

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Well-Being Committee met in regular session on Tuesday, June 1, 2021 at 4:00 PM remotely.

Committee members present: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback
Committee members absent: Mr. Hicks
Community members present: Mrs. Stephan
Community members absent: Mrs. Olszewski
Student Advisors present: Nora O'Connell and Gage Rovelli
Teacher Advisors absent: Mrs. Schaefer and Mrs. Schmidt
Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Mrs. DiMaggio, Mr. Falcone, Mr. Ford, Mrs. Melillo, Mrs. Murray, Mr. Sadinsky and Mrs. Stone

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

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

Approval of Minutes - April 6, 2021

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the minutes of April 6, 2021, as presented.

Dr. Friedrich noted that the word "at" be changed to "that" on page 3. Mrs. Caramanello also felt that some of Mrs. Petrella's comments were not included and that her example was in response to those. Dr. Friedrich withdrew his motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Moore agreed.

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to refer the minutes back to Alwaz First to fill in the above-mentioned information.

In favor of referring the minutes back to Alwaz First: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried unanimously.

Staff and Student Well-Being Update

Dr. Schuch explained that he had asked each of the schools to have a representative at today's meeting.

Mr. Falcone reviewed that the school reporters have already noted some of the issues that they had this year. They have tried to replace events with as many alternatives as possible, but it is just a different feel in the building with some of the students not in person. He felt that the kids need to be back in school for the social connection, interaction with teachers and to be part of the school community. Traditions will be phased back in over time, but it's important to get all the kids back in school. Mrs. Melillo stated that they are looking forward to getting back to a sense of normalcy and all of the milestones that they were unable to have this year. Mr. Falcone added that they have had dress-down days for the teachers and fun around the holidays. He felt that the sense of community was important for the teachers as well. Right now, it is important to give the teachers as much time as they can here in school so they can live a normal life outside of school.

Looking to next year, Mr. Falcone reported that they have met with the team leaders and department heads and they look forward to re-orienting the kids to high school, regarding academic expectations and rigor and behavioral standards and expectations.

Mr. Sadinsky stated that they are thinking towards next year as well. They are trying to figure something out for mid to late August for the kids to come in with their schedules and go room to room. They are looking to use advisory groups in the first few days of school to build up the community. Mr. Sadinsky felt that the early-release Wednesdays provided incredible dividends, giving the teachers time to breathe, meet with their teams and time to reach out to colleagues. Strong School has had some hot chocolate socials and the May staff meeting was held outside. They have been regularly checking in with teachers and staff, both at school and at home, and always try to focus on what's going well.

They have daily check-ins with the students at advisory and the students rate themselves, with a counselor checking in with those who need them to. They have also limited homework on Wednesdays and weekends which went a long way with the kids and the staff. Mr. Sadinsky felt that the Coordinator of Student Affairs position has been invaluable and Mr. Fitzgerald worked very closely with Mrs. Sinusas in organizing and facilitating the advisory sessions. The restorative and IFS work will continue to support each other, staff and students.

Mrs. Stone felt that both the kids and teachers craved any connection to normalcy all year. The district-wide spirit week was huge for everyone. They do SEL and Second Step at Memorial, mostly around empathy. One of the positives that came out of this year was the ability to spend time outdoors. The transition to a 3-5 school went okay because the kids transitioned well and the fifth graders will be recognized with a picnic outside. Field day will happen this year, with about 20 high schoolers coming to help. Memorial has held a bunch of Fun Fridays for the teachers. Teams checked in with each other and with the kids as well. This year was about creating a community and a culture where people knew that they were looking out for each other.

Mr. Ford stated that a lot of the efforts at Lyman went back to the initial re-opening plan, with daily mask and movement breaks throughout the day. They held daily class meetings as usual, but used them more for check-ins with the students. He also felt that mask breaks and getting outside were very positive. Mr. Ford echoed the sentiment of the return to normalcy, with field days and fourth grade recognition

assembly. In terms of staff, they also have the self-leadership collaborative teams which have developed well-being plans under the auspices of Mrs. DiMaggio. They incorporate well-being into staff meetings. Mr. Ford added that in-person meetings have helped as well. For next year, they will continue to build on this year's work and hopefully return to more of what was done in the past.

Mrs. Murray noted that she does a lot of the things that everyone has spoken about. They also had Drew the Dragon who visited the kids. They had a virtual residency this year and created a Brewster song. They also had a virtual Brewster assembly every week this school year and the teachers loved that. Daily morning meetings were a great way to check in with students. They also created a check-in/check-out program with students and have reimagined how to celebrate birthdays. Having lunch outside has been a huge hit. They have also had spirit days and several awareness days for different disorders. Brewster just hatched baby chicks which brought excitement to the school. Busy boxes were instituted for morning recess. For staff, a lot of what has already been talked about was done. The teachers really like the new softer lighting that has been installed. The return of the coffee pot and microwave was a big day. Mrs. Murray added that they too are looking forward to bringing back some traditions and she hopes to be able to experience the Brewster Dance Festival next spring.

Mrs. Caramanello thanked all of the administrators for the amazing job they did this year. Mr. Roraback asked if anyone has any idea how many students will continue to be brought to school vs. riding the bus. Mr. Ford felt that parent pick-ups and drop-offs have been pretty consistent all year at a little higher volume than normal and he felt that perhaps more kids would take the bus in the fall. He hoped to get a better sense of that over the summer.

Mr. Moore thought that many of these ideas should be carried over into next year, especially with teacher recognition and the health of the students. He also felt that the board may want to consider building in some type of program to use Wednesdays as a different kind of day. Mrs. Stephan agreed and stressed that everyone should know that if they're not feeling well, it's okay to stay home. She felt that being able to participate remotely really helped with that. Dr. Schuch felt that that will be difficult to sustain as it is so difficult for the teachers. He felt that that may have been taken advantage of this year and hoped that students will be in school whenever they are not ill. Dr. Schuch did feel that the students will be better able to catch up if they stay home. Mr. Falcone stated that it has been a real struggle for teachers to teach virtual and live classes simultaneously and the teachers would not want to provide that option next year. Mrs. Stephan understood the fine balance. Dr. Schuch did say that they are looking at these options, but they may not be available this fall. Mr. Falcone did explain that they are equipping some classrooms for virtual teaching and that will help. Mrs. DiMaggio added that teachers and administrators are very skilled with the technology now and the library and a classroom have been equipped.

Mrs. DiMaggio also added that she agrees that Wednesdays were a gift this year for well-being and professional learning as well. She hoped to be able to consider some Wednesdays for next year.

Mr. Roraback felt that the students would want to have as much of a normal schedule as possible. He also noted that the State of Connecticut is not mandating that the district offer any distance learning next year. He would also hope that students can still be taught during snow days.

Gage Rovelli felt that the band concert was really helpful to get the community back together. Sports have helped as well. Pre-class greetings from teachers are great and he specifically mentioned Ms. Zygmunt. He is happy that they now have things to look forward to. The main problem that Gage felt

was being online and not being able to talk to his friends. On the student athlete side of things, having homework after big meets is difficult. For next year, he felt there should be more pep rallies and bringing the classes together more.

Nora O'Connell added that the pandemic really brought well-being to the forefront. She is worried that will be forgotten next year as things start to improve. She does not believe next year will be completely normal as some people are not getting vaccinated and echoed Gage's comments about bringing the students together.

Mr. Moore summarized that there are a number of things that should continue next year to continue to pay attention to the students' and teacher's well-being. He asked everyone to let the board know if they had any other suggestions.

Discuss next steps on equity and the role of the Board of Education

Dr. Schuch is pleased that the board adopted the equity policy. He noted that the policy is just words and the district now needs to live it out. Policy or no policy, the district will continue to emphasize training for staff. They are also making a serious push on how the district views education and one of the virtues of that work will develop a sense of belonging for the individual learners.

Dr. Schuch also felt that it would be difficult for the board to be heavily involved in equity work and he is open to resurrecting the staff equity committee if it is needed. He would be more inclined to double down on the relational work, trying to include as many people as possible. Dr. Schuch also commented that equity is both a national and statewide movement and he felt there was a danger in getting caught up in trends. He felt that they really need to change people's hearts, one at a time, but do need to change the systemic inequities. Dr. Schuch also spoke with Leslie Paoletti who is very interested in working with the district.

Mrs. DiMaggio then went on to review that they will continue with the Courageous Conversations equity training next year. She is in the process of signing a contract with SERC for that training and they want to look at the leadership team. They also want to capitalize on what the high school has already learned. There will be focus groups held with the students at the middle school and the staff there will also be trained next year. There had been an equity leadership team a few years ago and they are looking at perhaps resurrecting that, with some changes. Mrs. DiMaggio stressed that they are trying to do things purposefully and with meaning; not just for compliance.

Mr. Moore added that discussion groups around a speaker have worked well in the past as long as the speaker is effective. He gave examples of Native Americans and Vietnamese separating from their families. Mr. Moore felt that personal stories are really more important than a professional speaker.

Mr. Moore also felt that the board should be trained on this issue as well. Mrs. DiMaggio noted that she and Dr. Schuch have talked about that and have a proposal from SERC to provide some training. Dr. Schuch noted that they did not want to be presumptuous with board members' time and there would be a cost associated with it as well. He asked that the board let them know if they'd like them to set that up. Mr. Moore agreed to review the information and bring it to the full board. He added that it would be best for the board to handle the political side of these issues.

Dr. Friedrich wondered what training would mean specifically. He noted that some teachers have stated that they don't know how to moderate these discussions or how to react when they identify an aggression. He felt that the board should know what's being done to equip teachers to better deal with these types of incidents. Dr. Schuch felt that they could embed some of the same training the teachers are getting in the board's training. Dr. Schuch acknowledged that people may be afraid of offending someone or saying the wrong thing. Mrs. DiMaggio added that the teachers at the high school have been through some of that training. Administrators went through some of the training and it was intense and emotional. Mrs. DiMaggio also mentioned a book study that she took part in and noted that she is reading the book that the high school is reading as well. She summarized that they try to provide tools for the teachers and administrators as much as possible, but it is messy work. Dr. Friedrich asked how they get feedback from the children and parents who are affected and added that the board has the responsibility to know that the administration knows when events happen and there is some way to monitor that.

Mrs. Stephan stated that she did not know the answer to Dr. Friedrich's question. She felt that the first step is the policy so that everyone knows there is support and it will then be a matter of building trust that someone will listen and something will be done. Mrs. Stephan has spoken with some administrators when her kids were young and has encouraged her kids to address the situations on their own in other instances. She felt that the kids need to know that if they bring an issue to the administrators, something will be done.

Maureen (community member who called in) has three girls who will be going through the schools. She asked if a monthly or quarterly anonymous survey of parents and students would be an option to measure progress. She also added that it was very hard to know who is talking without people introducing themselves at the meeting.

Mr. Moore explained that the meeting is being held via Google Meet and people can see each other. The board meetings have been via Zoom and committee meetings via Google Meet. The board will meet live and in person from now on. Their next meeting is June 9th in the library at Cuginchaug. Committee meetings will be by Google Meet until July.

Public comment

Leslie Paoletti felt it was important that the teachers and administrators all feel a sense of being trusted and don't feel that they need to be an expert in everything. There should be someone for them to go to as well.

Mrs. Caramanello asked who teachers can go to for help with these instances and Mrs. DiMaggio felt that the administrators and school counselors would be there to help and support the teachers. Central Office is always available as well. Mrs. DiMaggio also noted that the teachers are there for each other. Mr. Falcone stated that the departments at the high school meet at least once a week and there are also team leaders available. He also noted that they go to their colleagues outside the district as well for help.

Mrs. Stephan felt that some of the burden needs to be shared with parents as well. She had been contacted to help with a Vietnamese student at Brewster School years ago. She would be willing to share some of the burden as she has some perspective. Mrs. Stephan is talking with a fourth-grade class on Monday because they are reading a book about a Vietnamese refugee.

Mrs. DiMaggio added that SERC and other organizations are there to support the district as well and she thanked Mrs. Stephan for her generous offer.

Adjournment

Dr. Friedrich made motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to adjourn the meeting.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First