could limit college admissions opportunities.

Dr. Darcy argued that changing the ELA requirement from four years to three would not significantly impact college admissions for high-achieving students, but would instead increase flexibility for students who struggle academically or have different interests. Dr. Darcy emphasized that the policy should prioritize student choice and access to varied coursework, particularly for students who may be disengaged or looking for more relevant or career-focused classes. She suggested that reducing rigid requirements could help students stay engaged in school by allowing them to take electives, CTE courses, or other subjects aligned with their interests. Dr. Darcy also noted that strict graduation requirements could unintentionally limit student options, especially in smaller schools where scheduling flexibility is already constrained.

Mr. Roraback noted that at a recent Student Achievement Committee meeting, reassurance was provided that the guidance department would actively communicate with students and families about course selection decisions, including advising whether the reduced ELA requirement is appropriate for individual students. Dr. Leggett emphasized that counselors, students, and teachers would remain in ongoing communication throughout the process to ensure students make informed academic choices.

Mr. Moore noted that public feedback largely opposed the proposed reduction in ELA requirements, with several community members insisting on maintaining a four-year requirement. Dr. Darcy suggested that this resistance was rooted in a preference for tradition rather than change. Mrs. Cowan established that the item could still move forward as a first read while additional questions, such as waiver implications and specific student scenarios, are researched further and could be developed and discussed at the upcoming Student Achievement Committee meeting.

## **Committee Reports**

B. Building Committee Meeting - April 9, 2026 and April 22, 2026

Mr. Moore provided an update from recent building committee meetings regarding construction contracts, bid reviews, and ongoing scope adjustments intended to keep the project within budget. Mr. Moore noted that some alternates and planned items were removed or modified during negotiations, and that additional bids for major trades such as electrical and stormwater management are still being finalized.

Mr. Moore also noted an ongoing discussion regarding building permit fees, including efforts to request a waiver from the Town of Middlefield. Mr. Moore discussed historical and current building permit fee payments. The school project has \$600,000.00 in project costs that are now tied to building permit fees. Dr. Leggett explained that the original project budget included \$50,000 for building permit fees based on the assumption that towns typically do not charge for these fees for a school construction project. However, because those funds are being charged by Middlefield, there must be adjustments elsewhere in the budget, resulting in cuts in other areas to stay on track. Mr. Moore also noted that a remaining \$275,000.00 balance is still unresolved and pending further response.

Dr. Darcy, speaking personally as a Middlefield resident, expressed strong frustration and disappointment about the financial arrangement between the two towns, characterizing it as unfair and inconsistent with the idea of a cooperative partnership between districts.

#### C. School District Climate Committee Meeting - April 22, 2026

Dr. Darcy presented the update from the District Climate Committee. Jade Adalbert, Director of prevention programs at Durham Middlefield Youth & Family Services, presented survey results and a video highlighting current mental health concerns among students. The committee noted that the material, also available through the district newsletter and online, was sobering and prompted a broader conversation about how both the schools and community organizations are responding to student mental health needs. Members acknowledged that youth mental health is a critical and growing concern and expressed that current supports may not be fully keeping pace with student needs. The committee also reflected on Screen-Free Week as an awareness initiative, noting positive feedback from families and educators and encouraging more balance around technology use, particularly increased time spent outdoors. These conversations reinforced the need for continued focus on “digital wellness,” especially at the elementary level, and connected directly to the district’s plans to expand its digital wellness efforts through a dedicated team.

The committee reviewed behavioral referral data and discussed the challenge of making that information more usable and accessible for decision-making. A key focus was improving the way data is shared between administrators and the board so it can be analyzed more effectively and used to guide targeted restorative practices aimed at reducing the instructional impact of behavioral issues. Members also established a subcommittee to develop a district climate survey, including representation from leadership and Durham-Middlefield Youth & Family Services (DMYFS), with the goal of coordinating efforts and avoiding redundant or overly frequent surveys that could lead to community fatigue. There was discussion about potentially aligning or alternating surveys between so that results can be shared and inform each other more effectively.

The committee reviewed a draft climate handbook and Mr. Roraback emphasized the importance of making it practical and actively used by staff, students, and families rather than a static document. Ideas included improving accessibility and integrating it into daily practice so it can be easily referenced and applied.

#### E. School Naming Committee Meeting – April 29, 2026

Mrs. Cowan reported that the School Naming Committee will begin work on selecting a new mascot, alongside continued discussions about how to thoughtfully use and preserve space within the school. This

includes planning a presentation with the architects to review unused or flexible areas, as well as identifying artwork and other meaningful or sentimental items that should be preserved or highlighted in the building.

The committee also began brainstorming how to assign names to key spaces, with ideas such as dedicating areas like the library or health suite to individuals who have contributed significantly to the school or community. Broader recognition of additional community members was also raised as a possible direction for consideration. Informal suggestions were shared regarding potential mascots or naming themes, reflecting ongoing creativity and engagement in shaping the school's identity and spaces moving forward.

Mrs. Petrella questioned whether the agenda reflected a vote on the school name.

Board members confirmed that the agenda item for the school naming committee is listed as "discussion and possible vote," so no additional agenda items or revisions are required.

Lastly, Mr. Roraback noted that a prior strategic planning survey included a mascot question that received a smaller number of responses but generated a wide range of ideas, over 100 options in total. While some suggestions were lighthearted or less serious, others were viewed as strong starting points for further consideration. Mr. Roraback expressed interest in using those survey results as a foundation for the next steps in the mascot selection process, with a stated preference for prioritizing student voice and choice in shaping the final decision.

### **Board Communications and Professional Development**

Mr. Moore proposed a focus on improving district communication and expanding outreach methods to ensure information reaches the broader community more effectively. Dr. Leggett noted that while newsletters, ParentSquare, the district website, and the District Dispatch already provide multiple communication channels, engagement still varies depending on how and whether individuals access those sources. There was acknowledgment that social media can be both a valuable tool and a source of misinformation, reinforcing the need for a more reliable and coordinated district communications strategy. An update was provided on ongoing efforts to develop a student-involved social media and public relations plan with support from a communications professional. The goal is to create a more structured and trustworthy district presence online, while ensuring the rollout is thoughtful and effective. Mrs. Petrella also reflected on increased transparency and accessibility of board and committee meetings in recent years, noting expanded livestreaming and public availability of meetings compared to the past. Attendance data was briefly referenced, highlighting relatively low in-person participation despite multiple outreach efforts.

Mrs. Caramanello concluded on a positive note recognizing community partnerships, including praise for a recent Paper House Productions performance of *The Wizard of Oz*. Mrs. Cowan emphasized the value of collaborations between schools and local organizations, noting how early involvement in programs like theater contributes to student development and supports successful high school arts programs.

### **Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Executive Session**

*Mrs. Cowan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, for the Board to invite Dr. Leggett to enter into Executive Session.*

*All in favor of the Board to invite Dr. Leggett to enter into Executive Session: Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, Mrs. Caramanello, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.*

**Adjournment**

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

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

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio