

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held the Annual Meeting of Regional School District 13 of the State of Connecticut on May 4, 2026, at 7:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, CT 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.

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

Board of Education Members Absent: Mr. Stone, Mr. DeIVecchio, and Mrs. Caramanello

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

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

*Richard Parmelee made a motion, seconded by Jennifer Keane to nominate Norm Hicks as the moderator.*

*All in favor of accepting Norm Hicks as the moderator: Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.*

Mr. Hicks requested Mr. Konstantino to read the warning of the annual meeting and referendum and the return of the call into the record.

Mr. Moore was called upon to present the Regional School District 13 2026-2027 proposed budget. The proposed school budget totals \$44.46 million (gross), a 4.5% increase from last year, with a net budget of \$43.08 million, reflecting a 4.87% increase after accounting for revenues such as fees, grants, and state aid. The increase is driven primarily by salaries (2.44%), along with smaller contributions from benefits (0.38%), operating services (1.04%), and debt service (1.44%), partially offset by a 0.8% decrease in other costs. The budget covers all school-related expenses, including staffing, transportation, utilities, and operations, while operating services specifically include tuition, leases, insurance, and student transportation within and outside the district. The 0.8% decrease in “other” costs comes mainly from reduced spending on facilities, grounds maintenance, supplies, capital expenses, and dues/fees. Salaries are now budgeted at 100% staffing, unlike prior years. Additional salary pressure also comes from contractual obligations, while benefits had a moderate increase (0.38%). Salaries increased by just over \$1 million and benefits by about \$159,000.00, contributing significantly to the overall budget growth.

Mr. Moore continued to review several key changes in spending and revenue. Operating services increase by \$442,000.00 and debt service was returned to the general fund in the amount of \$613,000.00, while multiple areas see reductions, including facilities and grounds (down about \$6,000.00), supplies (down about \$107,000.00), capital (down \$300,000.00), dues and fees (down \$8,000.00), and purchased services

(about \$86,000.00). Revenue sources include fees from adult education, facility rentals, interest income, tuition, student activity fees, and fund balance. The fund balance is steadily declined from \$729,000.00 two years ago to a projected \$450,000.00, additionally, other grants have decreased.

The proposed staffing changes include the reductions of a .50 PE/Health position, a 1.0 Grade 1 teaching position, a 1.0 Music teacher position, a 1.0 speech pathologist, a .50 non-certified administrative assistant position, and a 1.0 grant funded social worker position.

However, there are also additions, including a 1.0 library media specialist to support evolving student needs, particularly around technology and AI, and a partially restored social worker position (0.6 FTE) in anticipation of future grant funding. Historically, the budget shows notable declines in 2016–17 (due to the closure of Korn school) and 2019–20 (due to COVID-19), followed by a period of recovery.

Mr. Moore reviewed the Capital Reserve budget. The district has historically been limited to allocating only 1% of its budget to capital projects, which has made it difficult to fund major needs like tennis court replacements costing \$1.2–\$3 million, so current efforts focus on smaller improvements (e.g., cooling systems, bleachers, and safety upgrades). Operating and maintenance costs are shared between towns based on student population, with Durham covering about 65% and Middlefield about 35%, using a five-year rolling average to stabilize fluctuations. State funding includes an ECS grant of about \$3.4 million for Durham and \$1 million for Middlefield, resulting in increased net costs to both towns. The district's overall budget increase is roughly in line with state and regional averages (4–5%). Mr. Moore concluded the proposed budget presentations by noting the upcoming budget referendum for community approval on May 5, 2026 at the Community Center in Durham and the Community Center in Middlefield.

The moderator opened discussion to the public for questions and comments.

Mr. Parmelee, a community member expressed support to Regional School District 13 for holding a budget referendum, noting it gives more residents the opportunity to vote and engage in the process. The participant then asked about maintenance responsibilities for Pickett Lane, a private road, and was told that the school district handles snow and ice removal, while the town maintains the community center parking lot. Questions were also raised about state funding (ECS grants), with clarification that increased funds go directly to the towns to offset their costs, but do not change the district's overall budget increase.

Craig Bradanini, president of the teachers' association, expressed strong support for the proposed school budget, emphasizing that its 4.5% increase is below state and regional averages, demonstrating fiscal responsibility. Mr. Bradanini acknowledged the difficult impact of reducing several full-time positions, noting these cuts affect real staff and programs, but said the district has worked to preserve core educational quality, student support, and learning opportunities. Mr. Bradanini also highlighted the added challenge of planning for future elementary school restructuring, stating the budget responsibly addresses both current needs and long-term goals. Mr. Bradanini described the proposal as balanced, strategic, and student-focused, urging the community to support it as an investment in the district's future.

Alma Elder from Middlefield thanked the Board for their work and asked for more information about the increase in funding for magnet schools, including clarification on what they are, how they are used, and how many students attend them. In response, Dr. Leggett explained that magnet schools are optional

programs families can choose, and that the funding increase is tied to a statewide allocation for magnet schools. Mrs. Petrella reviewed the district monthly report from April and noted there were 15 students attending magnet schools.

A participant shared his appreciation of Memorial School and its connection to honoring veterans, noting that a Durham veteran's wife was one of the individuals who placed the cornerstone for the school. The participant believes this school name should have remained unchanged.

Mr. Moore explained the district's building naming process, noting that a formal committee was formed in accordance with policy, including board members, teachers, and residents from both Durham and Middlefield. The committee reviewed survey results from the community and identified three frequently suggested names, which were then shared publicly for voting and presented in schools for student input across grade levels. After this broad engagement process and voting results, the committee recommended the name "Three Oaks Elementary School," which was approved by the board. Mr. Moore also noted that the process went beyond policy requirements and included significant community and student involvement. Dr. Darcy added that the Memorial School cornerstone and historical elements will be preserved, including recognition of its original significance and the veterans it honors. Plans were also discussed to continue honoring veterans across the district and to carry forward legacy names by incorporating them into spaces within the new building (such as the gym, cafeteria, and library named after the former schools).

The moderator entered a motion to adjourn the meeting until 6:00 a. m. tomorrow morning for the referendum.

*Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to adjourn the meeting until 6:00 a.m. tomorrow morning for the referendum.*

*All in favor of accepting the motion to adjourn the meeting until 6:00 a.m. tomorrow morning for the referendum: Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.*

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio