

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, March 18, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the library Coginchaug Regional High School.

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

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

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

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

After the Pledge, Dr. Leggett acknowledged gifts for the board members, recognizing their hard work and noting that March is Board appreciation month.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

2026-2027 Budget

A. Budget Discussion

Dr. Leggett reported that no major decisions were made at the last meeting, and a few items remain under consideration. Concerns were raised about the tennis courts, with a plan to patch and repair them for now and potentially add them in a future roofing bond project in about two years. Staffing discussions continue, focusing on the library media specialist and the teaching and learning director roles. Dr. Leggett proposed a compromise for the social worker position: instead of full elimination or reinstatement, a 0.4 FTE would be added next year, maintaining current staff levels and bridging the gap before the Memorial consolidation. The district is also ready to apply for a grant as soon as it opens, though the timeline is uncertain. Capital expenses were discussed separately with the Finance Committee.

Mr. Simmons questioned the cost difference between the full position and the 0.4 FTE position. Dr. Leggett clarified that instead of fully eliminating the role, one current FTE would go part-time, resulting in a net loss of 0.6 FTE instead of a full position. Members also discussed applying for a competitive

grant, which could offset some costs, though the grant may not cover the full amount. Mrs. Cowan also proposed a suggestion to charge other school-based clinicians rent/overhead to help offset expenses.

Dr. Darcy discussed how the Board's role sometimes focuses on setting a budget target, leaving the district leadership to make specific staffing decisions and be accountable for outcomes. Board members noted the challenge of reaching consensus on individual positions due to varying priorities and community input. Dr. Darcy cautioned that feedback often comes from a small, vocal segment of the community, which may not represent the broader population, emphasizing the importance of framing decisions around overall budget goals rather than trying to satisfy every opinion. Mr. Moore emphasized that district leadership should make staffing decisions while considering board members' input on priorities and community perception. Ultimately, the budget must be approved by the broader community, so it's important that leadership hears the perspectives of the board members before finalizing decisions.

Board Members discussed the proposed library media specialist position. Mr. Moore supported the proposed addition of adding a Library Media Specialist, noting it can enhance technology integration, real-world skills, and teaching/learning outcomes. Mrs. Petrella remarked she was neutral on adding this position, however, she supports Dr. Leggett's reasoning and is in favor of adding the position based on Dr. Leggett's judgement. Mrs. Cowan agreed that adding the position could be beneficial; however, Mrs. Cowan felt it may not be the right time due to financial constraints, preferring to prioritize existing curriculum, social worker staffing, and long-term savings from school consolidations. Several cost scenarios were discussed, showing how adding or reducing positions (library media specialist or curriculum director) would affect the budget, with gross and net percentages ranging from 3.74% to 4.50%. Mr. Roraback shared that in his school, the library serves as a vibrant hub, teaching real-world skills and supporting the district's "vision of a graduate." Mrs. Caramanello agreed on the value of a library media specialist but suggested adding the position in a future year, after savings from school closures and consolidation with Memorial are realized. Mr. Roraback questioned if it was a legal requirement for school districts to have a library media specialist, and Dr. Leggett clarified that the district is currently in compliance because we have one but the issue is that it is split between the two schools. Mr. Simmons expressed support for the role but agreed with the caution that it may not be the right year, suggesting it could be considered as part of a long-term plan or future priorities.

The board continued the budget discussion by reviewing curriculum leadership roles. Board members discussed the need for both a Curriculum Director and an Associate Director, noting past staffing structures, the district's ongoing curriculum challenges, and the benefits of having sufficient leadership to implement strategic initiatives effectively. Dr. Siegel emphasized the need for additional leadership positions to support the implementation of the district's strategic plan, illustrating that a single person can only do so much, but with more positions, the district can accomplish more and make faster improvements. Mrs. Caramanello questioned past support positions in this area. Dr. Siegel reported that between 2017 and 2022, the district had a curriculum director and a STEM coordinator who, while part of the teacher contract, performed many leadership and curriculum-related duties. There was no formal assistant for these roles. Dr. Darcy noted that the district has tried many different approaches to improving curriculum over the years but has not yet found an ideal solution, emphasizing that simply reverting to past models won't fix long-standing issues. Dr. Darcy expressed support for investing in both curriculum leadership and library media specialists, citing the need for more instructional support and "human hours"

to drive improvement. Dr. Leggett framed the decision clearly: keeping all proposed positions would result in a 4.5% budget, asking if the board is comfortable moving forward with that level.

Mrs. Caramanello reflected on her past experience working in the district, expressing confidence that a strong curriculum leader can be found. While not advocating to replicate the past exactly, Mrs. Caramanello believes the right person could positively impact the district and noted that staff are asking for that kind of leadership. Dr. Darcy questioned whether feedback about staffing needs truly reflects all teachers, as Mrs. Caramanello noted it wasn't based on formal surveys. Mrs. Cowan shared that she's consistently heard strong support, especially for the curriculum director role, from both staff and parents.

Dr. Darcy expressed comfort moving the proposed budget forward, noting that if the towns reject it in a referendum, that would signal the need for cuts. Mr. Moore agreed, pointing out there were no immediate requests from town finance boards to reduce the budget. Mrs. Cowan stated she desired a budget with a balance of being fiscally responsible, yet serving all of the district's students and our staff, and would not support a proposed 4.5% budget. Mrs. Cowan stated she supported keeping the social worker and existing curriculum roles while removing the library media specialist, targeting a budget around 4.16%.

Mrs. Caramanello favored a more reduced approach, keeping just one strong curriculum director and removing both the library media specialist and an additional curriculum position, bringing the budget closer to 3.74%, with the view that additions could be made in future years.

Mrs. Petrella agreed that a lower budget (around 3.74%) would be easier to pass, noting recent progress in curriculum improvements and suggesting the district could delay adding a curriculum coordinator. Mrs. Petrella was undecided on the media specialist position but leaned toward postponing it, especially since it might be cut anyway if a higher budget failed.

Mr. Roraback reflected on past practices of adding positions while finding offsets elsewhere in the budget to minimize impact, and noted that previous years included very tight or even reduced budgets following school closures. Mr. Moore reported that during COVID, the district maintained flat budgets by cutting capital spending and using reserves, which led to deferred projects. In recent years, budgets have returned to around 4% increases, which have generally passed referendums. Mr. Moore expressed uncertainty about how the community will respond to current economic pressures but noted that the district's proposed increases are in line with regional averages (roughly 3–6%). While comparisons may help messaging, some members felt voters ultimately decide based on whether they believe the budget meets the district's needs.

Mr. Simmons noted the budget started at a 5.51% increase but came down due to lower health insurance costs, creating some flexibility to retain or add positions without exceeding the original projection. Mr. Simmons felt comfortable with a 4–5% increase since it aligns with other districts and rising costs overall. From his perspective, voters are less focused on small percentage differences and more on whether the budget meaningfully supports schools.

Mr. Moore discussed uncertainty around voter turnout and how external factors like gas prices and property revaluations might influence perceptions of the budget. While higher voter turnout could make

outcomes less predictable, members felt a 4.5% increase is generally in line with expectations. Mr. Simmons noted that if the budget doesn't pass, there is a clear process to revise it by cutting identified items. Additionally, the Board can present a higher proposal (around 4.5%) at the public hearing, gather feedback, and make adjustments before final adoption.

Mr. Simmons questioned how many grant-funded positions are in the district. Mrs. Neubig reported that 9.7 full-time equivalent staff this year are funded by grants, including 6.6 support staff. If grants ended, those positions would need to be added back into the regular budget. The district actively seeks new grants, though many are competitive (often against 168 other districts). State grants are cyclical, and federal grants can be unpredictable, sometimes delayed.

B. Possible Vote on Proposed Budget

Mr. Simmons made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to hold a public hearing on the 2026-2027 budget, in the amount of \$44,456,570 on Wednesday, April 1, 2026 at 7:00 p. m. in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

All in favor of accepting the motion to hold a public hearing on the 2026-2027 budget, in the amount of \$44,456,570 on Wednesday, April 1, 2026 at 7:00 p. m. in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School: Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, and Dr. Darcy voted aye; Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Caramanello, and Mr. Roraback voted nay. Motion passed by majority vote.

Mr. Moore commented that the finance boards did not request significant changes this year, which is unusual. Their focus seems more forward-looking on the school's future rather than immediate cuts.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Adjournment

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

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

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio