

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Policy Committee met in special session on Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Policy Committee Members present: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Moore, and Mr. Konstantino (attending virtually)

Policy Committee Members absent: Mr. DeVecchio and Mr. Simmons

Board of Education Members Present: Mrs. Petrella

Administration Present: Dr. Leggett, Superintendent of Schools

Mrs. Cowan called the meeting to order at 5:00 P.M.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Public Comment**

Tim Viens, a Middlefield resident, parent, and educational leader with twelve years of experience, spoke to express concerns about a proposal to reduce the high school graduation requirement from four years of English to three. He questioned the reasoning behind lowering an academic standard at a time when the district is working to improve student performance, noting that the district would be the only one in the area adopting such a change. Mr. Viens warned that reducing requirements could create unequal student experiences, where some students pursue rigorous coursework while others are steered away from it, potentially reinforcing lower expectations for vulnerable students. He also emphasized that adolescents may not always choose more challenging options on their own and that schools have a responsibility to provide clear, academic guardrails to ensure all students receive a strong education. Additionally, he raised concerns about the lack of a clearly defined plan for the proposed career pathways that would replace the fourth year of English, including how those alternatives would maintain academic value and be assessed. Finally, Mr. Viens addressed community concerns that the proposal might be influenced by budget pressures and potential staffing reductions, stressing that financial decisions should not compromise educational quality or student opportunities.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the agenda as presented.*

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

**Approval of Minutes – January 21, 2026**

*Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the January 21, 2026 Policy Committee Meeting minutes.*

*All in favor of approving the January 21, 2026 Policy Committee Meeting minutes as presented:  
Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Konstantino.  
Motion passed.*

**Review Policies****A. Graduation Requirements Policy 5127**

Dr. Leggett explained that revisions were made to the proposed graduation policy primarily to clarify language rather than change the original recommendation. The district still recommends that students complete four years of English, while the minimum requirement of three credits reflects the direction the state is moving toward. Dr. Leggett explained that school counselors will continue to strongly encourage four years of English, with the three-year option intended only as an exception to allow students greater flexibility to pursue career pathways, industry certifications, or associate degree opportunities. Dr. Leggett emphasized that this change should not be viewed as lowering standards but rather as expanding options for students while maintaining academic rigor. Dr. Leggett also clarified that the proposal is unrelated to staffing decisions, noting that the English teaching position previously discussed remains in the budget. Additionally, adjustments were discussed regarding the timeline for implementation, either beginning with the class of 2027 with possible exceptions for current juniors, or with the class of 2028, to ensure alignment with FAFSA completion requirements. The updated chart now clearly lists the district's recommended credits alongside the state's minimum requirements in parentheses and includes college recommendations or specific course requirements for subjects such as civics, U.S. history, and world languages.

Dr. Leggett reviewed refined language in the physical education section, replacing "varsity sport" with "school-based athletic team" to ensure consistency and updating terminology from "Guidance" to "School Counseling." The policy also includes an update that any exemption from PE must be recommended by a licensed medical practitioner, specifically a nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, or medical doctor. Additional language was included to explain how middle school students can earn high school credit in limited cases, currently Algebra I, French I, or Spanish I, if they successfully meet or exceed course expectations and pass the same exam taken by high school students.

Mr. Moore asked for clarity on how successfully meeting or exceeding expectations is obtained. Dr. Leggett responded that at the middle school level, students are evaluated using a "meets or exceeds expectations" system rather than traditional letter grades. To receive high school credit for courses such as Algebra I, French I, or Spanish I, students must meet or exceed expectations and pass the same exam taken by high school students, allowing them to advance directly to the next course, such as Algebra II.

Mr. Roraback noted a small but growing interest among some students in graduating early. Dr. Leggett reviewed that the policy allows students to graduate at the end of 11th grade if they have completed the

required credits and at least one year at an accredited college through dual or concurrent enrollment programs.

Mrs. Cowan suggested a minor wording change to improve clarity in the chart, recommending that the phrase “state minimum” be explicitly included in parentheses. The suggestion was intended to make it clearer to readers that the values in parentheses represent the minimum requirements set by the state, helping avoid confusion between the district’s recommended coursework and the state’s graduation requirements.

Mrs. Cowan also raised a concern from a parent’s perspective, noting that students might tell their parents that only three years of English are required and therefore choose not to take a fourth year, which could create problems later if the student plans to attend a four-year college. Mrs. Cowan asked how the district ensures parents understand the difference between the minimum requirement and recommended coursework. Dr. Leggett responded that school counselors play a central role in guiding course selection, working closely with students and parents to review academic plans and ensure students take appropriate classes based on their goals. Counselors communicate with families if a student’s course load appears insufficient and sometimes proactively adjust schedules. The committee also discussed how information is shared with families, noting that some guidance is provided during events such as Open House and when students transition from middle school, though there was some uncertainty about whether additional scheduling information nights are regularly held.

Mr. Roraback raised a concern about students choosing a career pathway, such as attending a technical school for a trade like welding, based on the minimum graduation requirements, but later deciding they want to attend a four-year college and discovering they lack the necessary coursework. In response, Dr. Leggett acknowledged that this situation could occur but noted that many colleges now offer options for students to make up missing credits through online courses or additional classes after enrollment. Mrs. Petrella also questioned whether changes to high school graduation requirements at the state level are being matched by similar adjustments in college admissions expectations, particularly regarding English and math coursework. Dr. Leggett indicated there may be ongoing discussion about these issues, especially within community college systems, though the specific requirements of individual colleges vary and Dr. Leggett is not apprised of all college requirement updates and would have to look into this.

Mrs. Petrella also expressed concern about the reduction in total graduation credits from 29 to 25 and the potential impact on academic rigor, particularly given existing concerns about student performance in reading and math. Mrs. Petrella questioned whether allowing students the option to take fewer years of English and math might weaken academic preparation. Mrs. Petrella suggested exploring more flexible ways to structure courses within career pathways so that classes connected to technical or vocational fields could still count toward core requirements like math or English. By doing so, the district could maintain the recommendation of four years in these core subjects while allowing pathway-based courses, perhaps labeled differently than traditional literature or algebra classes, to fulfill those credits and better align academic learning with career-focused studies.

In response, Dr. Leggett explained that 25 credits aligns with the state and does not reduce the CRHS recommendations. Incorporating flexibility into course requirements would depend on how classes are categorized, noting that some pathway-related courses could potentially fall under existing categories like

humanities electives, which are already part of state requirements. Dr. Leggett clarified that while traditional courses like Algebra II or Integrated Math III are common college recommendations, the district offers a broader range of math-related courses that can still fulfill math credit requirements. For example, classes such as personal or financial literacy could count as STEM electives. Despite this flexibility, Mrs. Petrella emphasized that the district remains committed to ensuring all students receive a strong foundation in math before graduating, even as they explore more diverse and career-oriented coursework.

Mrs. Cowan made a suggestion to require a waiver signed by students, parents, and counselors if a student chooses the minimum three years of English or math, ensuring families understand the potential implications for college admissions. Dr. Leggett noted that families are more likely to refer to the program of studies than the policy itself, making it the primary document that guides high school course requirements and student planning. Dr. Leggett explained that the district previously required 26 credits but reduced it to 25 in order to align with state requirements, emphasizing consistency with state graduation standards. Dr. Leggett acknowledged the possibility of reintroducing a waiver process for certain course decisions and said she would consult school counselors and principals for feedback. While reviewing the chart that lists both district recommendations and state minimum requirements, Dr. Leggett expressed some hesitation about how much detail should be included in labeling state requirements in the policy itself; more explanation comes in detail in the Program of Studies.

Mrs. Cowan reflected on differences in graduation requirements across subject areas, particularly world language, noting that while the district recommends three years, the state only requires one, in part because some students with learning disabilities may be exempt from world language requirements. Mrs. Cowan acknowledged that this type of flexibility may make sense in certain circumstances and likely does not require a waiver process. However, Mrs. Cowan drew a distinction between world language and core academic subjects, suggesting that math and English are foundational courses where a waiver or additional safeguards might be more appropriate.

Mrs. Petrella asked whether other high schools are adopting similar changes to graduation requirements. Dr. Leggett responded that while not all districts have completed the shift yet, she expects most schools will move in this direction due to strong state-level pressure to expand pathways in high school education. Dr. Leggett referenced broader policy discussions and leadership efforts, including assessments suggesting that Connecticut is behind other states in providing flexible high school pathways that allow students to earn college credit, certifications, or licenses before graduation. Dr. Leggett explained that this shift is expected to be a major focus of upcoming district strategic planning, often framed as “high school innovation” or expanded pathways. However, Dr. Leggett noted that implementing such changes may be more challenging for smaller districts which may struggle to offer a wide variety of programs without additional funding or collaboration with other districts for resources like transportation.

Mr. Moore expressed greater concern about the math requirement than English, prompting broader discussion among Committee members about how to ensure families clearly understand the implications of choosing minimum credit pathways. Mrs. Cowan and others agreed that core subjects like math and ELA may require stronger visibility and clearer communication, like adding a waiver process requiring signatures from students, parents or guardians, and counselors, to explicitly highlight the consequences of choosing minimum requirements and to ensure families fully understand the academic implications before

opting out of recommended coursework. Committee members discussed using clearer formatting, such as asterisks and waiver indicators next to key requirements like English and math, to draw attention to important decision points.

Dr. Leggett noted that while the formal graduation policy itself may not be widely read, the information is more likely to be seen and used in the Program of Studies, which serves as the primary document guiding student course selection.

Mrs. Cowan asked whether PE exemptions should include documentation from a licensed mental health counselor in addition to medical professionals. Committee members considered the idea but noted uncertainty about whether mental health counselors typically provide formal exemptions for physical education requirements. Dr. Leggett explained that current language already requires a licensed medical practitioner, which would include professionals such as physicians, nurse practitioners, or physician assistants, and potentially psychiatrists in cases involving mental health conditions. Concerns were raised that expanding exemptions too broadly, particularly to include mental health counselors, could lead to an increase in requests from students who may not have a medical need to be excused from PE. Ultimately, the Committee agreed to maintain the requirement for a licensed medical professional, noting that students with significant mental health needs could still qualify through appropriate clinical evaluation or a 504 plan.

Mrs. Cowan also requested that Dr. Leggett review the FAFSA completion requirements. Dr. Leggett clarified that state legislation requires FAFSA completion efforts and reporting to begin with the class of 2027, though the district is already implementing these practices. Dr. Leggett noted that students currently complete their portion of the FAFSA process through school programs, which initiates communication with families, and emphasized that the district is already working towards universal participation in initiating the form. The main issue was whether to formally align the policy with the 2027 requirement or delay it to 2028 to provide additional flexibility for current juniors who may not yet meet all requirements. A possible compromise discussed was aligning the policy with 2027 while allowing exceptions or waivers for a small number of current students affected by timing issues.

Mrs. Petrella asked why the state and federal government want all students to complete the FAFSA. Dr. Leggett responded that the purpose is primarily to encourage students to think about college and to help them recognize that higher education may be financially attainable for them. Dr. Leggett noted that completing the FAFSA is intended as an early step in exposing students and families to financial aid opportunities, even if they are unsure about attending college.

Mrs. Petrella raised a broader question about how the district's emphasis on pathways aligns with the reality that many students are still unsure about their future careers. Mrs. Petrella asked what happens for students who do not yet have a clear direction, whether they are required to choose a specific pathway or if they can remain flexible.

Dr. Leggett responded that it depends on student goals: those pursuing a defined outcome such as an associate's degree, certificate, or license would follow a more structured pathway, while other students can continue exploring through flexible coursework and experiences like the capstone project. Committee members discussed it is normal for students not to have a fixed career plan in high school, noting that

many change interests over time or discover what they do not want to pursue through exploratory learning.

The Committee members returned discussion to the FAFSA implementation timing, with clarification that if FAFSA requirements and related policy changes take effect with the class of 2027, the district would need to ensure appropriate exceptions or accommodations for current juniors who may not have planned under those expectations.

Mr. Moore questioned how many credits students may earn when they graduate. Dr. Leggett explained that students graduate with a wide range of total credits, typically starting at the minimum requirement of about 25 credits, but often accumulating significantly more, sometimes into the low-to-mid 30s, depending on additional coursework, dual enrollment, and enrichment opportunities.

Mrs. Petrella also asked what the district does to expose students to careers before high school pathway decisions are made. Dr. Leggett responded that career exploration begins in middle school, citing a recent career day at Strong Middle School where students in grades 6–8 heard short presentations from a wide range of professionals, including EMTs, firefighters, nurses, bankers, realtors, and others. Dr. Leggett emphasized that this early exposure is intended to help students begin thinking about potential interests and career directions.

Committee members discussed that they were open to proposed clarifications in the policy, including clearer labeling, possible waiver language, and timing adjustments for implementation. Additionally, Mrs. Cowan noted that she was indifferent to whether the FAFSA-related change was implemented in 2027 or 2028 as long as students were not negatively impacted, emphasizing that the priority is ensuring no student is disadvantaged by timing or policy shifts. The decision was made to bring the policy revisions to the full Board for consideration.

Mr. Viens expressed overall support for the revisions, particularly the emphasis on clearer communication to families. Mr. Meehans agreed that while legal language is important, the key concern is ensuring that expectations are clearly understood by students and families from all backgrounds so they can make informed decisions.

Committee members concluded the graduation policy discussion referencing career pathways today. Mrs. Cowan described visiting East Haven High School and observing visual pathway displays in the school, such as pyramid-style charts that map out courses leading from foundational classes into specific careers like teaching. Dr. Leggett responded by sharing that similar visual planning tools are already being developed in RSD13, including a career tree model for health sciences that outlines different course sequences leading to roles such as registered nursing. Mr. Roraback commented that career planning may need to account for the growing impact of artificial intelligence and the possibility that some jobs could change or disappear over time. Mr. Konstantino discussed how AI is already being used in different industries, including examples of automated or robot-assisted restaurant operations in other countries.

#### B. Quorum and Voting Procedures Policy 9367

Dr. Leggett presented a minor attorney-recommended revision to the policy language regarding abstentions in voting. The updated wording clarifies that a member may abstain from voting for any

reason he/she deems appropriate, including but not limited to conflicts of interest or lack of sufficient information (such as not being present for prior discussion). The revision also emphasizes that abstentions should be rare and that members are not required to state their reason for abstaining. During discussion, it was noted that the previous language may have implied limited or restrictive reasons for abstaining, which caused confusion. The updated version removes that limitation and reinforces that abstentions are neutral and do not count as either a “yes” or “no” vote. The Committee clarified how abstentions affect vote totals. For example, they do not convert a split vote into a different outcome and simply reduce the number of active votes counted toward the result. Board members briefly discussed typical reasons for abstaining, such as absence during prior discussions or sensitivity around certain topics. With the revised language accepted, the group agreed the policy could move forward to the full board for consideration.

#### C. Admission to the Public Schools at or Before Age Five 5112

Dr. Leggett discussed a proposed repeal of the district’s early kindergarten admission screening policy and, more specifically, the timing of that repeal. Dr. Leggett explained that early admission screenings for the upcoming school year are already scheduled and in progress, so no currently planned evaluations would be affected. However, the concern was raised that delaying the repeal too long could allow new families moving into the district over the summer to access a screening option that would no longer exist moving forward.

Committee members considered different implementation timelines, including adopting the repeal in June with effect by August, or holding it until later in the summer to ensure a clean transition. Ultimately, the Committee discussed completing the repeal through the standard two-reading process, with final adoption likely targeted for August. Dr. Leggett agreed this approach would align the policy with the district’s existing admission rule requiring children to be five years old by September 1. Dr. Leggett also recognized that while the policy change is administratively straightforward, it may create challenges for families, particularly given local preschool and childcare constraints.

#### D. Non-Resident Students 5118

Dr. Leggett reviewed a policy change to tighten enforcement of “non-resident student” affidavits, in which a student claims they live in-district (or with a relative in-district) so they can attend the school. The proposed policy change would require families to sign a more formal affidavit stating the student’s residency is legitimate. The affidavit would include stronger legal language, such as: “The address is the student’s permanent residence,” “The student is not living there just to attend school,” and “The family cannot be paid to host the student.” Policy changes would also require the form to be notarized, the form would include required initials or sign-off points to make people acknowledge responsibility, and the form states families may be responsible for tuition costs if fraud is found.

Dr. Leggett clarified that if the district finds out a student is not actually a legal resident, the student is not removed immediately. The student is allowed to finish the school year to avoid disrupting the student and to allow a stable transition. Mrs. Cowan also questioned the policy for students who move. Dr. Leggett reviewed that if a student is a senior, they are allowed to stay and graduate, even if they move out of the district. If a student moves out of the district after January 1, they are allowed to finish the current school year in the district. If a student moves before January 1, they are generally expected to transfer to their

new district/school. The district can make flexible exceptions (about 3 months) depending on circumstances

Mrs. Cowan shared that some people may misrepresent residency just to get into a preferred district/school. Dr. Leggett agreed, establishing that there have already been a few questionable cases. Mrs. Cowan questioned how residency verification is enforced. Dr. Leggett indicated that currently, the district is verifying this only through the notarized paperwork but these recommended changes would add visits and random checks. Mrs. Cowan and Dr. Leggett also discussed keeping protections in place for legitimate situations (like family caregiving, instability, etc.) as part of the written policy. Dr. Leggett discussed that circumstances are discussed when families register their children, and there may be a possibility of involving school staff (like an SRO) to confirm residency for non-legitimate cases. Dr. Leggett suggested adding language on the form that included there would be random residency verifications throughout the year as a means to inform families that the policy would be enforced, as well as a way to deter families from claiming false residency. Dr. Leggett clarified that this would not apply to outplaced, foster, or McKinney-Vento students. The policy change will be brought to the full Board for consideration.

#### E. Improve Completion Rates of FAFSA 5543

No further discussion was had; the policy will be brought forward to the full Board for consideration.

#### **Public comment**

There was no public comment.

#### **Adjournment**

*Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to adjourn the meeting.*

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

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio