

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held the Annual Meeting and Referendum Vote of Regional School District 13 of the State of Connecticut on June 1, 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, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Roraback, and Mr. Konstantino.

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

Mr. Parmelee made a motion, seconded by Craig Bradanini, to nominate Norman Hicks as the moderator.

All in favor of accepting the nomination of Norman Hicks as the moderator: Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Moore, 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 presented the revised Regional School District 13 2026-2027 proposed budget. The original budget totaled \$44,556,570.00, representing a gross increase of approximately 4.5% and a net increase of 4.35% over the previous year. The revised budget reduced the increase to 3.94%, resulting in a total budget of \$44,218,342.00 and a gross budget of \$42,627,156.00, reflecting a 3.77% increase. Overall, the revisions reduced the gross budget by \$238,222.00 and lowered the net budget by \$453,972.00, decreasing the net budget increase by 0.58%.

Mr. Moore detailed the specific reductions that were made to lower the proposed budget. The largest cut was the elimination of a proposed new library media specialist position. Additional reductions included cybersecurity and print management services (\$9,000.00), unemployment compensation (\$5,000.00), office supplies (\$5,000.00), strategic planning (\$10,000.00), travel (\$5,000.00), legal services (\$20,000.00), a social education lease (\$10,000.00), and curriculum consultants (\$30,000.00), resulting in total savings of \$238,228.00.

The revised budget remains largely driven by salaries and benefits, which continue to be the district's largest expenses. The proposed net operating budget totals \$44.2 million, representing an increase of approximately \$1.68 million, or 3.94%, over the current year. The gross operating budget is \$42.6

million, an increase of about \$1.55 million, or 3.77%. The budget also reflects an increase in special education costs.

Mr. Moore then reviewed how costs are allocated between Durham and Middlefield. The allocation is based on student enrollment as of October 1, with 1,311 students in the district, and uses a five-year rolling average to minimize year-to-year fluctuations. Under this formula, Durham is responsible for 65.38% of costs and Middlefield for 34.62%. After accounting for state ECS grants, Durham receives approximately \$3.29 million and Middlefield about \$2.1 million. This results in net town assessments of \$24.58 million for Durham and \$12.66 million for Middlefield for fiscal year 2026–27. Compared with the previous year, Durham's assessment increases by about \$911,258.00, while Middlefield's increases by approximately \$608,335.00.

Mr. Moore continued with a review of per-pupil spending. Regional School District 13's per-pupil costs were compared with both state and regional school district averages. The cost per pupil was reported as \$29,509.00 in the 2024–25 budget. For the current year, the estimated cost is \$29,665.00, reflecting an increase of about \$100 per student. Under the proposed 2026–27 budget, the per-pupil cost is projected to rise to approximately \$29,688.00.

Lastly, Mr. Moore addressed capital expenses, highlighting projects and purchases needed to maintain the school system. To help fund these needs, the district plans to use approximately \$400,000.00 from its capital reserve fund. Mr. Moore noted that additional budget details were available if desired but characterized the presentation as a high-level summary of the district's current financial position and proposed budget.

Mr. Hicks offered the opportunity for attending residents to ask questions.

Roger Kleeman of Tuttle Road, Durham, asked for clarification regarding state funding, specifically inquiring how much additional money the district received from the state compared to the previous budget year.

Mrs. Neubig explained that the towns received an additional combined amount of \$215,744.00 in one-time additional grant revenue. This increase in state aid reduced the Net budget amount. Mrs. Neubig noted that the added grant revenue was applied directly to the net budget as revenue. Combined with the \$238,000.00 in expenditure reductions that had already been made, the overall impact was a decrease of approximately \$458,000.00 in the net budget requirement. As a result, the budget reduction reflected both spending cuts and additional state revenue, which together lowered the amount to be funded by the towns.

During the discussion, Mr. Kleeman questioned the discrepancy between the budget reduction figures presented and the information distributed to the towns. Mr. Kleeman noted that the document appeared to show only \$94,000.00 in reductions, while the Board was now discussing cuts totaling more than \$200,000.00. Dr. Darcy explained that the confusion stemmed from the way the information was presented. The document listed the elimination of a proposed library media specialist position as a separate bullet point but did not include the associated dollar amount. The second bullet identified \$94,000.00 in reductions from various budget lines. Together, these items accounted for the full \$238,228.00 reduction. Mr. Moore clarified that the library media specialist position represented a

savings of approximately \$144,228.00, which, when combined with the other reductions, produced the total budget cut. The discussion also confirmed that the budget materials already incorporated the additional state funding received by the district.

Mr. Kleeman also challenged the district's use of the term "annual meeting," noting that residents had already participated in one annual meeting earlier in the year. Mr. Kleeman questioned how a second meeting could also be called an annual meeting, arguing that by definition an annual meeting occurs only once per year and asking why the current session was not being described as an extension or continuation of the previous meeting instead.

Mrs. Neubig explained that state law requires a district meeting to be held before each budget referendum. Because the first referendum had failed, a second referendum required another district meeting the night before the vote. Mrs. Neubig noted that if the original referendum had passed, no additional meeting would have been necessary.

Donna Compositor-Taylor of Middlefield questioned the nearly \$900,000.00 increase in salary expenditures between the 2024–25 and 2025–26 budgets, asking what was driving the increase. Mrs. Neubig explained that in prior years, the district applied a 98% salary vacancy budgeting factor, assuming that staff turnover and vacancies would create savings throughout the year. However, that approach had become ineffective because actual salary expenditures were consistently exceeding budgeted amounts. As a result, the district must now budget salaries at 100% of expected costs.

Mrs. Neubig noted that the increase also reflects negotiated contractual salary increases for union and non-union employees. She emphasized that staffing additions were minimal, consisting primarily of a 0.6 social worker position, while other staffing reductions were included elsewhere in the budget. When Ms. Compositor-Taylor suggested that the increase might be more of a budgeting adjustment than a true increase in spending, Mrs. Neubig clarified that these are real salary obligations. In previous years, the district had used a larger fund balance to offset a portion of salary costs and reduce the tax impact on residents. Because those reserves have largely been depleted, the district can no longer rely on that strategy and must budget the full amount needed to pay employees.

Mr. Moore further explained that the anticipated savings from staff turnover have not materialized in recent years. Employee retention has been much higher than expected, with many staff members remaining in their positions rather than leaving and being replaced by lower-paid employees. The district reported that approximately 121 employees are currently at the top of their salary scales and have been with the district for many years. Mr. Roraback argued that while this contributes to higher salary costs, it also benefits students because experienced staff and low turnover generally contribute to greater educational stability and continuity.

Mr. Hicks 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. Cowan, 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