

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the library Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board of Education Members Present: Mrs. Cowan (left at 8:41), Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons (arrived at 6:48), Mrs. Caramanello (arrived 6:30), Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino (attended remotely)

Board of Education Members Absent: Mr. DelVecchio and Mr. Stone

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

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the agenda as presented.

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

Presentations

A. Brewster Student Presentation – The Piglet Mindset Program

Students from Brewster School presented The Piglet Mindset Program from their Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum. Piglet is a real dog who is blind and deaf and has visited the school. Through Piglet’s story, students learned important SEL skills such as inclusion, kindness, flexibility, perseverance, responsibility, and teamwork. They discussed how Piglet relies on his pack for support and connected that idea to their own “Piglet Pack” at school. Students shared drawings and examples showing how they practice these SEL skills in everyday situations, such as helping others, inviting someone to play, adapting to changes in plans, and not giving up when something is difficult. They concluded by expressing how much they enjoyed learning about Piglet and thanked the Board for their time. Board members thanked the students for their presentation and students were dismissed from the meeting.

B. Report of Independent Audit FY 2025 – Discussion and Possible Vote to Accept Audit Report

David Flint of CliftonLarsonAllen, the district’s audit firm, presented the annual audit results and reported an unmodified opinion on the district’s financial statements. Mr. Flint reported that the district maintains four major funds: the general fund, school cafeteria fund, special school grants and programs fund, and capital reserve fund, along with other smaller governmental funds combined. Mr. Flint reported that the pension trust fund is 97.9% funded, with a \$13.6 million net position and a strong 12.2% investment

return. The district's long-term liabilities include \$6.2 million in outstanding bonds and \$5.6 million in lease liabilities for equipment.

Mrs. Cowan asked how the district could show spending exceeding \$50.9 million in revenue on the change in net position statement. Mr. Flint explained that this figure is presented on the full accrual basis of accounting, which includes long term liabilities such as pension and OPEB obligations. Fluctuations in those liabilities can significantly impact the reported change in net position from year to year, even if day-to-day operations are stable. For a clearer picture of financial health, he recommended focusing on the fund financial statements.

Mrs. Cowan also questioned the large fluctuation in the Capital Reserve Fund. Mr. Flint explained that capital funds often show major swings due to the timing of project expenditures, debt service payments, and grant reimbursements. Large construction projects can create temporary deficits until state reimbursements are received. While receivables for reimbursements are recorded, they are deferred if not received within 60 days of year end, which is a requirement of governmental accounting and can make the year-end flow appear uneven.

Mr. Flint reviewed federal grant expenditures. Overall, the audit results were positive with no major concerns. Mrs. Neubig and the financial department were commended for their work on the financial statements and the audit preparations.

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, to approve the FY25 Independent audit report.

All in favor of accepting the FY 25 Independent audit report as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.

Public Comment

A. In-person public comment

Elizabeth Shoudy, a Durham resident, read a letter on behalf of Christina Talbert Slagle, also a Durham resident and parent of RSD 13 graduates. In the letter, Ms. Talbert Slagle asked the Board of Education to rescind and redo its prior vote supporting indemnification for former Board Chair Lindsay Dahlheimer following findings by the Durham Ethics Commission that Mrs. Dahlheimer violated the town's Code of Ethics. Ms. Talbert Slagle stated that the previous vote was conducted improperly and expressed concern about the district's reputation and said that ongoing controversies have distracted from the district's primary mission of providing strong, educational opportunities. Ms. Talbert Slagle urged the board to honor the Board of Selectmen's request for a re-vote, and ultimately vote no on indemnification, arguing that taxpayer funds and district insurance should not be used to cover Mrs. Dahlheimer's legal expenses. She concluded that a decisive public action would help restore trust and signal that this chapter is over.

Rhonda Riggott-Stevens, a Durham resident and parent of two district graduates, spoke in support of reconsidering the Board of Education's prior vote to indemnify former Chair Lindsay Dahleimer. Referencing a timeline of events and documents obtained through FOI requests, she questioned whether board members had all relevant facts before voting. She cited correspondence from the district's

insurance representative indicating the lawsuit appeared to be a personal matter and not related to Mrs. Dahlheimer's official capacity, which could affect eligibility for indemnification coverage. Mrs. Riggott-Stevens also referenced legal billing records related to indemnification discussions and the board's July 16 vote approving indemnification under Connecticut statute. She urged the board to ask whether Mrs. Dahlheimer was acting in her official capacity as board chair when filing complaints that allegedly led to the lawsuit, and whether documentation, such as the original complaint filings or DCF report, identified her as a parent or as a board official. Mrs. Riggott-Stevens further requested that the board review any memorandum submitted to the insurance company analyzing coverage eligibility.

B. Remote public comment

Amanda Betty, a Durham resident, spoke in support of a re-vote on indemnification for former Board Chair Lindsay Dahlheimer. Ms. Betty emphasized that this is not a political issue but a necessary correction to a documented failure of transparency and fiscal responsibility. Ms. Betty highlighted that the July 16th agenda and presentation were misleading, with items added after private discussions between the former chair, Mr. Moore, and the superintendent. She noted contradictory insurance information indicating the lawsuit appeared personal, yet the board was presented with a legal framing that downplayed that fact. Ms. Betty argued that by ignoring the Ethics Commission's findings and the broker's warning, the board exposed the district to significant legal and financial risk. Ms. Betty urged the board to conduct a transparent re-vote, free from conflicts of interest and based on full disclosure, in order to restore integrity and demonstrate accountability to the community and students.

Approval of Minutes

- A. Board of Education Meeting - January 14, 2026
- B. Board of Education Retreat - January 24, 2026
- C. Board of Education Training Meeting - January 28, 2026

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the January 14, 2026 and January 24, 2026 meeting minutes as presented, and the amended January 28, 2026 meeting minutes to reflect Mrs. Cowan was not present for the meeting's adjournment.

All in favor of approving the January 14, 2026 and January 24, 2026 meeting minutes as presented, and the January 28, 2026 meeting minutes with the proposed adjournment amendment: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Mrs. Caramanello abstained. Motion passed by majority vote.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Leggett presented the Superintendent's report, establishing that the district's strategic planning work, particularly the "Vision of a Graduate," is progressing well and will now include a complementary "Vision of Instruction." Mr. Moore inquired about what a "Vision of Instruction" entails. Dr. Leggett explained that the "Vision of Instruction" is being developed to define key non-negotiable attributes and expectations for teaching practices across pre-K-12 and transition, ensuring alignment with the desired

graduate outcomes. Early drafts will be ready for community feedback by late March or early April. Dr. Leggett noted that much of tonight's meeting would focus on the budget and the report was submitted as written.

Staff Report - Director of Finance

A. Discussion and Possible Vote to Transfer Completed Capital Project Reserve Funds

Mrs. Neubig presented a financial update, reporting that as of the end of January, 55% of the budget had been expended, 97% encumbered, and 59% of revenue received. A vote is presented before the Board to transfer funds from completed or abandoned Capital Reserve projects back to the General Fund to help manage the net budget increase. Specific projects being transferred would include \$20,000.00 for asbestos tile removal at Lyman, \$5,966.00 for ceiling tiles at Coginchaug, \$54,000.00 for exterior doors at Brewster, and \$439,064.08 for the pump house sprinkler system (paid by bond funds), totaling \$519,024.24. These funds would go to the General Fund balance and be used to offset the 26/27 budget.

Mr. Simmons questioned what other options would be if the funds were not moved to the General Fund. Mrs. Neubig explained that the funds from completed or abandoned Capital Reserve projects could either remain in the Capital Reserve to be identified for future projects or be transferred to the General Fund to help reduce the net budget increase, which in turn lowers the potential impact on taxpayers. Using the funds to offset the budget helps lower the assessment, but keeping them in the Capital Reserve would allow them to be earmarked for other projects. Dr. Leggett noted that unlike prior years, there is currently no remaining fund balance available to draw from for this kind of offset.

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Lucy Petrella, to transfer completed Capital Project Reserve Funds in the amount of \$519, 030.24 to the General Fund balance for FY 26.

All in favor of the transfer of completed Capital Project Reserve Funds in the amount of \$519, 030.24 to the General Fund balance for FY 26 as presented: *Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.*

2026-2027 Superintendent's Budget Presentation

Dr. Leggett introduced the proposed Region 13 budget for the 2026–27 school year, emphasizing a balance between “roots” (essential operational foundations like safe schools and core resources) and “wings” (growth initiatives, strategic planning, and new state requirements), with all decisions focused on student learning. The gross budget is \$44,718,571.00, a 5.11% increase over last year, while the net budget, the amount taxpayers will fund, is \$43,343,129.00, a 5.51% increase due to limited available fund balance. Key contributors to the increase include budgeting salaries at 100% instead of factoring in a vacancy factor due to staff attrition (1.2%), contractual obligations (1.15%), health insurance benefits (1.08%), operating services (1.04%), and debt service (1.44%), with small offsets in other areas (-0.8%). Mrs. Neubig reported that expenditure changes include increases in salaries (\$1,000,387.00), benefits (\$458,584.00), operating services (\$442,719.00), and debt service (\$613,200.00), while decreases occurred in facilities/grounds, supplies, and capital. Revenue sources include fund balance (\$450,000.00

from transferred completed or abandoned projects), grants, fees, and tuition, which together cover the net budget. Mrs. Neubig clarified that the gross budget reflects total expenditures, while the net budget is what the towns pay after revenue offsets, explaining why the net percentage increase is higher.

Dr. Leggett reviewed the proposed staffing changes, which include the addition of a full-time library media specialist and an assistant golf coach to accommodate increased participation of girls in particular. Reductions involve a 0.5 PE/Health teacher, a first-grade teacher (due to declining enrollment), one full-time music teacher (maintaining program quality with six teachers for 1,300+ students), a full-time speech-language pathologist (based on IEP needs), a social worker (grant-funded position ended), and a reduction of the athletic director's administrative assistant to half-time. Other considerations include reduction of a full-time high school English teacher and the reduction of the director of teaching and learning position, still under discussion.

Additional adjustments include converting ABA therapists to 10-month contracts with the ability to work summer services, removal of a general summer school program (excluding kindergarten academy and extended school year), and elimination of certain stipends tied to past initiatives. Nurse substitute pay is increased to remain competitive with hospitals, alongside potential incentives for consistent substitute coverage.

Dr. Leggett established that salaries account for \$1,000,387.00 of the total \$2,176,024.00 expenditure increase, representing 56% of the budget, with 100% of positions budgeted (no vacancy factor).

Mrs. Neubig presented that benefits increased by \$458,000.00, driven mainly by a 14% health insurance rise (\$455,000.00) and the Actuarially Determined Employer Contribution (pension) of \$353,000.00, maintaining a 97% funding ratio. Purchase services increased (\$86,000.00) which include OT/PT, professional development, auditors, legal, security, technical support, and maintenance of building automation systems. Facilities and grounds had a minor decrease (\$6,397), with new items for bleacher inspections, power washing, and minimal snow removal/landscaping at Memorial. Operating services increased \$442,000.00. This includes daily and special education transportation, VOAG, athletics, field trips, propane and diesel for buses, and tuition for magnet schools, outplacements, and adult education grants (pass through revenue). Operating services also cover technology, vehicle, and energy leases, insurance (auto, property, general umbrella, student accident), and six students budgeted for Middlesex Transition Academy, with tuition projected at current rates.

Dr. Leggett reported that the supplies budget decreased by \$106,972 (3.22% of total budget, reducing the overall increase by 0.25%). This covers textbooks, library books, instructional and athletic supplies, nurse and office supplies, technology supplies, custodial/maintenance materials, and utilities like natural gas and electricity.

There is a proposed Capital and Equipment budget decrease of \$303,688.00 (2.18% of total budget), including capital reserve allocation of \$400,000.00 (partially funded; full funding would be \$800,000.00). New items include two ovens for high school food classes and email monitoring software for school safety. Dr. Leggett proposed delaying the \$400,000.00 tennis court repair in favor of a \$1 million post-tension concrete solution, which would last 30 years versus a shorter-term repair. Capital reserve allocations also cover HVAC glycol replacement, bleacher automation, athletic field/turf, chiller/chiller

pump, track, and unanticipated building repairs, with small supplemental funds from a state DRIP (District Repair Improvement Program) grant.

Mrs. Neubig presented the proposed debt service budget increase of \$613,200 (1.44% of total budget). This covers principal and interest on a \$6.9 million bond from 2019 for district improvements. Memorial School debt service is being funded through construction costs, so no additional debt service hits the general fund this year but will transfer to the general fund at the completion of the project. This area shows as a large increase as it was not paid from the general fund last year, rather through the capital reserve account with the bond premium funds.

For the Middlesex Transition Academy, this year RSD 13 has nine students enrolled and eight students from other sending districts. Next year, the budget assumes 10 RSD 13 students and 12 students from sending districts. Projected revenue is \$1,027,200.00, while projected expenditures are \$1,049,055.00, showing a slight budget deficit. These are estimates and are not realized until final enrollment is known.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed the proposed Per-Pupil Expenditure. The 2024–25 audited data shows a \$29,509.00 per student cost (RSD 13 average \$28,648.00, state \$24, 251.00). Regional School Districts typically have higher operating costs as Regional Districts do not have a public works department and must pay for services that can be provided by local public works departments. Regional Districts also cover more ground with the buses for higher transportation costs. RSD13 also has 5 school buildings, which exceeds our enrollment needs. The estimated 2026–27 per-pupil cost is \$29,830.00, with expectations to align closer to regional district averages after the Memorial construction completion. Dr. Leggett noted that declining enrollment also contributes to higher per-student costs due to fixed overhead.

Dr. Leggett explained that budget review continues with budget work sessions on March 11 and March 18, a finance committee meeting on March 18, a public hearing on April 1, a district meeting on May 4, and the referendum on May 5. Dr. Leggett concluded the presentation by acknowledging pride in the staff of the district and the programs that are offered to students and families, as well as acknowledging a commitment to maintaining high-quality programs for students and families as the Board reviews the proposed budget. Mrs. Neubig also thanked the partnership and work of colleagues, administrators, and the Central Office staff for their work on the proposed budget.

Mr. Roraback questioned if the board of finance for both towns had received the budget proposals. Mrs. Neubig clarified that the Board receives the budget first, with hard copies sent to libraries and town halls, and a PDF version will be available as well. The Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for March 18th, giving the public an opportunity to review details. Mrs. Petrella also asked if the transfer of Capital Reserve funds to the General Fund was reflected in the budget proposal. Mrs. Neubig reviewed that the fund balance shows \$450,000.00 applied to offset the net budget increase; without it, the net increase would be 6.51% instead of the current 5.51%. Mr. Moore questioned where Region 13 stands in comparison to Region 2 or other regional school districts. Dr. Leggett established that comparisons show budget increases ranging from roughly 4.75% to 11%, with Region 13 near the state average of about 5%.

Chairman's Update

A. Board of Education Training Session

Mr. Moore presented the Chairman's update, discussing the aspirations for the district, which were created by the Board members at the recent Board training. The aspirations include the following:

1. The district is recognized for excellence in education with a curriculum that helps students achieve growth goals.
2. The district provides a safe, welcoming, and caring environment, meeting all student needs.
3. Administrators and teachers are recognized and rewarded for excellence, fostering a joyful school environment.
4. Facilities are safe, pleasant, and designed to enhance student learning.
5. The Board of Education is cohesive, open, trustworthy, and communicates effectively with parents and the community.

Mr. Moore reviewed that these aspirations are intended to guide future goals, budgeting decisions, and district planning. Mr. Moore also shared updates that a newsletter summarizing fall activities and the Memorial School project had been printed and was distributed, and that Memorial School project content is also accessible online.

Update on Memorial Project

Angela Cahill, STV project manager, provided an update on the Memorial School project. Ms. Cahill established that Phase three is pending the state approval letter, after which O&G will go out to bid, with an initial 30-day bid period and possible extensions.

Phase IV, covering furniture, fixtures, equipment (FF&E), and playgrounds, will involve staff input and model classrooms in August for planning. State contracts may be used to expedite procurement. Ms. Cahill reported the current budget is slightly over by \$300,000.00, but alternates from the value engineering exercise will provide flexibility to stay within budget. Updated renderings and a flyover of the school have been shared online and in newsletters.

Mr. Roraback discussed the firehouse project that is currently under construction in Middlefield and requested Ms. Cahill to explain why a school project would take longer than a municipal project like the firehouse. Ms. Cahill shared that differences between a municipal project, like the firehouse project, and the school renovation include project size, funding sources, and review complexity. The school project involves multiple state agencies, approvals, and larger design documentation (500 sheets of drawings), whereas the firehouse project is smaller, fully designed upfront, and deals primarily with a single entity. Funding approval sequencing also delays school projects compared to smaller municipal projects. Mrs. Cowan clarified that the fire house project had design renderings established prior to approval, whereas after the school project was approved, the Board had to go through the design process and other required elements. Mrs. Petrella also noted the cost difference between the two projects, where the firehouse is \$8 million and the school project is \$78 million.

Board Communications and Professional Development

Mr. Moore reviewed recent communications and letters, including several letters regarding snow policies, three letters and communications on the graduation policy, which were referred back to the policy committee for review, a letter concerning the budget related to an English teacher position, which remains in the budget, and an ethics letter from Brendan Ray, pending review. Mr. Moore thanked four Board members who are going to participate in classes on Read Across America on March 2. Mr. Moore also presented student concerns about the Shoreline track meet conflicting with the prom, which will be reviewed for possible schedule adjustments.

Mr. Roraback attended the National Oceanographic Sciences Bowl at UConn Avery Point, where students from the district's team, the "Cephalopods," competed against peers from Rhode Island, New York, and Connecticut. Mr. Roraback recognized the three students for their hard work, as well as acknowledged a longtime mentor, Laurie Martin, for her work continuing to inspire students.

New Business**A. Vote to Approve Strong Field Trip - Camp Jewell**

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, to approve the Strong Field Trip to Camp Jewell.

All in favor of approving the Strong Field Trip to Camp Jewell as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.

B. Vote to Accept Merwin Funds

The Charles B. Merwin Fund, established about a century ago, supports teacher-proposed projects reviewed by trustees, awarding grants annually or multiple times per year. This year's grants included \$500 to Grade 5 at Coginchaug Regional High School for the *Echo Outreach* program, proposed by science teacher Rachel Mann, \$400 to Maura Broggi for on-site visitor programs to enhance the Grade 6 curriculum with lectures in literature and science, and \$7,345.91 to Ryan Donecker for the *Coginchaug Print Company*, a student-run custom apparel business, to purchase a DTF Station Prestige A4 Shaker and Oven Bundle. This supports student projects making aprons, uniforms, and other apparel, including *Restore the Core* t-shirts.

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, to approve the acceptance of the Charles B. Merwin grants.

All in favor of approving the acceptance of the Charles B. Merwin grants as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.

C. Vote to Approve Committee Appointment - Student Member to Student Achievement Committee

Dr. Darcy requested a motion for Will Overton to be approved as a non-voting student representative to serve on the Student Achievement Committee.

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, for the approval of Will Overton as a non-voting student member to serve on the Student Achievement Committee.

All in favor of the approval of Will Overton as a non-voting student member of the Student Achievement Committee: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.

D. Discussion and Possible Vote regarding Durham Board of Selectman letter

The board members held a detailed discussion about whether to rescind a prior vote related to indemnification of a former board member. Dr. Leggett explained that reconsideration must occur in the same meeting, but rescinding a vote later requires meeting a higher legal threshold (such as a two-thirds majority or an absolute majority of six members) or should be clearly listed on a future agenda with the exact motion stated for maximum transparency. Dr. Leggett recommended waiting until the March 11 meeting, allowing time for legal guidance and for newer board members to be fully informed. Mr. Moore supported the suggestion to wait until March 11 so newly appointed board members could have time to review all necessary information. Dr. Leggett also clarified that rescinding the vote would not affect indemnification or insurance coverage, as those protections exist by law regardless of the board's vote. Mrs. Cowan clarified that once the case settles, underwriters would then determine whether coverage remains in place. Dr. Leggett added that if a board member were ultimately found to have acted with malice, indemnification would not apply and insurance would not cover the costs, meaning the individual would be personally responsible.

Mrs. Cowan also questioned if the exact motion was included on the March 11 agenda, would there be public discussion, executive session, or a combination. Dr. Leggett proposed an executive session to have legal counsel as guidance, as well as a public discussion for transparency. In addition, Dr. Leggett reminded the board that all votes are taken in public session.

Mrs. Caramanello stated that she felt legal counsel is not necessary to rescind the prior vote, especially since she disagreed with the vote originally. Mrs. Caramanello expressed the board never received a clear explanation for why the vote was required. She continued to state that if the vote had no real effect, that alone justifies rescinding it to acknowledge that the board should not have voted in the first place. Mrs. Caramanello also expressed discomfort with delaying the decision to brief newer members, particularly if doing so would involve sharing selective or one-sided information from executive session discussions.

Dr. Leggett emphasized that the purpose of executive session would be for legal counsel to advise the board on the process and complete ramifications of rescinding a vote. Mr. Moore stated that rescinding a vote is a rare and important action for a school board to consider and before doing so, the board should

have legal counsel to advise on the full consequences of that action. Mrs. Cowan reminded board members that the Board has rescinded a vote once in the past, although the two situations are different.

Mrs. Petrella explained the previous rescinded vote occurred at the next meeting, involved the same board members, had a clear effect, and carried no legal complications. In contrast, this current issue involves legal considerations, an Ethics Committee ruling, and uncertainty about broader implications.

Mrs. Caramanello contended that rescinding the vote would simply acknowledge that the board should not have voted in executive session after two hours of testimony. Dr. Darcy agreed with Mrs. Caramanello that the original vote should not have happened, emphasizing that it was a “performative” vote and not about the lawsuit’s merits.

Mrs. Cowan stated as a Durham elected representative, she has an obligation to address the Durham Board of Selectmen’s letter and the findings from the Durham Ethics Committee, establishing that she stands by her original vote and questioning why the board needed to vote. Mrs. Caramanello agreed, and posed the same question.

Dr. Leggett clarified that the Ethics Committee did not rule the vote itself illegal, but rather took issue with that one particular member’s participation. Dr. Leggett also explained that at the time, there was widespread misinformation about the lawsuit, and the attorney advised that a vote would demonstrate that board members, having received confidential legal guidance, supported indemnification.

However, Mrs. Caramanello expressed frustration that she felt insufficiently informed before being asked to vote, identifying that information revealed through FOI requests was not presented to members during executive session before voting.

Mr. Moore replied that prior to the original vote, there had been widespread discussion of the lawsuit in newspapers and on social media, even though many board members had not yet seen the actual complaint. The executive session was intended to review the lawsuit’s details and clarify what it involved so members were not relying solely on public commentary. Mr. Moore emphasized that newer board members should receive the same background information before any decision to rescind is made, and suggested drafting a clear motion and updating them on the legal issues discussed in executive session, even within a short timeframe.

Mr. Simmons stated that, as someone who was not present for the original vote, he believes a motion to rescind is appropriate. Mr. Simmons also expressed openness to holding an executive session to better understand the general process for rescinding a vote, separate from the specifics of this issue. However, Mr. Simmons emphasized that, based on the communications received, the original vote had no actual impact on whether the insurance company would provide indemnification. Mr. Simmons questioned whether the vote was merely a symbolic show of support for the board member or an attempt to formally determine indemnification, noting that the board’s vote does not ultimately control the insurance company’s decision.

Dr. Leggett again clarified that, legally, a board vote is not required for indemnification because board members are automatically covered under the law as public officials. In response, Mr. Moore noted that

the original motion referenced a specific section of the law identifying the individual as indemnified and that the vote was simply acknowledging an existing legal fact.

Dr. Darcy suggested that new members may not need additional legal counsel in order to rescind the prior vote. Dr. Darcy argued the original vote was largely “performative” and had no real legal effect, so rescinding it would simply acknowledge that it should not have occurred. She shared that she felt the vote was presented as a foregone conclusion at the time, with the executive session intended only to inform members on the facts prior to voting, not whether a vote should happen at all. Therefore, in her opinion, further legal consultation is unnecessary if the goal is simply to rescind that action.

Mrs. Petrella expressed concern about setting a precedent by rescinding the vote, arguing that it could suggest the board might revisit any past decision if enough public pressure is applied. She worried this could undermine the stability and integrity of board actions, noting that the board has made many significant decisions, such as hiring votes, that could similarly be challenged if public opinion shifted.

Mrs. Cowan emphasized that while pushback and feedback happen regularly on routine decisions, like hiring an ELA teacher, this situation is different. It stems from an ethics complaint investigated independently and thoroughly, which was viewed as unbiased and credible. Mrs. Cowan framed it as an extraordinary circumstance, distinct from typical constituent feedback, that warrants special consideration by the board. Mr. Simmons agreed that the complaint is beyond an individual and signifies a matter brought forth to the Board by the town of Durham.

Dr. Darcy pushed back against the Ethics Committee’s notion that a board member’s presence influenced her vote. Dr. Darcy emphasized that the board has made unpopular decisions before and stood by them, and that, in her opinion, the original vote shouldn’t have happened. Dr. Darcy’s focus is on doing “the next right thing” to resolve the issue and move forward, rather than responding to external pressures.

Mr. Roraback emphasized the importance of moving past the current issue to protect the volunteer culture in Durham and Middlefield. Mr. Roraback stressed that volunteers dedicate serious time and effort, and the perception that this work is easy or profitable is incorrect. Drawing from personal experience with lawsuits, Mr. Roraback highlighted the serious, personal consequences that legal disputes can have and stressed the need to safeguard volunteers’ well-being. Mr. Roraback’s message is clear: acknowledge past issues, but prioritize moving forward to protect the community and its volunteers.

Discussion concluded with a plan to draft the exact motion to meet legal requirements and put it on the March 11 agenda. Board members debated whether legal counsel needed to be present: some members feel it’s unnecessary if counsel has already reviewed the motion, while others note that an executive session would only be needed if there’s potential legal risk. Lastly, Dr. Leggett discussed the policy around abstaining votes may need to be revisited by the policy committee to prevent confusion in the future, ensuring clarity for future board actions.

E. Policy Review

1. First read

a. Library Collection Development and Maintenance

- b. Library Displays and Programs
- c. Library Materials Review and Reconsideration

Mrs. Cowan reviewed three library-related policies brought forward by Mrs. Lucier at the January 21st meeting. These policies, sourced from CABE, were chosen instead of a single policy to make regulation simpler and clearer, and they are specifically intended for libraries, not curriculum. Mrs. Lucier was recognized for her significant work and dedication, including her role in drafting related laws. Dr. Leggett suggested that once the policies move to the second reading and adoption, the district should set up a mock book challenge. This would serve as a simulation to see how the policies would operate in practice, giving the board a hands-on sense of their impact. Mr. Moore agreed that it would be an interesting exercise.

- 2. Second read and possible vote
 - a. Fundraising Activities 5325
 - b. Student Wellness 5135

Mrs. Cowan reported the fundraising policy changes were mainly regulatory, addressing crowdfunding platforms. Dr. Leggett reviewed that the student wellness policy was updated so that all students receive the same meal regardless of financial need, promoting equity and reducing stigma.

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Cowan, to approve Fundraising Activities 5325 policy and Student Wellness 5135 policy as presented.

All in favor of accepting the approval of the Fundraising Activities 5325 policy and Student Wellness 5135 policy as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mrs. Caramanella, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Darcy, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed

Committee Reports

A. Policy Committee Meeting - January 21, 2026

Mrs. Cowan had no additional updates to present from the Policy Committee.

B. Building Committee & BOE Joint Meeting - January 21, 2026

The Building Committee reviewed and approved the bid for Phase II work, along with a few invoices. On February 4th, the Committee accepted the final design documents and drawings. Then, at the February 18th meeting, the board approved the contractor for Phase II, including approvals for three bids, two for Phase II work and one for electrical equipment, as noted by Ms. Cahill during the meeting.

C. School Naming Committee Meeting - January 28, 2026 +February 18, 2026

The committee, made up of two representatives from Durham, two from Middlefield, and representatives from each school, reviewed survey results and community feedback to identify three potential names for the new school. The first choice is Veterans Memorial Elementary School, honoring the current name

while separating it from other similarly named schools. The second choice is Three Oaks Elementary School, reflecting the unification of three schools (three towns) under one roof and establishing new roots. Mr. Roraback clarified that Rockfall is not a town itself, but rather a borough of Middlefield. The committee's third choice for the new school name is Wadsworth Falls Elementary School, which has been cleared with DEEP.

The plan is to finalize details at next week's meeting, with community voting scheduled for the week of March 16th. Each town will have a ballot box, and ballots can be obtained from the town clerk. All students and staff will also be able to vote, using either Google forms or in-class methods. Following the vote, the Board of Education will consider the results at the April 1st meeting to officially adopt the winning name. There are also plans to honor previous schools by potentially naming areas within the school, like the cafeteria or library, after them. Additional checks, including reviewing the Wadsworth Family Foundation and historical context, have been done to ensure appropriateness of the name

Public Comment

A. In-person public comment

Ronda Riggott-Stevens raised concerns about whether Lindsay Dahlheimer was acting on behalf of the Board of Education in her actions toward Anthony DeFilio. Ms. Riggott-Stevens noted there's no evidence showing she was formally representing the Board. While the insurance company has assigned an attorney and is covering her under indemnification, Mrs. Riggott-Stevens emphasized that coverage depends first on acting on behalf of the Board and second on absence of malice. Mrs. Riggott-Stevens stressed that the Board should carefully consider whether Mrs. Dahlheimer's actions were official or personal, as the Board itself was never served in the lawsuit, and indemnification votes of this type are unusual. She also recommended reviewing the DCF report and related documentation privately to clarify these points.

B. Remote public comment

Amanda Betty echoed the concerns raised by Ronda Riggott-Stevens. Ms. Betty emphasized that the vote to indemnify Lindsay Dahlheimer was based on misinformation or lack of information and should never have occurred. She explained that in prior experience, when the board was served with a lawsuit, all members were named, and personal service to individuals wasn't required. Ms. Betty expressed concern that if the insurance company later determines Mrs. Dahlheimer was not acting in her official capacity, the insurance company could demand reimbursement from the district for fees already paid under reservation of rights, ultimately costing taxpayers. Ms. Betty urged the board to review all relevant information carefully, ensure it's shared with the insurance company, and expressed hope that the upcoming discussion at the next meeting addresses these concerns.

Adjournment

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mr. Simmons, to adjourn the meeting.

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

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio