

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Well-Being Committee met in special session on Thursday, February 20, 2020 at 4:30 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich and Mr. Moore
Committee members absent: Mr. Hicks and Mr. Roraback
Student Advisors present: Conner Byrne and Molly Yale
Teacher Advisor absent: Mrs. Schaefer
Administration present: Dr. Serino, Superintendent of Schools
Guests present: Officer Hesseltine, SRO

Mrs. Caramanello called the meeting to order at 4:40 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the agenda, as presented.

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

Approval of Minutes - January 9, 2020

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the minutes of January 9, 2020, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of January 9, 2020, as presented: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich and Mr. Moore. Motion carried unanimously.

Lock-downs

Dr. Serino explained that she had been asked to review the lock-down procedures including addressing the feelings that the process can generate in students. She distributed the new protocols that need to be followed to update the school safety and security plan. There is a particular focus on the updated protocols for family reunification and responses to mental health concerns.

There is a particular schedule in terms of the number and types of drills the schools must follow. Dr. Serino explained that they were originally instructed to have lock-down drills and not to tell students that it was just a drill. That has changed and students are now told when it is a drill. They want students to have practiced responses so that they know what to do in the event of a real incident, most importantly being ready to follow directions from an adult and to be quiet in a crisis situation.

The Connecticut State Police made a presentation last November that was focused on an active aggressor, what to do and how to respond. The general approach has changed to a “run, hide and fight” philosophy but District 13 has not been taught in this approach yet. Dr. Serino showed a slide about how the brain reacts in a situation when there has been training vs. no training. They want to be sure not to create fear in students but to realize that it is important to be prepared. School Resource Officer, Mark Hesseltine reiterated that it is muscle memory in a crisis situation and people can benefit from responding with an approach that they have practiced.

Dr. Friedrich felt that the training will become much more complicated when it’s more than just hide. Mrs. Caramanello stated that they used to teach the students at Brewster to run straight across the street to the houses or run into the woods.

Dr. Serino explained that Officer Hesseltine and Mrs. Gaudreau will go to Strong School to call an unannounced lock-down drill soon and the principal won’t even know. She noted that there had recently been a pretty intense student matter at Memorial School that caused the school to go into lock-down a number of times. Because of that, a decision was made that Memorial doesn’t need to have an unannounced drill.

Mrs. Caramanello reviewed that there is also the third element which is not an outside threat or a fire, but a student and she felt that may be more difficult to communicate. Dr. Serino reviewed that in student situations, the district must protect the confidentiality of the student. The staff did feel that someone should have just let them know via email that it was a student matter with no imminent threat or danger and Dr. Serino did debrief with the staff at Memorial.

Mrs. Caramanello asked Molly and Conner how they felt about this and Molly felt that unofficial drills would be good and stated that she had a bad experience with a real lock-down at Strong. Conner stated that there had been a drill when they didn’t know it was a drill and everyone did as they were told. Officer Hesseltine felt that that can cause anxiety for some students.

Dr. Serino added that there have been real events that students are aware of and that is frightening. Students are also texting their families immediately. She noted that keeping on top of all of changes in safety and security recommendations is challenging because there are different perspectives on how best to do this so that it is important to select an approach and follow it. Dr. Serino felt it was important that the teachers are having conversations with the students as to why drills are held. Mr. Moore added that students should realize that when they text their parents, they may come to the school and complicate the situation further. Mrs. Caramanello asked whether it would be better if they just always called it a drill and Officer Hesseltine felt that the students should practice, knowing it’s a drill, but be told when it’s real.

There is also potentially some new legislation around fire drills and Officer Hesseltine will follow up on that.

Dr. Serino reviewed that there had been a professional development a few years ago that included tabletop exercises about these kinds of issues. Mrs. Caramanello suggested that that be done again.

Mr. Moore added that telling the parents before the kids get home has also been an issue and Mrs. Caramanello agreed that people want to be told. Dr. Serino reviewed that the State Police have suggested a much more aggressive response to a hostile aggressor situation.

Dr. Serino reminded everyone that students are not the only people who can feel anxious in a situation like this; staff can also experience significant stress in their desire to carry out the process correctly and support their students.

Climate survey action planning

Dr. Serino stated that they have just done a preliminary review of the survey that Durham and Middlefield Youth Services gives to the students in Strong and the high school took. There will be a full presentation of the results at the next well-being committee meeting. This survey asked about, among other things, drug and alcohol use.

Dr. Serino felt that an important area of focus for the Board of Education could be the causes of stress, anxiety and worry. These areas include physical safety, social media, friends, social scene, home life and academics. Molly felt that academics and home life would be big ones and Conner felt social scene. Dr. Serino explained that 52 percent of students at the high school indicate that academics is the source of greatest stress, anxiety and worry. Home life is next at 10 percent and in the middle school, 14 percent for home life and 36 percent for academics. One of the administrators wondered if students interpreted academics to involve friends and sports as well as schoolwork. Dr. Serino felt that academics means grades, homework and classwork. Molly and Conner agreed.

One of the conversations at the board's retreat was about where the district rates in the DRG, student performance, awards and recognition, grading and homework and the importance of focusing and acknowledging areas aligned with the characteristics and skills identified in the portrait process. Dr. Serino felt that this would be a great area for the Well-Being Committee to focus on. She added that 70 percent of the students talk about having a trusted adult in their home life and felt that the committee could talk about how parents can receive that positive and important feedback. The students talk far less about needing a trusted adult at school. Dr. Serino reminded everyone that the role of the committee is to support the work and analyze the measurements.

Conner stated that they both have teachers they can talk to. Mr. Moore asked what type of teachers they trust and Molly said she trusts a fun one. Conner added that he trusts teachers that he has had for successive years and ones that he likes a lot. Molly added that she likes teachers that are really engaged in knowing about their students.

Mrs. Caramanello stated that a lot of teachers are focused on grades and don't have time to figure out why students haven't completed homework. She also felt that a lot of students don't want to talk to their teachers. Dr. Serino felt that it is important for the district to examine how to focus on academics while always having knowing the students as a priority.

Dr. Friedrich asked they felt this had anything to do with class sizes and teaching load. Mrs. Caramanello felt that there is more of an opportunity in the lower grades as the kids are there all day with the same teacher, but hoped that could be present in the upper grades as well. She does feel that workload and stress for teachers is number one. Both Molly and Conner felt that teachers would be more likely to connect with individual students if there were 10 kids in the classroom vs. 20. Dr. Serino also noted that the advisory model provides that consistent person for the students. Dr. Friedrich noted that looping is another word that comes to mind.

Mr. Moore asked the students about the administrators and Molly felt that most students get along well with Mr. Falcone and he tries to be fun. Dr. Serino felt that the role of the principal has changed over the

years. Molly added that she has become closer to her guidance counselor this year as well. Conner didn't know who his guidance counselor was until this year.

Mrs. Caramanello asked about how to better address unkind behavior and how the core ethical values seem to get lost. She would like to see feedback about that, but Dr. Serino explained that this survey didn't really go into that. Dr. Serino did state that the district does focus on bullying and unkind behavior, particularly at Strong School where that is a part of their strategic improvement plan. Mr. Moore wondered what the board can do to support what's happening at Strong. Dr. Serino mentioned restorative practices and social-emotional learning partnered with CCSU. They are also proposing to add a coordinator of student affairs at the middle school who can focus on student experiences and student life.

Molly Yale felt that the core ethical values are all over the place at the high school and are different within different groups and grades. Conner Byrne didn't think anyone was really thinking about the core ethical values in high school. Dr. Serino felt that students who have been in the district for most of their schooling have experienced the core ethical values.

Update from Playground Committee

Dr. Serino noted that no one from the Playground Committee was present, and she did not have an update from the committee who just met on Monday.

Survey of 8th grade parents on plans for high school

Dr. Serino reported that she asked Mr. Sadinsky to survey the parents of eighth graders about their plans for high school. It will be done through Parent Square in mid-March and will say that the Board of Education and administration are interested in knowing their plans as well as some more probing questions. They hope to bring that feedback to the committee in April.

Identification of extracurricular activities and participation

Dr. Serino will work on getting a survey out to students about what they are involved in and what else they might like. Mrs. Caramanello has spoken with the AD about more athletics being offered in the fall and also having a girls' golf team. Her daughter gave up the golf team because she was not being assigned to matches. Mrs. Caramanello would like to see more effort put into that. Dr. Friedrich felt that if gender inequity is an issue and wondered if they should be looking in other areas.

Mrs. Caramanello also felt that there would be a lot of girls interested in field hockey or even lacrosse. Mr. Moore suggested that lacrosse could replace football as well if attendance diminishes. Dr. Serino felt that the survey could include some open-ended questions as well as drop-down menu selections. Mr. Moore mentioned adjusting schedules so that kids could compete in sports and take part in band/chorus as well.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, 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 5:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
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