

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Finance Committee met in special session on Wednesday, September 16, 2026 at 6:00 p.m.

Finance Committee Members Present: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Buckheit, and Mr. Stengel

Finance Committee Members Absent: Mr. DelVecchio, Mr. Stone, Mr. Konstantino, Mrs. Opalacz, and Mr. Neidhardt

Board of Education Members Present: Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Viens

Administration Present: Dr. Leggett, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance
Durham Board of Finance Members in Attendance: Mr. Muzio and Mr. Castro

Mrs. Cowan called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Approval of Agenda

Due to lack of quorum, no vote for approval of agenda took place.

Approval of Minutes – March 18, 2026

Due to lack of quorum, no vote for the approval of minutes took place.

2027-2028 Budget Discussion

The committee members discussed that the state reimbursement rate has increased to 68.21%, significantly reducing the financial burden on the towns, while the project remains capped at the approved \$76.13 million. The permit-fee dispute was settled, with \$380,340 remitted to the district, however, the district still needs documentation of Middlefield's project-related costs and staff hours to receive state reimbursement. It was clarified that Middlefield's permit-fee estimate was based on a commercial-building formula applied to the project value, while the lack of documented hours was a separate concern affecting reimbursement. The committee members expressed concern that missing documentation could reduce reimbursement and increase Durham's share of the project's debt, and the district is continuing to pursue the necessary records. Committee members also discussed potential legislative changes to prevent similar permit-fee issues for regional school districts and emphasized the need for accurate public communication about which costs are being paid by the project versus the towns.

Dr. Leggett shared an article showing how school costs have increased over decades as districts have taken on additional responsibilities while operating within essentially the same school day and number of instructional days. As budget season begins, the committee discussed major cost pressures, including special education and health care, and stressed the importance of clearly explaining these drivers to taxpayers while continuing to work with state legislators on broader education-funding issues. Discussion emphasized the need for clear, proactive communication with taxpayers about these cost drivers, while also examining departmental spending closely and looking for efficiencies before the upcoming budget and referendum season.

Committee members addressed improving communication and community engagement around the upcoming budget, with plans for earlier videos, FAQs, and greater collaboration between the school district and town finance groups. Members also discussed balancing budget reductions with maintaining appropriate staffing, class sizes, and specialized academic programs, particularly at the high school.

The discussion concluded with thoughts on how to analyze high school success, establishing whether students find the right post-graduation pathway program including four-year college, community college, apprenticeships, certifications, and direct-to-work programs. The district is pursuing expanded career and dual-enrollment opportunities.

Update on Three Oaks Memorial School

Dr. Leggett clarified that correspondence stating “Middlefield paid” can be misleading, because costs associated with the project are paid from the project budget rather than directly by the town. The district will continue monitoring the permit-fee situation while preparing for upcoming budgeting and financing, including converting existing bond anticipation notes into bonds and issuing additional notes, with a portion of that debt service to be included in the 2027–28 budget.

The project is progressing as expected, although there have been some delays due to material coordination and unexpected site conditions. The contractor has been using budgeted Saturday work to recover the lost time and has already made up more than a week.

Dr. Leggett reported that the district is working with attorneys and both towns on the disposition of Brewster and Lyman schools, with Brewster subject to a \$1.50 purchase option for the town of Durham. Committee members discussed potentially using school gym space for community programming and revenue, while continuing to prioritize student activities.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Adjournment

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Ms. Cowan, to adjourn the meeting.

All in favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Buckheit, and Mr. Stengel. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio