

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Well-Being Committee met on Tuesday, March 19, 2019 at 4:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich (arrived late) and Mr. Moore

Student Advisors present: Connor Byrne, Molly Yale

Teacher Advisor present: Mrs. Schaefer

Committee members absent: Mr. Hicks

Other Board members present: Mr. Augur and Dr. Taylor

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Manning, Director of Organizational Development

Also present: Mr. DeFilio

Mrs. Caramanello called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Moore explained that Mr. Augur had asked that the agenda be modified to move the review of the engagement survey to after item 5.

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to approve the agenda, as amended.

In favor of approving the agenda as amended: Mrs. Caramanello and Mr. Moore. Motion carried unanimously.

Introduction of Members

Mrs. Caramanello introduced herself and Mr. Moore. Amy Schaefer is the teacher representative and Molly Yale and Conner Byrne are student representatives.

Mr. Moore explained that this is the only committee that the board has with student and teacher advisors. Dr. Veronesi has also recommended a citizen for the committee, but he has not been voted on yet.

Mr. Moore introduced himself and explained that he is chairman of the Board of Education and has been on the board for four years. He spent his career in environment protection as an environmental engineer at the Connecticut DEP, ending as Deputy Commissioner. He also worked for a consultant firm, both overseas and around the country, before becoming the Chief Administrative Officer at MDC in Hartford. He also taught water resources and hydraulics at the University of New Haven for 10 years. He has been retired since 2011 and has 10 grandkids, with six of them in the school system.

Anthony DeFilio explained that he is a resident of Durham and an assistant football coach at the high school. He is a CPA by profession. Mr. DeFilio is very interested in contributing in a positive way to this committee. Mr. DeFilio lost his wife to breast cancer seven years ago and has five children, from 21 to 10. He feels that there is a lot of unintentional insensitivity in relation to his loss, but more as a total loss. He would like to get the board and the general public to recognize the struggles that families like his has.

Dr. Taylor explained that he is a Board of Education member and a father of four kids in the district. He is an emergency physician and data scientist at Yale.

Dr. Friedrich stated that is a Board of Education member and a retired neuroscientist.

Mr. Augur stated that he is also a Board of Education member and does not identify with his job. He is a motorcyclist and father of two.

Conner Byrne stated that he is a junior at Coginchaug.

Molly Yale is also a junior at Coginchaug.

Mrs. Schaefer explained that she is the art teacher at Strong School and lives in Middletown. She coaches tennis and cross country, is the yearbook advisor and runs the art club. She does not have any kids of her own and is very dedicated to the district and its students. She thanked Mr. DeFilio for his honesty and explained that empathy and the connection with students is the core of her teaching. Mrs. Schaefer is also a member of the Well-Being committee that the district has with teachers and staff.

Mrs. Caramanello explained that she has been asked to chair the committee and noted that she taught first grade at Brewster for 10 years. She has three kids in the district and a baby who is two. Mrs. Caramanello felt that there is a strong need to understand the pressure the kids are having.

Charge of the Committee

Mr. Moore explained that the board had adopted a series of goals and objectives in January and there are four overall pillars: student achievement, well-being, engagement and fiscal oversight. The board looked at its issues in well-being and one was to determine the priority safety enhancements to be sure that there is an appropriate level of safety and security for the students. The others are awards and recognition for students and teachers and to make sure there are extracurricular offerings to engage students with a broad enough appeal. The board would also like this committee to correlate their work with the Well-Being committee in the schools.

Engagement is also part of the charge for this committee. Part of that would include engagement with the faculty, administration and the board. The Human Resource Committee transferred the development of that engagement survey to this committee. Mr. Moore would also like this committee to become a reporting mechanism for any issues of safety, insecurity or bullying and how the district reacts to those issues on a broad basis.

Mr. Augur mentioned adding the report that the board receives from Durham-Middlefield Youth and Family Services. Mrs. Caramanello stated that the teacher and staff well-being committee looked at that last year. Dr. Friedrich suggested some kind of interface with Youth and Family Services as well as the local wellness coalition.

Mrs. Caramanello added that, while it is the wellness of the students, it is also the staff and the community as well. Mr. DeFilio added that he thought it was about respect and communication as there is really no communication between the booster clubs, sports programs and the school system. He felt that a lot of issues could be avoided if people would only communicate.

Review of draft Engagement Survey

Mr. Augur has circulated a survey to the board members and received feedback. The board is still considering bringing in a consultant to get deeper into this, but hoped to get a base started now. Mr. Moore reviewed that the survey has two focuses: how are you engaged in what you do and what you think your partners do as well as the relationship of how you think the board and the administration are doing in terms of the four pillars. The board also talked about having a student engagement survey as well, but took that off the table for the time being.

Everyone agreed that the first two questions were good. There was some discussion about making sure the survey remained anonymous and there would be no requirements to answer any specific questions. As for the third question, Mrs. Caramanello felt that she would be inclined to be more truthful if the question asked how engaged she felt, rather than how engaged she has been. Dr. Friedrich agreed and suggested alternative wording. Dr. Friedrich also felt that the word “reputation” should not be used and gave him suspicion. It was also generally felt that people would be honest if there are no names on the survey.

Mr. DeFilio asked what the committee will be doing with the information and why they care what the answers are. He would want to see specific situations and examples of what could be improved or enhanced. He would ask what the teachers’ frustrations are and what some of their goals are. He would want to know some of the failures that teachers have seen. He doesn’t feel that it matters how long they have been teaching or how engaged they are. Mr. Augur explained that the questions are neutral because he would also be interested in hearing what is going very well.

Mr. Moore felt that the next steps would be to figure out what can be done to address the issues pointed out in this survey. Dr. Friedrich gave an example of if all of the people who have been here less than four years hate it and the people here four to eight years don’t, you would ask questions differently. He did feel that it was important to know how new staff felt in relation to staff that have been here for a while. Mrs. Caramanello likes the idea of adding examples to the definition of being an engaged teacher. Mr. Augur also suggested adding a link to a website that delves well into engagement.

Dr. Friedrich asked the teachers if the board’s pillar question engages them and Mrs. Schaefer hoped that no one would wonder what they were. She thought that the teachers would find the percentages interesting. Mr. Moore felt that questions 11-13 about the individual components of the administration might be better served by one question rather than three. He also felt that the bullets may be different in weight once it gets down to the principal level. Dr. Veronesi explained that the board’s goals include fiscal oversight, but the strategic coherence goals do not. She felt that people should look at administration with regard to student achievement, engagement and well-being. Mrs. Caramanello felt that principals are definitely conscious of fiscal oversight at their level. Mr. DeFilio asked if the pillars were defined anywhere and Mr. Moore stated that they were defined under the board’s goals and on the website as well.

Mr. Moore also explained that the board has a meeting tomorrow and on March 27th as well where they could take action. Dr. Taylor felt that this could be reviewed by the board tomorrow night.

Timeline for survey completion, distribution and analysis

Dr. Veronesi explained that they could use the regular system for this and set it to private which would make it an anonymous survey. Mr. Augur and Dr. Taylor both suggested using SurveyMonkey to do it. Mr. Augur will make the edits and provide the link and Mrs. Caramanello can send it out to the district staff. After some discussion, it was agreed to give the staff until April 11th to complete the survey and the board can discuss the survey and its analysis at their meeting on May 15th.

Mrs. Caramanello asked what the committee will actually do with this information. Dr. Taylor was a bit surprised that the survey got moved out of the HR Committee as he felt this was really an employment engagement survey. Mrs. Caramanello would like things to be more specific and she would like to hear the negatives as well as the positives. Dr. Friedrich felt that information may be received in both directions and there may be things that the committee wants to deal with and other things they want to pass on. Mr. Moore also explained that there are very few people on the HR Committee and they only meet two or three times a year.

Dr. Veronesi felt that the board really wanted to hear from people about how they can be in greater alignment with the work of the district. She gave a few examples of possible feedback that may be received. Mr. DeFilio agreed with Dr. Veronesi and stated that he is here for well-being, not student achievement, engagement or fiscal oversight. He stated that he is here to promote communication more than anything and respect for the students and families in the district. He suggested that maybe there should be four different surveys on each of the pillars. He does understand that this is a starting point. There was then discussion about removing the weighting from the survey because it really doesn't apply to anyone but the superintendent.

Review of Board of Education Well-Being and Engagement Goals and Objectives

Mr. Moore explained that the goals and objectives were what the board had adopted and were already reviewed. Dr. Friedrich repeated that he would like to be sure there is interfacing with community resources. Mr. DeFilio asked if everyone thought it would be in the best interest of the committee to come up with a mission statement. He suggested that the mission be that the committee is to advance the well-being of the students and their families.

Mrs. Schaefer explained that the teacher and staff well-being committee has been working on a framework and has set some goals. They have a simple definition of what the district thinks well-being is. Dr. Veronesi stated that that was based on research on well-being from the University of Pennsylvania and was actually a definition of well-being, more than a mission statement. Mr. DeFilio then suggested a simplistic mission statement, something like that the committee make sure they are cognizant of the surroundings, student and family well-being and well-being of the school system as a whole. He felt it needed to be more definitive, but simplistic at the same time.

Mr. Moore asked Conner Byrne and Molly Yale if they had any thoughts and Molly felt that the "all" should be expanded upon to describe who "all" is. Mr. DeFilio recalled that Molly and her family came to his house and cleaned for him when his wife passed away. He felt that students need to know about these types of issues.

Review of Regional School District 13 Strategic Coherence Goals in Well-Being and Engagement

Dr. Veronesi read the strategic coherence goals on well-being and pointed out that they are working towards that goal. She felt that it was important that well-being practices are evident and how that is supported for teachers. There are improvement strategies to help develop that goal and Dr. Veronesi described some things, such as Second Step in the elementary schools, the Communities model at Memorial and Advisory at Strong and Cuginchaug. She asked the students to think about if Advisory supports students' well-being and what students need. Dr. Veronesi asked the students to ask their friends what they felt well-being was and how the school could support that. Dr. Veronesi gave an example of a situation they learned in the focus groups about homework. She also reviewed partnering with outside agencies, identifying actions, safety and security and equity.

Update District Well-Being Committee

Mrs. Schaefer explained that she gets a little nervous talking about this because she is so immersed in it and passionate about it. She uses this ideology in her classroom and in her personal life every day. The Well-Being Committee started out to make the staff feel good and has grown immensely from there. The group has been together for a year and a half, with the same leader and same presenter. They have also looked at a lot of research. In the first year, they have done purposeful training with social-emotional learning programs. They have been to conferences and created a book club which got people to buy in. All grade levels and all types of teachers are involved.

This year, they are working with the social-emotional department at Central diving into the research. Teachers at Memorial and Lyman have received Pause training. Moving forward, they are working toward getting the well-being model into the classrooms and how it would look as a program. Mrs. Schaefer feels that it's about making connections, having communication and having respect for each other. She believes that this should be at the core of teaching.

Mrs. Caramanello also felt that the teachers also need to be emotionally well. Mrs. Schaefer agreed and stated that for a year, the committee focused on the teachers. She has spoken to the committee members and they all feel better, they feel connected to each other and respected and supported. Mrs. Manning stated that, because of all the changes in education in the past 10 years, she feels there is a major crisis the young children social and emotional well-being. She stated that a survey in the district noted that surprising percentage of the students in the district have considered suicide and some (approximately 10 percent) have made a plan. She feels that the district is innovative in its willingness to address this, starting with the teachers.

Mrs. Caramanello felt that teachers and students are feeling stress and anxiety and asked how this is being addressed by the committee. Mrs. Manning explained that they have provided professional learning for the teachers as well as QPR (question, persuade, respond) training through the suicide prevention grant. They also feel that staff meetings are another place to do that as well as expanding the membership of the well-being committee. Central is also very excited to expand the program with the district. Mrs. Schaefer stated that she is in classrooms and working with teachers.

Mr. Moore asked how many people are on the Well-Being Committee and Mrs. Schaefer thought it was close to 20 now with members from every school. Mrs. Manning added that it's not just classroom teachers, but also teaching assistants and people with various roles. Mr. Moore asked how the board can allow them to better implement and Mrs. Schaefer explained that that's why she is here, to figure out how to do that. Mrs. Schaefer felt that time and communication are the most important things. Mrs. Manning

explained that it's a matter of making sure that everybody who works with children understands the basic tenets of this. Mr. Moore reflected on his experiences with team-building at his various employers. There was discussion about that you can't force people to be happy and participate.

Mrs. Manning described the restorative piece of this and noted the mindfulness and how teachers speak to students, but also how to address behaviors and getting to the core of why the behavior happened. Molly Yale commented that half of the students in her grade are not engaged and Mrs. Schaefer stated that she'd like a Friday Night Lights type of experience here at Cuginchaug with community members, students and coaches all coming together. Mr. DeFilio felt that was simple to do by communication. He felt that everybody fights everybody and everyone wants credit for everything. He gave an example of a teacher that made his son do a book on what he and his mother liked to do together just two years ago and that his son had to hold a sign and a flower at a basketball game to give to nobody. He felt that it was important to know your audience. Mr. DeFilio also mentioned that homework assignments are being handed out without the teacher knowing what the students are reading because they never read the article. People are overwhelmed with their personal lives.

Dr. Friedrich agreed and stated that our communities are different now than years ago. Everyone is rushing around and kids are going crazy with the number of extracurricular activities. He felt that the kinds of things that would communicate about losses, such as churches, 4H and Grange, are all gone and the school system has to pick up the slack. Mr. Moore stated that he had been at Geno Auriemma's speech at the Chamber of Commerce and he had said that kids today want to be liked by everybody and he has to undo that to get his athletes to work together and be a team. Mr. Auriemma noted that everybody is part of a team and stated that he tells his freshmen that if they make a basket, they make one person happy. If they pass the ball and get an assist, they make two people happy.

Mr. DeFilio felt that they can address the audience (the families) and tell them the district is trying their hardest to know who they are talking with and include extended family to make things a positive experience. Mr. DeFilio stated that the principals are wonderful and really care about his family as do the teachers. He felt that protocols about loss are necessary for the booster clubs and the teachers. He also gave an example of a school that no longer does father/daughter dances, but does short and tall dances instead. Mrs. Schaefer stated that her mission would be to teach the kids about their emotional well-being and health at a young age.

Mr. Moore also noted all of the laws that prevent people from talking about specific things and the board is really controlled on what they can and can't do. The parents would have to bring these issues forward.

Molly Yale also mentioned motivation and how they could be more motivated. Mr. Moore mentioned that his granddaughter says there's too much homework. Mr. DeFilio feels that if you make something fun, everything else will follow. Conner Byrne also noted that he can tell when a teacher really enjoys what they are doing which leads him to be more motivated.

Mrs. Caramanello asked if the students feel like they have outlets when they are feeling stressed or anxious. Molly Yale stated that she loves Mrs. Bottini and goes to her sometimes and she will talk her through it.

Mr. Moore summarized that the challenge for this committee and the board is how to integrate the needs with the board's direction and policy and figure out what the staff and students need. He also thought that the committee needs to talk about safety in the schools. Dr. Friedrich added that he felt they would learn and refine the goals as the work happens. Mr. DeFilio cautioned that they not be too broad and that they

should be more specific about defining well-being and go at it. Mrs. Manning felt that it comes down to input, from the teachers and the community. Mr. DeFilio also felt that drugs and alcohol education should be included here as well. He felt that it is out of control in every single school. Mrs. Manning explained that they have created parenting nights on drugs and alcohol, social-emotional well-being and digital safety. They have had anywhere from 25 to 45 parents attend the ones that have been held.

Dr. Friedrich thought that there are a lot of missed opportunities for presenting this information and felt that they need to consider how to get the parents to attend these presentations. Mr. DeFilio suggested making it fun and Mrs. Manning stated they provided child care which brought out a lot more parents. Mr. DeFilio thanked Mrs. Caramanello for chairing the committee and expressed to everyone that he is committed to making a difference.

Future agenda items and meeting schedule

Mr. Moore explained that committees normally meet monthly (except in the summer), but they can meet more often. Mrs. Caramanello suggested Tuesday, April 23rd for the next meeting and Mr. Moore stated that they will put an agenda together.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to adjourn the meeting. In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich and Mr. Moore. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First