

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, July 9, 2025, at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Cowan, Dr. Darcy (arrived late, via Zoom) Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella (via Zoom), Mr. Roraback, Mr. Stone

Board members absent: Mr. DeVecchio, Mr. Mennone

Administration present: Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education; Mr. Kimball, Principal of Frank Ward Strong School; Dr. Leggett, Superintendent of Schools; Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance; Mr. Petronio, Director of Athletics

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the regular meeting to order at 6:07 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to approve the agenda, as presented.

All in favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried.

Public Comment**A. In-person Public Comment**

None.

B. Remote Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback to approve the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting of June 11, 2025.

In favor of approving the minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting of June 11, 2025: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Stone. Mrs. Cowan abstained. Motion passed.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Leggett expressed her gratitude for the warm welcome she has received as the new Superintendent for Regional School District 13. Dr. Leggett explained that as superintendent she is interested in pursuing the collective commitment, remaining 100 percent focused on students, ensuring all academic success, a sense of belonging, and overall well-being. Together, the district will strive for excellence, rise above challenges, and foster a culture of kindness, thoughtfulness, and growth.

Dr. Leggett stated that there is contact with the YMCA to develop after school childcare solutions aligned with the newly revised calendar. This will meet the needs of families and ensure that there is a smooth transition into the 2025-2026 school year.

Dr. Leggett noted that the revised calendar reflects a lot of thoughtful input from across the district. The construction schedule is on track. She emphasized the importance of clear and proactive communications going forward.

Dr. Leggett shared some highlights of the week's leadership retreat. Over the past two days, the leadership team has engaged in restorative practices training, which involves creating a climate where every member of the school community can feel seen, heard, and respected. Discussions have been held regarding climate and culture activities and how restorative practices will become a foundation of everything that is done. Dr. Leggett explained that 80 percent of restorative practice is proactive and about laying a foundation, building good relationships, and fostering inclusion and a feeling of belonging. The remaining 20 percent of restorative practice is responsive, including how to respond to behavior and student discipline in order to prioritize learning and accountability. Dr. Leggett stated that there is a common misconception with restorative practice that there are not any consequences for the students. The reality is that there are meaningful consequences that repair harm, restore relationships, reinforce expectations, and create a sense of belonging for all students. There are disciplinary consequences that continue to work toward bringing students into the community instead of making them feel separated. Dr. Leggett will be demonstrating a restorative practice training with the members of the board during the September meeting.

As of July 10, 2025, the strategic planning process will be launched. Dr. Leggett emphasized the importance of strategic planning that builds on appreciative inquiry, which is an approach that honors what is already working in the district.

Dr. Leggett praised the central office team, thanking them for their professionalism, insight, and support. Dr. Leggett introduced Dave Kimball, the new Frank Ward Strong School principal.

Dr. Leggett stated she will be working with Dr. Seigel to become up to date on curriculum instruction assessment throughout the district. There have been initial discussions regarding scheduling professional learning throughout the school year. Student presentations are now being scheduled for each monthly board meeting.

Moving forward, Dr. Leggett stated she would like to have all information available and linked to the agenda on the Friday before the Board of Education meeting.

Dr. Leggett discussed that Snapshot will be released three times throughout the year. The first Snapshot will be published in October. Dr. Leggett plans on issuing a district newsletter monthly, starting in August. Lastly, the board will release their communications quarterly.

Dr. Leggett suggested making O&G updates a regular agenda item at the Board of Education meetings going forward. The swing space work began at Strong School and the boxes from Memorial School have been moved this week. In mid-August there will be another move which will include desks. Schools will be accessible during the summer to staff, however there could be some sections that are closed off periodically due to work being done in those areas. The 12-month staff transition to Strong School started on July 1, 2025. Custodians have been hard at work cleaning rooms and furniture that are not being impacted by the move.

Mr. Cravanzola of O&G provided an update to the board. Since the last meeting, O&G has issued and awarded a contract with Diversity Construction Group. The group has mobilized to the site recently and are actively engaged in demolition activities while also focusing on design and paperwork. There have been coordination meetings regarding the portable vendor as well. An onsite meeting was held with the neighbors of the construction area to address concerns. Mr. Cravanzola stated that O&G is working on a schematic design estimate based on QA+M documents and a meeting will be held on July 10, 2025. A preconstruction to construction handoff meeting with O&G has also been completed. Currently, work is proceeding on schedule and as planned. Mrs. Cowan asked Mr. Cravanzola if there is a secondary plan in place regarding the portable that is scheduled for delivery in the last week August. Mrs. Neubig explained that the portable will be separated into two rooms, a classroom and a special education room. Mrs. Neubig also stated that in the worst-case scenario, the students in that portable would be transferred to the library or another open room for a week. Mrs. Cowan suggested sending out updates to the community reporting the status of the construction. Mrs. Neubig agreed and also stated that there will be a construction update area on the website. Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that the Building Committee possibly will be adding meetings within the next two months, with Mr. Cravanzola stating that it would be beneficial to do so.

Mrs. Cowan asked Dr. Leggett if the YMCA would be able to open aftercare solutions to members who are not enrolled in the YMCA. Dr. Leggett responded that she would look into it.

Chairman's Update

Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that she and Mr. Moore have been working on finishing up the newsletter.

Staff Reports**A. Director of Finance – Kim Neubig**

Mrs. Neubig noted that the fiscal year closed out on June 30, 2025. 99.34 percent has been spent on the budget and 99 percent of revenue has been received. At the August board meeting, Mrs. Neubig will be sharing two reports. Purchase orders have been closed out. The auditors will be visiting in July.

B. District Climate Data – Jen Keane

Mrs. Keane shared the district climate survey presentation with the board. Participants included 1,145 students, 194 families, and 117 staff members. The data reviewed all indicators and cited the questions where there was more than a 15-point change from 2023 to 2025. The data also reviewed any negative indicators with more than 20 percent agreement or disagreement to determine trends. The neutral responses were removed. In regard to grade and building reconfiguration, some indicators were not exact.

There was positive feedback from parents, including references to the students having high quality homework that helps them learn, the school addressing student needs, and teachers and staff addressing all students with respect. There was also positive feedback from district staff, including that the staff feel physically safe in the schools, school events are being well attended, and that the schools are encouraging families to be engaged in activities. The areas for growth involving parent and staff responses include bullying and mean behavior, witnessing racism, and students treating each other with respect regardless of race, gender, gender identity, or socioeconomic status.

There was positive feedback from the students, including that they feel safe in their classrooms, the rules are fair, and there is always someone available to help when they have a problem. The areas for growth involving student responses include other students speaking in a mean fashion, students being teased, and witnessing or experiencing racism.

Mrs. Keane explained the recommendations and action plan as follows:

1. Continue to put students' mental health and well-being first
2. Building Committee use of School Climate Improvement Plan Template
3. Adopt protocol and procedures for implementing the best practice guidelines for school climate reporting techniques and investigations
4. Comprehensive training for staff on the updated Bullying, Harassment, and Title IX policies
5. Restorative Practices training with an implementation plan
6. Complete the roll out of Sandy Hook Promise Say Something Anonymous Reporting for staff and students (for Strong School and Coginchaug High School)
7. Increase, strengthen, and monitor tiered levels for SEL

Mrs. Cowan asked if the participation was lower or higher between 2023 and 2025. Mrs. Keane stated that for the students it was a similar amount of participation, and she will find the exact data regarding families and staff. Mrs. Cowan expressed concerns regarding the lack of participation from staff.

Mr. Moore asked why there was such an increase in positive responses. Mrs. Keane explained that part of that is because of the removal of the neutral response. There were responses requesting an option to pick something in between agree or disagree. Mrs. Cowan suggested building a truly anonymous survey, stating it would possibly bring in a higher response rate. Mrs. Keane noted that the current survey is fully anonymous, however there are people who do not believe that to be true. Mr. Roraback suggested creating a separate time for the staff to complete the survey, such as during a professional learning day to encourage more staff participation.

Mr. Moore asked how the bullying and racism issues will be addressed. Mrs. Keane answered that the restorative practices training should be helpful, along with monitoring SEL tiered levels. Mr. Moore noted that in the past there was a student committee who dealt with the bullying and racism issues and suggested that the committee become active again. Mrs. Keane agreed, stating that it is possibility and she is looking for more participation.

Mr. Moore asked if this information has been shared with other staff members yet. Mrs. Keane explained that yes, the principals have had staff meetings regarding the data and created action plans based on the results.

C. Athletic Injury Report/Survey – Todd Petronio

Mr. Petronio presented the student athlete health and safety injury data to the board along with a climate survey. Mr. Petronio explained that hiring an athletic trainer full-time has helped delve into more issues and actions. Mr. Petronio further explained the specifications as to what constitutes an injury in sports, noting the differences between injury reporting and daily treatment notes.

The total number of athletes in the fall of 2024 was 166 and 26 of those athletes had injuries. However, an injury is technically defined as any instance that requires an athletic injury report. This doesn't necessarily reflect the number of injured students, but rather the justification for filing a report. Mr. Petronio stated that the expectation was to see higher numbers in soccer and football. The report shows data from the last four years, which helps identify improvements and declines. The total number of athletes in the winter of 2025 was 138 and 19 of those athletes had injuries. There were a greater number of injuries in basketball and indoor track. The total number of athletes in the spring of 2025 was 169 and 16 of those athletes had injuries.

There were no observable trends noted from the data. The total number of athletic injuries appear consistent with the total number of student athletes. There was an under-reporting issue last year with injuries due to the lack of having an athletic trainer. Mr. Petronio explained that the presence of the athletic trainer made the students feel more comfortable expressing their injuries or issues. There are higher injury reports in contact sports, such as football, basketball, and soccer.

Mr. Petronio shared athletic injury prevention and training measures, including emergency action plans (which are venue specific), preseason reviews with coaches, heat monitoring, and concussion protocols. New in 2025 was the addition of three external AED machines and lockboxes.

Mr. Petronio explained that the coaches have athletic injury prevention and training as well, including annual district training, sport specific training, biannual CPR/FA training, CIAC concussion training (football specific), and annual pre-season reviews. They are also starting to be trained in mental health. Mr. Moore inquired about the training schedule for the coaches. Mr. Petronio stated that in order for a 5-year permit the state requires 15 hours of continued education. There is one 3-hour training provided every year. The district training specifics are released at the beginning of the school year. Most training is done prior to the season. Mr. Petronio shared protocols and procedures regarding concussions, heat and lightning, conditioning, and regular dialogue.

Mr. Petronio shared the athletic climate survey highlights for July 2025. Surveys were sent to student athletes, parents of those students, and coaching staff. Students and coaching staff response was approximately 50 percent. The parent response was approximately 15 percent. Generally, more than 94 percent of student athletes felt safe and welcome at/on their sports team environment. Student athletes felt connected and trusted with the coaches at the school. In terms of the athletic department, 94 percent of responses noted it was a safe and positive environment. Mr. Petronio stated there are improvements to be made with racism and bullying. Communication will also be improved upon, along with negative student athlete behavior. Dr. Leggett and Mr. Petronio have also discussed implementing "Portrait of a Student Athlete."

Mr. Moore asked if the coaches and athletic trainer, Ethan Bankoski, are present at the summer practices. Mr. Petronio noted that there is a specific date at which coaches can begin training the students and also when they need to stop. After that period, the coaches are not permitted to train the students. Last year CIC opened up that rule for all sports. Mr. Petronio stated that there is a concern about student athletes participating in too many sports activities during the summer, which is being investigated at this time. Mr. Bankoski is available as much as possible for these practices.

Mr. Moore inquired about how to avoid injuries during practice. Mr. Petronio explained that it's very difficult to avoid these injuries, and they mostly occur because there is a larger number of practices versus games. Mr. Bankoski added that students are more likely to approach him with an injury during practice. Dr. Leggett asked if anything needs to change during practices to decrease the level of injuries occurring. Mr. Petronio noted there is nothing in the data that shows a need for change, however Mr. Bankoski does work with the coaches on looking for ways to adjust training.

Board Communications and Personal Development

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that on August 7, 2025, from 1:00-7:00 PM there is the CABA leadership conference at Water's Edge. Topics will include onboarding new board members, superintendent and board relationships, board culture, and legislative advocacy.

Mrs. Cowan stated that she received two emails, one from Molly Clark and one from Amanda Betty discussing concerns regarding the board chair. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked for the emails to be forwarded to the entirety of the board. Dr. Leggett reminded the board that emails should not be forwarded if they include student information.

New Business**A. Review Committee Membership Assignments**

Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that the assignments have been sent out to all board members. Mrs. Cowan stated she would like to be added to the Building Committee, including any Finance/Audit Committees. Dr. Darcy added that she would prefer the Policy Committee meetings start at a later time, and Mr. Moore agreed. It was discussed that the Policy Committee will meet after the Building Committee meets. Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that the structure for the District School Climate meetings will be changing, and Dr. Darcy will be removed from the Policy Committee and added to District School Climate meetings. Mr. Moore suggested an extra board member serve on the Student Policy Committee, along with a student representative as well.

B. Curriculum Director Position Discussion

Dr. Leggett proposed delaying the hiring of a curriculum director from November 2025 to July 2026. Dr. Leggett suggested using the allocated funds for contracted services for the 2025/2026 school year. Delaying the hiring will create a better applicant pool since the position would be advertised in the spring. Dr. Leggett stated she would like to work with Dr. Seigel and gain the leadership team's help and input from the staff. This will make it clearer as to what the position is and how the role will align with the strategic planning. Mrs. Cowan asked whether or not Dr. Leggett imagined one contracted person or a multitude. Dr. Leggett answered that her guess is that it will be multiple people, which would be an advantage to the district. Mrs. Cowan addressed concerns about students and staff currently in need of a curriculum director and that delaying the process of hiring would not send the correct message. Dr. Leggett noted that the position would technically be filled, just not by one specific person. Dr. Darcy added that whoever acquires the curriculum director position must oversee the broad range of the curriculum. Mrs. Caramanella noted that the staff preferred someone get hired now rather than in November and also agreed with Mrs. Cowan about the message not being well received. Mrs. Petrella noted that Dr. Leggett has extensive knowledge of curriculum development and if a contracted consultant were to be used the needs of the district would need to be redefined, which will ultimately help the hiring process. Dr. Darcy stated that there have been discussions previously regarding extricating the board members from the position of making decisions for the district and this is an appropriate time to start that process.

C. Policy Review**1. Second read and possible vote on series 6000 (part 3, continued)**

Mr. Moore updated the board on the policy changes and reviews, including the following:

- a. Diversity Policy 6001
- b. Equity and Diversity – CABE
- c. Organizations 6145.5

Dr. Darcy made a motion to adopt Diversity Policy 6001, Equity and Diversity, and Organizations 6145.5, seconded by Mr. Stone.

All in favor of adopting Diversity Policy 6001, Equity and Diversity, and Organizations 6145.5: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, and Mr. Roraback. Mrs. Cowan abstained. Motion carried.

Committee Reports

A. Building Committee Meeting – June 18, 2025

Mr. Moore reviewed information from the Building Committee meeting held on June 18, 2025. The recommendation of Diversity Construction was approved for the swing space construction. The new portables are currently being constructed. QA+M revised their layout by moving the tennis and pickleball courts behind the school, which allowed for more parking on the left side of the parking lot. Testing for the septic system has begun. There were multiple motions made to pay different bills which were all approved. It was determined that Memorial cannot be labeled as a full emergency shelter, however a meeting with Middlefield representatives will be held to discuss what their needs will be. There was a discussion on hiring a commissioning agent. Mr. Thomas Makuch and Mrs. Judi Rand expressed concerns about their property, which was addressed at a separate meeting with Mrs. Dahlheimer and O&G. Mr. Moore noted that the track should be completed by August 1, 2025, at the latest. A long-term plan to replace the tennis courts was deemed necessary, which would cost approximately \$500,000. The fire sprinkling system will be finished this summer in both Strong School and Coginchaug, which will be hooked up to the city water.

Public Comment

A. In-person Public Comment

Amanda Betty, from Durham, requested the Student Achievement Committee meetings become virtual for parents to attend.

Mrs. Betty expressed concerns about the Board of Education chair. Mrs. Betty noted that it was rumored that the chair was working in coordination with a member of the public to influence district fundraising policies. She believes these actions reflect a pattern of behavior that is inconsistent with the ethical standards expected from district leadership. Mrs. Betty called for the immediate resignation of the board chair and if that does not occur, she urged the board to launch a formal investigation.

Jen Smith, from Durham, also expressed concerns over the Board of Education chair. Mrs. Smith shared social media comments supposedly made by the chair. She also noted that the chair has been speaking with members of the community regarding business of the board. Mrs. Smith asked the board to act and remove the chair from the Board of Education immediately.

Gwen Hutter, from Middlefield and Durham, also noted concerns about the Board of Education chair. Mrs. Hutter explained that she feels that the chair's intentions are not in the right place. Mrs. Hutter requested that the chair be investigated fully and not allowed to run for a second term.

Catherine O'Rourke, from Middlefield, voiced concerns about the Board of Education chair. She stated that the pattern of behavior is creating chaos and unnecessary animosity within the community while also interfering with the orderly and efficient operation of the district. Mrs. O'Rourke asked the board to conduct a full and transparent investigation into the chair and requested the chair step down.

Emily Smith, from Durham, explained that she has played on various teams that Anthony DeFilio coached and stands in support of him. Ms. Smith stated she believes it will be detrimental to the community to allow the chair to continue serving.

Kristina Manning, from Durham, called for the chair of the board to resign.

B. Remote Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education

In favor of adjourning the regular meeting of the Board of Education: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Scarozzo