

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Well-Being Committee met in special session on Tuesday, December 8, 2020 at 4:30 PM remotely.

Committee members present: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Mrs. Olszewski

Committee members absent: Mrs. Caramanella

Student Advisors absent: Nora O'Connell and Gage Rovelli

Teacher Advisor present: Mrs. Schmidt and Mrs. Schaefer

Administration present: Dr. Serino, Superintendent of Schools

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Public Comment**

None.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Mr. Roraback made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Olszewski, to approve the agenda, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried unanimously.*

### **Equity and addressing systemic racism**

Mr. Moore drafted a policy and it was sent out to the committee members. He had looked at other policies and tried to make it wide open. He felt that there should be an equitable educational opportunity for all students as well as a safe environment. He included race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity or disability. He also included that the district will embrace diversity and reject racism, antisemitism and all forms of discriminatory actions. He also included that the well-being of staff, students and the community is a priority. Mr. Moore did encourage everyone to feel free to change anything in the policy.

Mr. Moore then included actions for the board as well as actions for the superintendent. The board should assure resources are equitably proportioned, curriculum and instructional materials should encourage the study of diverse communities throughout history and the board will assure diversity in hiring as well as procurement of services and contracts.

The actions included for the superintendent include maintaining the climate of inclusion and acceptance, providing diversity training, assuring that school opportunities are provided to all students, adopting appropriate regulations and develop enforcement procedures as necessary. Mr. Moore would also like definitions included in the policy.

Dr. Serino stated that many of the other policies have a definition statement, defining words such as diversity, educational equity and institutional racism. She also felt that they should talk about the fact that the district is working in partnership with the community. Dr. Serino suggested adding responsibility sections for staff and students as well as the board and superintendent. She also explained that the Policy Committee reviewed policies from other school districts on equity and diversity as well.

Mr. Roraback asked Dr. Serino what her definition of systemic racism would be and she stated that she would take that from someone else's policy and read New Britain's definition of institutional racism as an example.

Mr. Hicks asked if any samples were supplied by Shipman and Goodwin and Dr. Serino stated that she would look into that. Mr. Hicks felt it would be good to glean the high points from them and he thought that the smaller committee could do that.

Dr. Friedrich suggested changing the word "opportunity" to "experience" in the first line of the policy. Mrs. Schmidt added that teachers are looking for the ability to embrace curriculum that includes diversity. She also volunteered to work on definitions.

Mr. Roraback asked Gage Rovelli what he would like to see in the curriculum and Gage felt that it should include the unconscious bias and that visuals would be effective. Nora O'Connell added that they already touch a little bit on systemic racism in history, but she believes it would be beneficial to look at more current events and how they relate to systemic racism. Mr. Roraback mentioned that there was a local history class back in the 80s at Coginchaug and they addressed local events that related to diversity. He mentioned that Peters Lane in Middlefield is named after a slave and Lyman Orchards used to be part of the Underground Railroad. Mr. Moore added that the Ku Klux Klan attended the Durham Fair one year and there have been various other issues over time.

Dr. Serino added that it isn't just local history, but local commitment as well. She gave an example of the Durham Fair's board addressing issues of racism and they made a commitment to examine that and make some changes. Dr. Serino went to the Durham Fair a couple of years ago and paid specific attention to the diversity of the attendees. She then looked at all of the advertising which seemed to be older white guys and realized that that should be looked at.

Mr. Roraback felt it was important for students to be placed in a minority situation, for instance going to an ethnic market. Dr. Serino explained that that is called perspective taking. Superintendents in the consortium will begin training again in January and Dr. Schuch will be part of that.

Mr. Moore explained that the subcommittee will work on the policy and hopefully bring it to the Policy Committee in January.

### **Student Well-Being Update**

Nora O'Connell reported that the students go back to school tomorrow after being remote for about a week. She is personally kind of worried about going back due to the COVID scares, but excited to be back as well.

Gage Rovelli talked to some of his teachers and found that the math teachers were very effective at communicating their ideas. He felt that the other groupings did not communicate as well. He hoped that the teachers would meet to discuss what worked and what didn't work.

Mr. Moore asked how the students felt about not having homework on weekends and Wednesdays. Nora stated that she didn't think it was great, but realizes that students that are not in AP classes don't have homework. She felt that it was working out for the majority of the students.

Mr. Roraback felt that the teachers don't want to have their feet held to the fire for homework not being meaningful or not having enough assignments, but they also don't want it to be too much.

Dr. Serino stated that she was recently at Lyman, Memorial and Brewster and felt that the younger students are happy to be in school with their friends. She also felt that the social connection for the older students doesn't feel as authentic. Mrs. Schmidt added that she felt the kids are happy to be with their friends and in school. She has noticed that middle schoolers are struggling with organization. Mrs. Schaefer felt that she sees a different side of the kids than some teachers do, being in the art classroom. She does spend a lot of time with eighth grade algebra students who are highly stressed and have a lot of work, but felt that they would have that without COVID. She agreed, however, that a lot of kids are struggling with the organizational piece and transitioning from being remote to in-person and back and forth. Mrs. Schaefer thanked everyone for the help with Wednesdays.

Mrs. Olszewski stated that her son at John Lyman has been in school the whole time and has been doing pretty well. She liked the classroom teachers teaching remotely as opposed to the students having to watch a video. Mr. Moore added that his grandkids like Google Meet so that they can interact.

Dr. Serino stated that there has not been a single case where the virus was transmitted in school which means everyone is safe in school. She added that the pandemic has caused everyone to have to be resilient and change in a way that they've never had to before. Dr. Serino also noted that the district has not had to deal with the kind of public pressure that has been happening in other communities.

### **Staff Well-Being Update**

Mrs. Schaefer felt that staff was plugging along and continuing to check in with each other. They are going to start planning some additional check-ins as well. They are concentrating on the fact that they have to stop complaining. Mrs. Schaefer would like to bring somebody in from a different school and get a different perspective. She has also noticed teachers helping and not just offering to help.

Mrs. Schmidt echoed that there are people struggling but they are all in it together. She does see a lot of sharing of ideas between teachers. Mrs. Schmidt leaves Strong every day feeling that she is happy and the kids are happy.

Mrs. Schaefer added that teachers have approached her and feel that no one checks in with them when they are at home. They'd like to hear from someone in leadership, even board members. Mrs. Schaefer personally reaches out to as many people as she can. Dr. Serino stated that Mr. Brough and all of the principals check in with any staff that is at home, but they evidently missed somebody. Dr. Serino also wondered how connected the Cohort C students and teachers are with everyone else. Mrs. Schaefer felt that the transition of bringing those students back will be very difficult.

Dr. Serino asked Nora and Gage how much of a check-in they get. Nora stated that there really isn't anything. She does try to reach out to her friends that are at home, but she has heard that it's really hard to be at home and they feel very disconnected. She has heard that they're not getting the same quality of education and it's just awful for them at home. One student told her that they get things wrong on tests because they just weren't taught it online. Gage noted that his friends feel that there is too much checking, but that's probably because they're boys. His teachers do a good job of connecting the in-school students with the remote students.

Mrs. Schaefer asked if the teachers are asking them how they are doing and Nora stated that it depends on the teacher. She feels that the teachers are so stressed to just cover the material that there really isn't time for that. Gage usually gets to the Google Meet early to have a conversation with his teachers. Mr. Moore asked if the students felt the teachers should have a check-in before they start class and Gage thought there should be Google docs for the students to write in when they notice something that a teacher did really well and vice versa.

Mrs. Schmidt asked if the high school uses Padlet at all and explained that the staff at Strong uses it. She also uses it with her advisory group. She noted that it can be anonymous or you can identify yourself. Mr. Roraback explained that he uses exit tickets at the end of class and also asks the students what worked for them and what didn't.

Mrs. Olszewski stated that she feels very disconnected with the teachers. Her oldest is in Memorial and now has a team of teachers. She noted that the only time she has ever met her son's home room teacher was during conferences and hasn't had any interaction with the rest of his team.

Mr. Moore asked how music was going this year and Mrs. Schmidt stated that they are making music but it is different. The choirs have done virtual recordings. She does feel there have been a lot of positives and the students are getting to explore other parts of music. Mrs. Schmidt feels that it is becoming more about the process rather than the performance. She is not stressed at all about the students losing any musicality through this.

### **Review Well-Being Strategic Plan Goals and Improvement Strategies**

Dr. Serino reviewed the well-being section of the Strategic Plan and thought that maybe Mrs. Schaefer could update them on restorative circles at the next meeting. They have talked about re-administering the climate survey, but she is now thinking that student focus groups would be helpful as well.

Dr. Serino added that the work on well-being that is happening in this district is really unique. She is not aware of any other district who does what this district does.

Mr. Moore also asked the students if they liked the virtual sports banquet and Gage stated that it was good. Mr. Moore also asked if anyone had watched the video produced by CVEF about graduates from the district and encouraged them to do so. Dr. Serino had asked Mr. Falcone and Mrs. Melillo if that could be part of an advisory class, but she will send the link directly to Gage and Nora.

**Public Comment**

None.

**Adjournment**

*A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting.*

*In favor of adjourning the meeting: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks and Mr. Moore. Motion carried unanimously.*

The meeting was adjourned at 5:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

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