

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in regular session on Wednesday, November 11, 2020 at 7:00 PM remotely.

Board members present: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor.

Board members absent: Mrs. Geraci and Mr. Yamartino

Administration present: Dr. Serino, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance and Mr. Falcone, Principal of CRHS

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

Steven Fitzgerald, US Army Warrant Officer and Coordinator of Student Affairs at Strong Middle School, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Fitzgerald also reported that he had the chance to present to the students today and Dr. Serino commented on his integrity and responsibility.

Approval of Agenda

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

In favor of approving the agenda, as amended: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

Presentation - Draya Gohagon: Student Donation

Dr. Serino introduced Draya Gohagon, an activist, and explained that she would like to make a donation. Draya is a fifth-grade student at Memorial and is wise, courageous and outrageously intelligent.

Draya told her activism story and explained that she is black and white and loves it. She loves her family. Her parents say that her activism started in kindergarten when she asked her teachers to help her find more books about mixed kids like her. Sometimes, she is nervous to talk about her activism but that all changed this year. In December, 2019, Draya was invited to dance with a dance company comprised of all types of dancers and all races. It made her feel like she belonged and she wanted to make sure that all of her friends feel like they belong too. Draya was tired of only learning about black leaders on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday and her mom told her to do something about it. She decided to write a letter to Mr. Ford asking him if she could help design a better Black History month celebration. She felt that there are a lot of heroes of all races and abilities and they should be learning about them all of the time. Mr. Ford let Draya help design the celebration and each class researched an important black American that made the U.S. a better place and Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during the month of February, they would learn about great black Americans. She reviewed the many black Americans they learned about.

After school closed last spring, Draya learned about how black Americans are still being oppressed today. She wrote a letter to Michelle Obama about how she could help change that. She then learned

about George Floyd and was scared for her family. Draya then organized a toy protest with her friends at her house. She then organized a kid protest called Chalk the Walk to honor the lives of black Americans killed because of racial injustice. Her protest lasted for more than two weeks and over 30 people came to her house and wrote messages of hope. Draya stated that Dr. Serino came to her protest and asked her questions and they talked about how Draya wanted to make a change.

Draya also spoke to the National Junior Honor Society in Middletown about how to be an activist. She was also one of two keynote speakers at nErDcampCT, a conference with 750 listeners including teachers and authors. She told everyone how she raised \$1,000 to buy diverse books for libraries in Connecticut and they begged her to do another fundraiser. Draya felt that everyone has a story that they can share and those books do that. She showed the logo that she designed to promote her fundraiser and explained that her goal was to raise \$1,500. The plan was to use \$1,000 to buy diverse books for schools and \$500 to have speakers teach adults how to talk to kids about race. She used GoFundMe and her parents helped her share it all over social media. The fund raiser got so popular that the Lisa Wexler show, a radio show in Connecticut, interviewed her and the Middletown Press wrote an article about it.

By the end of the fund raiser, Draya was able to raise \$3,950 and also received many book donations. She has since purchased about \$1,000 worth of books to send out to schools and they also hosted a virtual event about how to talk to kids about race and oppression. Draya now wants to donate \$500 to Regional School District 13 to buy more diverse books for classrooms and asked the board to accept her donation.

Draya now has two projects she is working on. One is an art project and the other is a YouTube channel where they will interview authors and illustrators on why there should be more diverse books. She also presented a drawing with a quote from Ruby Bridges to Dr. Serino.

Mr. Moore thanked Draya for her presentation and for her donation. He asked Draya what she thought about Kamala Harris and Draya explained that she read a book about her on Facebook Live.

Mrs. Booth stated that she is so proud of who Draya is growing up to be and is very happy to know her. Mrs. Caramanello was so impressed and congratulated her mom as well. Dr. Taylor felt that Draya is doing amazing stuff and he is super-proud of her. Mr. Hicks felt that it was an amazing presentation and that Draya is a delightful young lady.

Dr. Serino thanked Draya and asked if she had a specific school that they should purchase books for and Draya stated that they picked Brewster because they wanted the younger kids to be involved.

CRHS Reporters - Jaden Astle, Cadence Hurlbert, Noelle Sorensen

Cadence Hurlbert stated that she did the Chalk the Walk with Draya and she learned so much. Cadence reported that a bunch of students had to quarantine due to a positive case at the high school. She was one of the students that had to quarantine and one of the most difficult transitions was going from in-person music classes to online music classes. They ended up doing a lot of work on music theory because they couldn't play music together. The overall transition was also very difficult because they were not expecting to have to stay home for two weeks. After the initial adjustment, Cadence still felt that school was harder than it normally is. She felt it was mentally and emotionally taxing and being back in school has been great.

Jaden Astle reported that he was also one of the quarantined students and stated that he respects the reasons why that large a group of students had to quarantine and appreciates all of the teachers' efforts.

He did feel that it was very hard to get effective collaboration between groups of students in and out of school. He also felt that it was hard to understand information when not physically in school and gave the example of trying to do a science lab. He also developed a greater sense of insecurity for the future and felt it was hard to get excited about future events.

Noelle Sorensen happened to be a student that did not need to quarantine, but felt that it still affected them all. She had a class with just one other student and she too felt it was hard to work with the students at home. The quarantine also affected sports and the soccer team decided to wear masks 100 percent of the time other than during games. She explained that the students are trying to hold on to their senior year as long as they can, but understand that this is bigger than all of them.

Mr. Falcone added how strange it was that they aren't talking about upcoming events at the high school and how the students really wanted to share their experiences of the quarantine. He met with the National Honor Society today and had conversations with them and met with his team leaders as well. They are looking at different ideas to offer support to the students. Mr. Falcone felt that the overall message was that it is so important to stay in school. He also noted that the kids have been absolutely amazing with following protocols and procedures.

Mr. Moore stated that the same issues came up at the Well-Being Committee meeting and how hard it is to hear the kids talk about these experiences. Dr. Friedrich thanked the students for sharing their feelings with the board. Cadence Hurlbert thanked the board for giving them the platform to share. Mrs. Booth encouraged the students to continue to emphasize wearing masks and not going to people's houses. Mrs. Petrella also thanked the students for sharing and added that everyone is experiencing different levels of craziness.

Approval of Minutes

- A. Board of Education special session meeting - October 10, 2020**
- B. Board of Education regular session meeting - October 14, 2020**
- C. Board of Education special session meeting - October 28, 2020**

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the minutes of the Board of Education special session meeting of October 10, 2020, the Board of Education regular session meeting of October 14, 2020 and the Board of Education special session meeting of October 28, 2020.

Dr. Friedrich requested that the recording of the vote at the top of page two of the October 28, 2020 minutes be modified to read "motion carried unanimously." Mrs. Petrella accepted that change.

Dr. Friedrich also requested to edit the third paragraph from the bottom to read that "Dr. Schuch stated that he is humbled and honored." Mrs. Petrella accepted that change as well.

Mr. Hicks added that the Chase Collegiate School is in Waterbury, not Wallingford, as was written in the minutes of October 14, 2020. Mrs. Petrella and Dr. Friedrich accepted that change as well.

In favor of approving the above-stated minutes, as amended: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried.

Next Board Meeting - December 9, 2020 at 7:00 PM

COVID-19 Response Update

Dr. Serino updated the board that 22 cases have been reported since September 11, 2020. Of those 22 cases, 13 have had no impact on the school population; meaning that no other members of the community had to quarantine except the positive case. Six of the cases were fully remote students (cohort C). There was a reported case at Strong on October 23rd. The cases that did impact the schools impacted 46 staff members and 182 students. Guidelines continue to be followed, including looking at the time of symptom onset, date of last contact and date of test collection. Quarantine starts the day after the last contact and goes for a full 14 days for close contacts. DPH and the Connecticut State Department of Education both feel the same as the students do and that is that they should remain in school. Dr. Serino felt that some schools are arbitrarily closing, but the directive they have received is to make decisions based on data. RDS 13 will continue to look at local data as well as health data in the school and staff availability for consistent education for students in maintaining an in-person model.

Contact tracing has been done this week at John Lyman and Memorial schools. Staffing issues made it nearly impossible to provide proper education for kids at Memorial and the decision was made to have the fifth graders out until the end of this week.

Addendum 4 from the State Department of Education includes guidance about making decisions to go back to hybrid or move to distance learning. It had initially been very clear about exactly when to move to either model based on community case rates, but that has changed due to the fact that schools are doing well and there has been little to no evidence of case transmission in schools. Since October 29th, Laura Francis shared that Durham has had 12 new cases, with a total of 36 new cases since the end of October.

Dr. Serino stated that Shane Lockwood, the Health Director, reviewed that there were 57 cases in the health district (Southington, Plainville, and Middlefield) in September. In October, there were 202 cases and from November 1st to November 6th, there have been 60 new cases. He does anticipate those numbers will climb and Connecticut will be primarily orange and red, if not completely red. Mr. Lockwood is encouraging the district to keep a careful eye on what is happening in the schools and the ability to maintain staffing to support in-person education.

Dr. Serino reiterated that both DPH and CSDE feel it is important for children to remain in school. Local conditions appear to be creeping close to decisions having to be made, but school data supports students staying in school. New guidance has been received about winter athletics and the CIAC will meet on November 17th to talk about moving forward. The winter sports season was supposed to start on November 21st and has been delayed, possibly until December 5th. Moderate risk sports, such as basketball, continue to be recommended, with masks worn. Team practices are recommended, with various modifications. In-state multi-team meets and out-of-state competitions are not recommended.

Dr. Serino then reviewed the contact tracing model that the district is using. Pam Branciforte, RN is the district's COVID Liaison and the main contact point. Once a positive case is confirmed, Mrs. Branciforte notifies Dr. Serino, the school nurses and the principal. The preliminary process of contact tracing begins when a case is pending. Once a case is identified, Mrs. Branciforte, the school principal, Mrs. Keane (Director of Special Education and Student Services) and Dr. Serino meet and begin the process of reviewing the contact tracing that has been done. She then reviewed the contact tracing process and the logs that are kept by classrooms. The principal is largely responsible for reaching out to staff members to inform them that they have been identified as close contacts and then share the length of the quarantine. The group then reviews student close contacts and begin making phone calls to parents. Prior to staff and parent phone calls, a script is written so that information is shared consistently and accurately. A letter then goes out to parents and staff and the board and the selectmen are updated as well as the Health

Director and the district's medical advisor. Schedules are reviewed and forms are completed and submitted. Dr. Serino reiterated that she is working with an incredible team on this.

Dr. Friedrich suggested that Dr. Taylor may be able to help with creating a database and Dr. Taylor mentioned that he is in the DPH group working on databases. Dr. Taylor asked what the trigger is to back off full in-person learning, thinking that both Durham and Middlefield will be in the red zone soon. Would the district wait until there is a clear demonstration of transmission within the schools? He does agree that the state has not been very clear and it has been pushed back to the individual municipalities to make the decisions.

Dr. Serino stated they will continue with in-person until there is spread in schools and/or there are more cases in the community that impact students and staff being out and there is widespread quarantining. The difficulty will be with staffing and the inconsistency of attendance for students. Dr. Serino suggested that the board form a subcommittee to talk about this when they come closer to that point. Dr. Serino stressed how important it is for the kids to be in school. She also explained that there is no way to predict what will happen at this point.

Dr. Taylor asked if Dr. Serino knew how many cumulative staff hours are being spent on contact tracing, Dr. Serino explained that it is very time consuming; several hours per case. Dr. Taylor asked if it was just principals doing it and Dr. Serino stated that it depends on when the call comes in. They did enlist office staff to help make calls at the high school. Dr. Serino also mentioned that they are trying very hard to make personal phone calls and not go to automated calls. She also reported that Laura Francis had stated they had received grant funding to help with contact tracing.

Dr. Friedrich asked if there was anything specific planned around Thanksgiving and Dr. Serino explained that they had received an email encouraging them not to extend the Thanksgiving break as a precautionary measure and to sustain in-person learning which she agrees with.

Committee Reports

A. Student Achievement Committee Meeting - October 21, 2020

Mrs. Petrella reported that they had only one item on their agenda, Strategic Coherence Plan: Identifying Student Learning Metrics. Mrs. DiMaggio shared charts with the committee that took a look at the scores for the iReady reading for grades one through eight, from 2018 to the fall of 2020. They compared the scores at the start of each school year and also showed the winter scores as well. In all, there were three scores before COVID and one after. The reading scores were really good and held their own after COVID.

They then looked at math in the same way. The scores were excellent up until COVID hit. The scores in the fall of 2020 did not hold up as well as the reading scores. They felt that the reason for that was that the students read with pretty much everything they do, but that it not the case for math.

Mrs. Petrella felt that the emotions of the students are key. Mrs. Petrella then read a statement from Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer for the CSDE, about accountability results and that the state should focus on providing information directly related to the activities that truly matter. As a result of that, CSDE revised their accountability for 2020-2021 and they are looking for districts' plans to ensure the health and safety of students, staff, parents and other key stakeholders. They are looking for research-based plans to address students' social and emotional needs. They are also looking for assurance that all students have legitimate access to high-quality curriculum and instruction as well as access to dependable

internet and devices. They are looking to prioritize small-scale, fine-grade assessments over large-scale, survey assessments. Lastly, they are looking for evidence of what students have learned in 2020-2021 relative to grade-level standards and statewide achievement tests.

Mrs. DiMaggio explained to the committee that the district's priorities have shifted and the focus needs to be on the well-being of the students, staff and families along with creating and maintaining connections to students and each other. The district will need to ensure that students are fully engaged. Social-emotional wellness, connections and engagement have to be at the forefront. The district has suspended standard accountability for 2020-2021 and will instead focus on maximizing students' chances to develop rich understandings of grade-level content and on not test scores. The district will, however, continue to administer the statewide achievement tests to help monitor the long-term trends in student achievement, if possible.

The committee also had an in-depth conversation about staffing, focusing mostly on coaches and their role at this point. The coaches are now teaching cohort C and the administration is trying to figure out how to get them back to coaching. Cohort C includes seven coaches, an enrichment teacher, a science specialist, a social studies teacher and a couple of teachers who are out for health reasons. The teachers are missing the instructional leadership that the coaches provide. Mrs. Petrella reminded everyone how difficult it is to even find subs, let alone talk about hiring additional teachers.

Dr. Friedrich felt that the important thing was the message from the state that they are backing off and rethinking evaluations as is the district. Staffing challenges are very important. Dr. Friedrich added that nothing will work if they don't create an environment where the students can feel engaged.

B. Well-Being Committee Meeting - November 10, 2020

Mr. Moore reported that the Well-Being Committee had guests attend the meeting to talk about equity, diversity and racism, including Pastor Rebekah Forni, Anne Koba and Jay Watson. Pastor Forni and Mrs. Koba talked about the work they are doing and the book club they have. They also volunteered to continue to meet with the committee to help on this issue. Dr. Serino reviewed the work that the district has done on this and they did feel that there were positive activities happening.

They also talked about student and teacher well-being and students were concerned about the amount of homework and time being spent on that. They are concerned about Wednesdays being short days because they are not getting a lot of each class. Teachers have created a recognition program at Strong School and are looking at ways to help the students have more fun.

Dr. Friedrich added that a point raised at the meeting was that Black History Month is a wonderful thing, but expanding the understanding of people of color needs to happen more than just in that month. He also felt a rather urgent sense that Wednesdays are a crisis for the teachers as well as the students. Dr. Friedrich has serious concerns about staff morale around Wednesdays and asked Dr. Serino to please think about that.

Mr. Roraback stated that his own experience on abbreviated Wednesdays is actually triple the work. Shorter class times are very difficult for students and teachers alike. Dr. Serino recommended that the district continue with early release, but take a look at how that is being organized. Staff does feel that Wednesday afternoons are vital for meetings and other things. She added that Mr. Sadinsky had brought the idea of fewer classes with longer periods to his team. Dr. Serino is less concerned about the academic impact than she is about student and staff well-being.

Mrs. Caramanello reiterated that the emphasis is on well-being and mentioned having Well-Being Wednesdays to give a break from academics. They had two students join the Well-Being Committee and they felt that some teachers felt that academics were the main emphasis and are assigning an overwhelming amount of homework. Dr. Serino stated that they are aware of that and have shared that message. The administration feels it is important that teachers know that they trust them.

Mrs. Booth asked if Dr. Serino plans on half-day Wednesdays for the rest of the school year and Dr. Serino believes that early-release Wednesdays need to continue, but not necessarily until the end of the year. Mrs. Booth appreciates the teachers needing the time, but noted that parents have difficulty having to pick their children up at 11:30 in the morning. She felt that the board should give parents a heads-up if this is going to continue. Dr. Serino suggested that they could work with Dolphin Days for in-building care on early-release days. She felt that they should continue with Wednesdays as they are, especially through the cold and flu season.

Communications

Mr. Moore has received communication from Stephen Liss about the debate club and Dr. Serino responded. He also received a concern about the phys. ed. testing and asked for adjustments. Mr. Moore also mentioned that Dr. Schuch will meet with board members over the next few weeks. He has met with Mr. Moore and the administrators as well as the teachers' union. Mr. Bradanini is setting up times for him to meet with the teachers from each school.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Serino reported that Veterans Day was celebrated at the schools and reviewed the various activities that were done. She also explained that she has been asked about not having snow days this year and went over a list of items that would have to be assured in order to do that. Any internet or power outage could disrupt those plans. Dr. Serino recommended that the district continue with snow days for at least the first three days and then reconsider after that point.

Continuing the conversation about student and staff well-being, the students are happy to be back and want to be together, having some fun. The high school students feel that there is an incredible amount of work. Most of the remote learners in the younger grades say that it's been a great experience, but the high school students feel that there needs to be a greater connection.

Dr. Serino held 12 hours of drop-in time over the past two weeks for staff members and she found that everyone is happy to be back but many feel that it is too much and that they are not enough. Dr. Serino agreed that it probably is too much, but it has nothing to do with the staff not being enough. The teachers also wonder how to answer questions about COVID that the students have. They also talked about the Wednesday schedule and various means of support.

Dr. Serino noted that this faculty and staff is the finest she has ever seen in terms of skill, dedication and unwavering commitment. She also appreciates the support from the board in understanding that well-being has to be the priority.

Mr. Moore thanked Dr. Serino and the entire faculty for all of their work.

Director of Finance's Report

Mrs. Neubig reported that the general fund closed out October at 29 percent expended and 32 percent revenue received. Larger expenditures included the audit and oil and diesel at \$1.99 a gallon for heating oil and \$2.01 for diesel. Mrs. Neubig is working with Mrs. Gaudreau, Mr. Croteau and Silver Petrucelli on the vestibules that have been approved by the state as well as the Memorial roof and LED lighting at Memorial. A discussion will need to be held soon at a Building committee meeting.

Culvert work has been progressing and inspected and should be good until the summer of 2022. The Memorial playscape and court conversions have been completed.

The district was awarded a total of \$380,000 in corona relief funds. Initially, the state had dictated the areas that the funds would go toward but many districts asked if the funds could be reallocated and the state agreed. Mrs. Neubig reached out to district department heads and it has been decided to apply the bulk of the funds to academic and student support services. They have allocated \$75,000 to that to cover support, long-term substitutes, virtual proctors and teacher class coverage. Student support personnel has been allocated \$70,000 to pay for the school re-entry team, the COVID liaison and educational evaluations. An additional \$3,700 was allocated to transportation monitors and an additional \$227,000 for PPE supplies.

Mrs. Neubig updated the board on the FEMA application and has been told that they weren't sure that cafeteria losses will be covered as USDA pays for that. She does believe that FEMA will take another look at the application and she revised it to include only through June 30th.

The independent audit has been completed and Mrs. Neubig has the final audit in email form. She asked if it can be distributed electronically this year instead of a bound copy. The auditors will present at the ERC meeting on December 9th and Morgan Stanley will also report on the performance of the pension fund at that meeting. The general fund balance was \$838,000 at year-end. Mrs. Neubig had originally thought it would be about \$791,000 and thanked Mrs. Popp for all of her help on that. Of that surplus, \$616,000 has been used to balance the 2020-2021 budget and \$222,000 can go to the fund balance as usual or can be reallocated for other reasons. Mrs. Neubig reminded everyone that the COVID relief funding ends on December 30th.

Mr. Moore and Dr. Friedrich thanked Mrs. Neubig for keeping on top of all of this. Mrs. Neubig thanked Mrs. Gaudreau and Mr. Croteau for all of their help as well. Dr. Serino stated that she has not worked with a better Director of Finance.

New Business**A. Vote to accept Administrators' Agreement**

Mrs. Neubig summarized that the agreement is for three years and the employee premium cost share increased from 20 to 21 percent in year one, to 21.5 in year two and to 22 percent in year three. They also added a post-deductible copay for prescriptions and the board contribution to the HSAs remains at 45 percent. Some language on the use of vacation and personal days was clarified and a new classification of directors was included with a new salary schedule. They also agreed upon a three-year salary schedule with step movement for all except directors, due to the new classification. There was a 2.75 gross wage increase for high, middle and elementary school principals, for a total of 2.79 for year one. Year two has a 2.5 percent gross wage increase across the board, plus step movement, for a total of 3.16 percent. Year

three has a 2.5 percent gross wage increase, plus a step movement, for a total of 2.73 percent. The total for the three years is an 8.68 percent increase.

Mr. Moore explained that the union has signed the contract.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the Administrators' Agreement, as presented.

In favor of approving the Administrators' Agreement, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried.

Mr. Hicks suggested amending the agenda to add item 13.B., acceptance of a gift.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to amend the agenda to add item 13.B. acceptance of a gift.

In favor of amending the agenda to add item 13.B., acceptance of a gift: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried.

B. Acceptance of Gift

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to accept a gift from Draya Gohagon with heartfelt thanks.

In favor of accepting a gift from Draya Gohagon, with heartfelt thanks: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried.

Mr. Moore asked Dr. Serino to send a note to Draya letting her know of their acceptance.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First