

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in regular session on Wednesday, April 25, 2018 at 4:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor
Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Sadinsky, Principal of Strong School and Mrs. DiMaggio, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Approval of Minutes - April 25, 2018

Dr. Taylor made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to approve the minutes of the April 25, 2018 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes as presented: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Grade 7 - One Team Model

Mrs. DiMaggio thanked Mr. Sadinsky for coming to the meeting to help present this information. She explained that they have looked at grade 7 for next year and why it should be changed to one team; one approach. They would like to increase instructional time, increase professional collaboration time, enhance opportunities for all students, increase intervention support time and personnel, establish a Monday through Friday schedule and respond to declining enrollment.

Mr. Sadinsky reviewed that Strong runs an eight-period schedule, plus flex time for a half hour. For many years, it has been a six-day, A through F, rotation and he has been looking at going to a Monday through Friday schedule for seven years now. They have developed a Monday through Friday schedule and it will be implemented in the next school year. They will also go to a seven-period schedule with no more flex time. This will allow instructional time to be increased. Each teacher will teach four classes per day, at 50 minutes each as opposed to five classes per day at 40 minutes. They will also change to a four marking period schedule from trimesters and PE will also be part of the related arts rotation (PE, art, technology innovation and health). Most of those classes will meet daily as opposed to five out of six days. They will also have full-time math and reading interventionists at Strong School next year.

The incoming sixth grade class will be 119 students next year and the total enrollment at Strong will be around 260. Staffing levels at Strong are slightly lower next year than they are this year.

Dr. Taylor asked how much of the decision to go to one team was made because of the programmatic imbalances and Mr. Sadinsky explained that this conversation had started before the requests came in to switch programs. The conversation began due to programmatic changes that were happening. Mrs. DiMaggio added that they have been looking at trying to get 60 minutes of math per day. Mr. Sadinsky also explained that the start and end times have not changed, so the only way to add instructional time was to look at the schedule. Readers' and Writers' workshop will be done in the same classroom.

Mr. Sadinsky did state that the requests to change programs did come into the conversation at one point. He explained that if all the requests were honored, the average class size in seventh grade ID would have been about approximately 17 and 28 on the Contemporary side.

Mr. Roraback asked if this change affects the accreditation and Mr. Sadinsky explained that that is not so in middle school. Dr. Taylor asked what the charge is to the Math and Reading Interventionists at this level and Mrs. DiMaggio explained that there had never been a full-time position at the middle school. For now, they will work with students who are not at goal. They will work on developing a rich program for the intervention students and, if possible, provide enrichment at some point. They have also looked at the coaches and interventionists across the District. Courtney Driesch, the math interventionist for seventh and eighth, will take on sixth grade as well.

Mr. Sadinsky also explained that they have been cross-teaming for the last two years where, last year, the seventh grade Contemporary teachers were also teaching an eighth grade class. This year, the two math sessions that Ms. Leeds has been teaching are with Contemporary students and she teaches language arts to ID students. At the same time, two eighth grade Contemporary teachers teach a section of seventh grade ID students. This has taken some adjustment, but is working very well. He also reported that there have been some major changes in curriculum which has prompted the teachers to spend more time working and collaborating together. They have also worked to have PLC time built into the teachers' schedules.

Dr. Veronesi also mentioned that this cross-teaming had never been considered until they realized that reductions could be made. She also stated that interventionists have been used with the model to intervene with students who perform below the benchmark, however they are now looking at the high-achieving math students and how their needs can be addressed. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that the curriculum is changing for next year, particularly the accelerated seventh grade math class which will include many eighth grade standards. Entrance into this class is rigorous and they will discourage parent overrides. Students in the accelerated class would then go on to algebra in eighth grade.

Mr. Sadinsky also commented that the students who have worked with the interventionist have seen great benefit. He also believes that having the interventionist, even if only at .4 time, has been a great asset. Dr. Veronesi also explained that the amount of students needing intervention should begin to decrease since implementing this model. Mrs. Petrella also felt that there are classes geared to higher-achieving students at the higher grades.

Mrs. Petrella asked how grade 8 will be configured and Mr. Sadinsky explained that the schedule will be the same for everybody. Strong School will basically be a three-team school next year, with eighth grade as two separate teams and seventh grade as one. Dr. Veronesi also commented that the eighth grade teachers teaching seventh grade is another way of creative staffing to not carry more staff members than necessary based on strictly adhering to a two program design with staff members staying within a

designated program. She also explained that the District will have an average of 100 students per grade in the coming years.

Dr. Taylor asked how many classes each student will have per day and Mr. Sadinsky explained that there will be seven class periods, one math, one science, one social studies, one language arts as well as world language, related arts that will rotate and music or tutorial. They will work on a schedule to allow for assemblies, etc.

Mrs. DiMaggio continued reviewing the differences between the ID and Contemporary programs in grade 7. They then divided it into curriculum, instruction, assessment and other. In the curriculum area, humanities was a difference with Integrated Day and there was one different field trip (American Museum of Art in New Britain). In instruction, students in the ID program may have the same teacher for seventh and eighth grade for certain subjects but not always. They do feel that all of the instructors are good teachers. Dr. Veronesi also commented that teaching reading and writing separately is really an old model and is not considered best practice.

Mrs. DiMaggio went on to review that assessments and grading practices are different and she will be looking at that. There is multi-aged peer collaboration in seventh grade ID with eighth grade mentors assigned to seventh graders. Mr. Sadinsky would like to have that as a building-level model in future years.

As for what the two programs have in common, they both use the Common Core standards, NGSS standards and the content standards with the curriculum. All of the students get related arts. As far as instruction, the focus has been on the 4Cs, Readers' and Writer's Workshop model and the text and materials are the same. Standardized assessments are all the same and Core Ethical Values and collaborative teams are the same.

Dr. Veronesi asked Mr. Sadinsky to talk about what happens socially for the students and Mr. Sadinsky explained that currently there are four periods from any given day, plus lunch, that the students from both teams are together. These include related arts, music, flex groups and lunch. All interscholastic sports teams as well as intramurals are accessible to anyone.

Mr. Sadinsky explained that the humanities class in ID is currently two periods, which is basically reading and social studies classes combined. Moving to the Reader's and Writer's Workshop model for next year, one teacher teaching both is critically important. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that the humanities course work is brilliant and they will use that concept as part of the curriculum that is being developed. Mr. Sadinsky stated that they not only have the PLC meetings, they also have team meetings daily where a lot of interdisciplinary work is done. Mr. Sadinsky also commented that there will be times when teachers can collaborate between and among grade levels.

Mrs. DiMaggio explained that there will be consistent curriculum for all students, including NGSS for science, as well as consistent curriculum enhancements, such as field trips and speakers. STEAM integration, Common Care standards and content standards will be consistent as well. In instruction, the workshop model is in place, the 4Cs and productive accountable talk will also be consistent as will authentic lessons, assessments and project-based learning. For assessment, consistent assessments, PLC meetings and data meetings as well as consistent grading practices and expectations. Dr. Veronesi commented that this is not happening just because they are moving to one team in seventh grade, but in fact the District is moving in this direction to improve student experience and student outcomes.

Dr. Veronesi also described her day at Strong School today during instructional rounds and explained that you can't see an instructional difference from one team to the other. At the end of the day, the teachers stated that they wanted to be able to observe each other, time every day to meet, support, models and discourse. Mr. Sadinsky described the two areas of focus that arose from the Instructional Rounds visit were the levels of questioning and more deliberate collaboration. They also looked at classroom layout and how room layout impacted student collaboration. Mr. Sadinsky and Mrs. DiMaggio both agreed that the administrators' list of identified priorities was very similar to the teachers' list. The staff will be debriefed on Tuesday and talk about next steps. Dr. Veronesi summarized that the problem of practice that the team examined was "classroom layout and instructional strategies promote passive student engagement" and that is not what this District is looking for. Mr. Sadinsky stated that that is something they have been working on for some time now.

Mrs. DiMaggio went on to review that extracurricular activities, sports and clubs will have a consistent schedule for all students.

Dr. Taylor asked about STEAM integration and Mrs. DiMaggio reviewed that STEAM is a work in progress and they will continue to try to integrate as much as they can. Mr. Sadinsky explained that even though they will attend the class fewer days in total, it will actually be more minutes. They have made some changes in the labs and the curriculum is being revised and rewritten. Tina Hurlbert is always looking at ways that she can integrate with her related arts colleagues as well as getting into other classrooms. Dr. Veronesi summarized that it won't be a separate STEAM class, but how it will be integrated into the curriculum.

Dr. Taylor also asked about the project-based learning in the ID program and how that will be integrated within the one team approach. Mr. Sadinsky felt that there was probably more project-based learning in the ID program, but there is plenty happening in the Contemporary program as well. He is encouraging his team to look more to the collaborative model and look at how some projects are interdisciplinary. Mrs. DiMaggio also commented that the UBD design model calls for more project-based learning.

Mr. Moore stated that, in the strategic visioning process, they heard that most people were looking for less homework. Mrs. DiMaggio felt that homework needs to be purposeful. Dr. Veronesi reported that the well-being committee talked about that yesterday within the context of how stressed children feel. She stated that research does not support homework as a robust variable that influences student achievement. Mr. Sadinsky brings parents' concerns to the teams and they have worked on talking about who's got what work due and when. Mr. Sadinsky has also asked his teachers to look at a consistent approach to how to deal with missing homework, etc. He does understand that there will be road bumps and that change is hard.

Mr. Moore also mentioned getting kids outside more and a change of the space. Dr. Veronesi stated that people talked about the furniture today while in rounds. She felt that furniture and space don't make the collaboration, but they can enhance it or detract from it. Mr. Sadinsky explained that lunches will be slightly longer next year, so perhaps they will be able to get outside more often. Dr. Veronesi suggested wellness walks.

Mrs. Petrella felt that this was very exciting and that it sounds like what she had while teaching. She also related that her students did a lot of project-based work and she did not teach in an ID program. Mr. Roraback felt it was about asking the kinds of questions to get the students thinking.

2017-18 PSAT/SAT Scores

Looking at the PSAT, Mrs. DiMaggio reported that there was an increase both in reading and writing as well as in the mathematics. She also stated that their scores are above the state and national benchmarks. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that the benchmark for the math scores are set higher and are much more difficult to reach.

Dr. Veronesi commented that we are out-performed around the world in terms of math and our PSAT and SAT scores are not simply the result of high school classes, but really K-9, K-10 and K-12. Mrs. DiMaggio also explained that math in the SAT tests is really algebra 1 and 2. All of the District's students take algebra 1 and 2 in high school. Mrs. DiMaggio read an article that commented that statistics and data analysis is the wave of the future rather than calculus. The District does offer two statistics courses and will look at how to integrate data analysis into other classes.

Looking at the PSAT and SAT results, the students made good progress between the PSAT and SAT. In reading and writing, 82 percent of the District's students met benchmark and 47 percent in math. Dr. Veronesi also commented that the change at the high school since Mr. Falcone's arrival has been to pay attention to the fact that the teachers can do things that will influence the students' performance in terms of analyzing the test data and making instructional decisions based on that. They may also an SAT prep class.

Mrs. DiMaggio went on review what changes were made to help with student growth, including looking at areas that need support and growth and created a school learning plan. PLCs (professional learning communities) have focused on the data and teachers were provided with the testing information materials. They also monitored student growth through the formative assessments and reviewed them at monthly meetings. They have also collaborated with outside agencies and central office to create professional learning opportunities. They have common planning time and provide additional support to students demonstrating reading and math deficiencies. They have also created final evaluation portfolios. These efforts have created a 70-point difference in test scores over a year's time. The high school also offers an SAT boot camp and SAT courses that are offered after school and on weekends.

Mrs. DiMaggio explained that we do not yet have the DRG information because some of the towns took the tests in April. Dr. Taylor felt it was hard to get a feel for what's happening when the test keeps changing. He felt that there is enough variation in the data that you can't really say that there has been growth on a quantitative scale without multiple years of data. Discussion continued about how difficult it is to interpret the data. Mr. Moore thought it might be interesting to see the difference between eighth and ninth grade due to the amount of students the District loses.

Assessment Calendars

Mrs. DiMaggio reviewed a draft of when the District wants to test the students, what information they would be looking for and how would it be truly meaningful. It is broken down to K-3/5, 6/8 and looking at iReady, assessment would not start in kindergarten until February. She reviewed that school-wide data teams will meet from October 22 to October 26 to look at the iReady data and the SBAC data. She reviewed several points on the assessment calendar. IABs (interim assessment blocks) have been placed where they need to go, based on the curriculum. The teachers found IABs useful this year, so they will continue for next year.

Mrs. DiMaggio then reviewed the literacy assessment calendar and explained that there will be plenty of data available. Dr. Veronesi stated that teachers have complained about testing all the time and Mrs.

DiMaggio explained that the District is legally required to screen all students to see what level they are on. All students need to be screened for the readiness for reading. She stressed that it is important to use the tests to inform instruction, to improve and to meet the needs of the students. They also look at the testing to tweak the curriculum. Dr. Veronesi explained that there needs to be three data points.

Mrs. DiMaggio explained that they looked at what tests are meaningful and knocked out some tests that didn't make sense. She mentioned that other items may also be discontinued by using the iReady system.

Public Comment

Melissa Booth, from Durham, asked if more of testing could be administered by someone other than the classroom teacher, especially in the younger grades. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that they like the classroom teacher to do the testing and a lot of this will be the full classroom. Mrs. Booth also heard that the principal at the high school is very into the PSAT/SAT test and she felt that there are people who just do not do well on tests and that doesn't mean that they're not bright and won't succeed. Mrs. Booth also felt that there were a lot of parents who were totally blind-sided by the seventh grade change and felt that the communication wasn't the best. She has heard that people felt that the budget was passed and now this is being thrown at them. Dr. Veronesi felt that that would be a lack of integrity on the administration's part if they had deliberately planned the timing after the budget and Mrs. DiMaggio stated that everyone has been very transparent about this. Mrs. Booth has also heard that the ID kids get 3-4 hours of homework and that was why people were trying to change their children from ID to Contemporary. She also mentioned that there is an obesity problem in the country and a lot of students don't do sports. She would hope that the District would require physical education for more than one quarter per year. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that it was a hard balance. Dr. Veronesi explained that students can get physical activity in other ways, including wellness walks.

Mrs. Booth felt that it seemed like the District was moving toward a more integrated approach for everybody and is okay with it at this level, but not yet at the younger level.

Carl Stoup thanked Dr. Veronesi, her staff and the Board for making this move. He felt it was very encouraging and quite exciting to take the first step to creating a great program.

Adjournment

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First