

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, September 10, 2025, at 6:00 P.M. in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board Members Present: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore; Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Stone (attended remotely) and Mrs. Caramanello (arrived at 6:10).

Board Members Absent: Mr. Roraback

Administration Present: Mr. Brough, Human Resources Specialist; Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance; Dr. Leggett, Superintendent of Schools

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

In favor of approving the agenda as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Stone. Motion passed.

Presentation and Recognition**A. 2025-2026 Teacher of the Year – Chris Napoletano**

Mr. Moore introduced Chris Napoletano, Teacher of the Year recipient. Mr. Napoletano spoke about his love for the district, working at Memorial School for over 25 years. Mr. Napoletano was grateful for the distinguished Teacher of the Year honor and recognized the amazing teachers that are working alongside him. Mr. Napoletano also spoke about the beginning of this school year, identifying the supportive and welcoming natures of the Lyman and Strong staff. Mr. Napoletano wants to build on the progress that was made last year, focusing on tier one instruction, developing interpersonal relationships, and supporting the social-emotional needs of the students.

Dr. Leggett invited Mrs. Durkin to speak about Mr. Napoletano. Mrs. Durkin discussed her history working with Mr. Napoletano from his time as a teacher at Memorial to his current role as assistant principal, praising his ability to make others feel validated and his commitment to the Strong community.

B. Restorative Practices Presentation

Dr. Leggett introduced Sheila Riffel and Pam Santerre, the leadership team who worked with the district on Restorative Practices over the summer.

Mrs. Riffel and Mrs. Santerre identified that restorative practices are used throughout the world in various communities. The presenters have been trained from the Institute for Restorative Practices, one of the most established restorative practice trainings. The goal of restorative practices is to develop community and manage conflict by repairing harm and restoring relationships. The core of restorative practices is to build community and build relationships between students, between students and staff, and between students and families.

Mrs. Riffel identified that for restorative practices to be effective, intentions need to be explicit. When working specifically with administrators in Region 13, discussions arose of how restorative practices can grow beyond the classroom to the community at large.

Mrs. Santerre discussed a social engagement window, which asks educators to identify the lens of control and the offerings of support they offer to students, aiming to achieve high expectations while offering high levels of support. Mrs. Riffel identified that Region 13 has been engaging with elements of restorative practices that have been in place. Both Mrs. Riffel and Mrs. Santerre stated how impressed they were with the administrators, praising their ability to engage with the material, interact with one another, and embody a “people first” team.

Mrs. Dahlheimer questioned whether the team ever ran mock restorative practice circles with students, who may struggle to understand the concepts of the restorative circle construct. Presenters identified that a trained restorative practice facilitator, like a teacher, would facilitate the conversation. Mrs. Dahlheimer also asked how restorative practice conversations work when students may not be willing or open to engage. Presenters identified that participating in restorative practice conversations need to be authentic, and that pre-work would go into meeting with students to prepare them for restorative conferences so they understand not just the consequence of action, but also the conversations that involve self-reflection and the work toward repairing the harm that was done.

Public Comment

Mr. Moore introduced public comment and Mrs. Petrella reviewed the Public Comment Protocols:

We offer two public sessions at each meeting for this very purpose. The only exceptions to these are when special or emergency meetings require a specific agenda. It's critical that public input is a time for people to speak and for the board to listen. Therefore, we want to reiterate the following protocols.

As a reminder, this is to ensure there's always an avenue for the board to hear your concerns.

Everyone will listen respectfully during the time someone is speaking. As a reminder, each person speaking has three minutes. This is one three-minute time speaking— not a repeated three minutes among other speakers. When someone is speaking, there will be no interruptions by anyone else present at the meeting, either in person or online.

Interruptions can be spoken, other noises, expressions, side conversations, and or commotions. A board member may interrupt if the content is violating any policies. There will be no profanity or inappropriate language. There will be no discussion of specific children or employees during public input. The board will not engage in debate or respond to statements.

The board may ask clarifying questions or provide clarifying information. Board responses to public comments usually occur at future meetings or through other appropriate channels.

There was no public comment.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Moore presented the approval of the minutes of the August 13, 2025 Board of Education meeting.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to approve the August 13, 2025 Minutes with changes.

Mrs. Petrella wanted clarification if she had made the motion, as stated in the minutes, to approve the minutes from the July 16 meeting. She identified that she may not have made the motion, but the recording would indicate who had made the motion to approve the minutes and it will be checked and revised if needed.

Mrs. Dahlheimer wanted to make 2 changes:

Page 6: Under chairman update: change the language to reflect the statements made at the meeting, which were, “Mr. Moore stated he attended a CABE Conference, which included a panel Lindsay ran on advocacy for the legislators.”

Third paragraph: Change “Mr. Moore shared that a newsletter was distributed to all residents and thanked the students and staff for their help” to “Mr. Moore shared that a newsletter was distributed digitally via ParentSquare and that we are working to get a hard copy to residents.”

In favor of approving the August 13, 2025 Board of Education Minutes as presented with changes: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Stone. Motion passed.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Leggett stated she had a positive first convocation with Region District 13 and it was a great start to the school year. Dr. Leggett identified that the district is finalizing the curriculum contract with ACES. Four teachers will be sent to an AI, artificial intelligence consortium, also through ACES, which includes three library media specialists and one content area classroom teacher. They'll be working with a consortium of districts across the region and the state on developing policies and instructional guidelines. Dr. Leggett reviewed that every month is connected to the work being done with restorative practices and the district's core ethical values. September's theme is focusing on building our community.

Dr. Leggett also reviewed communications within the district. The school district resolution procedure guide and “what to do when” information sheet has been distributed as a resource for families. Additionally, the district has an owl camera that would help with improving the video communication of board and committee meetings. Dr. Leggett identified that YouTube recordings may have technical difficulties, and that the use of an owl camera will make the recordings more streamlined with clearer audio as well as speaker recognition so individuals can clearly see who is speaking. Dr. Leggett stated that the district would be using AI in the interim to record meetings, as the district is still looking to hire a transcriptionist. In addition to a transcriptionist, the district is also seeking substitute teachers.

Chairman’s Update

Mr. Moore discussed the recent convocation he attended. Mr. Moore identified that the board has invested in building the past 5 years: the football stadium, the field house, the lights, and a new school and that the board needs to focus its attention on academics.

Mr. Moore also identified the growth of AI in today’s younger generation and that teachers will have to combat AI in order to help students grow and thrive. Mr. Moore also reviewed the retreat that took place, in which members reviewed the goals and objectives and a tentative date of Monday, September 15 at 4:30p.m. was set to develop the performance appraisal system for a superintendent.

Mr. Moore also reviewed committee assignments and structure. Most board members submitted committee preferences; final assignments will be sent out by the end of the week or early next week. Mr. Moore clarified the *climate* and *well-being/leadership* committees must be merged into one board committee, while each school will still have its own climate committee.

Typically, 3–4 board members will be placed on each committee. Dr. Leggett identified that public members will be invited to join standing committees after the October board meeting approves committee makeup. Policy revisions are needed to formalize new committees. Mrs. Dahlheimer established that appointing outside constituents may wait until after the November elections, likely in December.

Lastly, Mr. Moore identified a new policy reporting form has been created for committees to summarize activities concisely, helping with transcription and keeping minutes manageable.

Staff Reports

A. Director of Finance – Kim Neubig

Mrs. Neubig reported that as of August 2025, the district has expended 11% of the general fund; encumbered 61% of it; and received 17% of revenue.

Mrs. Neubig also spoke about bussing issues, with longer routes and time discrepancies between what is posted on the website and how traffic and other elements can affect the actual route times on a day-to-day basis. Mrs. Neubig praised Robin Golembieski’s efforts in working on resolving transportation issues, as well as the update that a driver was hired which will continue to help improve the situation.

Update on Strong/Memorial Projects

Mrs. Neubig shared the updates on Strong and Memorial projects. Strong School has been fully operational since the first day of school. New spaces include additional classrooms created in open areas on both upper and lower floors, a new guidance office, and a sandwich station outside the cafeteria to reduce lunch line bottlenecks for 5th and 6th graders. At Lyman, Portable 5, the one classroom that was in room 23, moved in yesterday. Pictures of the portables were passed around for board members to review.

Mrs. Neubig shared design planning is ongoing at Memorial. Mrs. Neubig is preparing bond anticipation notes, with the first one set at \$20 million based on 12-month cash flow needs.

The next building committee meeting will review RFQs/RFPs for the Owner's Project Manager (OPM) and Commissioning Agent. On September 17, during executive session, the committee expects to appoint the OPM and commissioning agent.

Committee members commended the construction of the portables for students and the efficiency of moving students into the portables. It was brought to IT's attention that WIFI was glitchy with a request to look into this.

Mrs. Neubig was also commended for her work with transportation as well as her work in these projects.

Board Communications and Professional Development

Mr. Moore stated a district newsletter is available on the district website and on parent square for cost efficiency purposes. A postcard was sent to residents with a QR code so they could access the newsletter directly. Copies of the newsletter will also be made available at the library, town hall, and community center.

Mr. Moore continued to discuss correspondence. He stated the board received a letter from Meriden Hills Baptist Church and Mid-State Christian Academy. The pastor and principal are interested in purchasing Lyman and would like to resume discussion with the board on this issue.

Board members also discussed communication policy. Mr. Moore stated that he will send his correspondence to all board members so they are aware of the response that has been communicated.

Board members also discussed sharing communications they receive from the public. Members questioned whether these emails should be read by board members during the meeting or possibly attached to the meeting minutes. Mr. Moore resolved that the communications would be addressed in the Policy Committee to establish a clear communications protocol.

New Business**A. Vote to Set June 12, 2026 Graduation Date**

Mr. Moore presented June 12, 2026 as the graduation date.

Mr. Mennone, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, made a motion to approve June 12, 2026 as the graduation date.

In favor of approving June 12, 2026 as the graduation date: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DeVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Stone. Motion passed.

B. Choose Board Member Representatives for Teacher Negotiations

Teacher Negotiations are set to begin on October 6 with mediation on November 25. 4 individuals are needed to be on the negotiation committee: 2 committed individuals and 2 alternates. Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella will be on the committee and Mrs. Dahlheimer, and Mrs. Cowan volunteered to be alternates if/when needed.

C. Town of Durham Plan of Conservation and Development Revision

The town is revising its Plan of Conservation and Development, due August next year with public hearings in the spring. Mr. Moore submitted information on facilities, enrollment, costs, goals, and concerns for the next decade (not a board-approved document, just a summary). The town requested population projections and recent enrollment studies, and school building capacities. Mr. Moore provided design capacity for Memorial.

Mr. Moore recommended that next steps may include meeting with selectmen to discuss options once RFPs are developed. Brewster has legal issues tied to the property; Lyman is easier to transfer, with interest already from Meriden Hills Baptist Church and Midstate Christian Academy. An RFP will likely be needed to gauge other community interest.

D. Policy Review

1. First read on below policies

a. Repeal - Bullying and Safe School Climate Plane 5131.8

State mandate requires repealing Policy 5131.8 (Bullying/Safe School Climate Plan) and replacing it with Policy 5131.911 (School Climate & Culture). Dr. Leggett identified the new policy broadens scope from bullying-only to overall school climate, covering all challenging behaviors and incorporating restorative practices. Any cases already started under the old policy will remain under that process. Mr. Moore established that the final board vote is scheduled for the October meeting.

b. Sex Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace (Personnel) - Shipman

Mr. Moore established this policy applies to staff, not students. This policy has been updated to align with recent federal (Title IX) guidelines. Student harassment policy remains unchanged.

c. Live Animals in Schools

Dr. Leggett developed a comprehensive live animal policy that ensures alignment with best practices, ADA, and liability coverage. This policy addresses **service animals**, **therapy animals** (must be trained with handlers as a team), and **instructional animals** (e.g., presentations with reptiles).

These policies will be brought to the Board for adoption at the October meeting.

Committee Reports**A. Policy Committee Meeting - August 20, 2025**

Mr. Moore completed the policy reporting form. Draft policies were reviewed and submitted to the board and items were placed on the agenda that required board approval.

B. Building Committee Meeting - August 20, 2025

Mr. Moore reviewed the August 20, 2025 Building Committee update. The swing space was completed and building committee members met with principals to review traffic flow. New traffic lines were painted at both schools to improve movement.

Mr. Moore discussed the Design Review (QA&M). The Building Committee reviewed schematic design changes and value engineering. The committee achieved about \$5M in cost savings by adjusting design features. The committee considered geothermal vs. oil/gas but rejected this due to \$2–3M additional cost not included in the original bond.

Permit Fees: There was discussion on whether towns would waive building permit fees. Middlefield will not waive (\$300K–\$500K in fees), as funds will support a part-time building official. Durham has minimal permit involvement. A procurement for RFQ/RFPs was issued for commissioning agent and owner's project manager.

Invoices: The Building Committee approved several invoices related to swing space.

Fire Suppression: Fire Suppression is completed at Strong School and the high school, using public water instead of building a new pump station.

Drainage Study: Nathan Jacobson's office will study drainage issues near bleachers/softball field fence.

Committee members questioned the operations of the concession stand and PA system. The concession stand is now operational with equipment in place; grill use requires outdoor setup. A sign-up and checklist system has been implemented. The new press box PA system was not yet confirmed as installed; the current games are still using a temporary announcing setup. The district is purchasing a portable sound system.

C. Building Committee Meeting - August 26, 2025

The Building Committee approved \$1.3M payment to O&G for swing space work (70% complete) during the August 26, 2025 meeting. The total project cost is \$1.8M.

The Building Committee also approved the schematic design estimate, which—after value engineering—reduced costs and brought the project under budget.

Public Comment

No public comment took place.

Adjournment

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

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Stone. Motion passed.

Respectfully Submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio