

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Well-Being Committee met on Tuesday, April 23, 2019 at 4:30 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mrs. Caramanello and Mr. Moore
Student Advisors present: Conner Byrne, Molly Yale
Teacher Advisor present: Mrs. Schaefer
Committee members absent: Dr. Friedrich and Mr. Hicks
Other Board members present: Lucy Petrella (arrived late)
Administration present: Mrs. Manning, Director of Organizational Development
Parent members present: Mr. DeFilio

Mrs. Caramanello 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. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to approve the agenda, as presented.

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

Definition of Well-Being: Associated Goals and Objectives

Mrs. Manning distributed copies of the minutes from the last meeting.

Mrs. Caramanello asked if everyone likes the use of the word “all” in “RSD 13 offers an environment that enhances the well-being of all” or they preferred the RSD community. Mrs. Manning had a working definition of well-being that talks about it being a positive emotion, relationships with meaning and accomplishment as a starting point and Mr. Moore had looked at other definitions that included vitality, personal fulfillment and sense of accomplishment.

Mrs. Caramanello didn’t feel it was the actual definition of wellness, but more of who will the committee focus on. Mr. Moore explained that the community is generally students and teachers. The Board was looking at students, teachers and maybe Board members, but probably not the general public. Mr. Moore didn’t feel it was their job to extend to the two towns.

Mrs. Caramanello found a district that had resources for parents about things like bullying or loneliness or not fitting in. She wasn’t sure if that was something the district does and wondered if the parents would be part of the RSD community in that sense. Mrs. Schaefer felt that the community needs to be part of it and positive resources should be provided. Mrs. Manning gave examples of possible resources, like tips

for your children playing outdoors. Mrs. Manning liked the idea of providing social and emotional well-being resources for parents.

Mr. DeFilio felt this committee would help positively affect the teachers and administration, students and all the different entities that interact with the school system as a whole. He would hope to make sure the kids are safe, both mentally and physically. Mr. DeFilio talked to Mr. Falcone today to see what he would like to have happen and he will speak with other principals. Mr. Falcone felt that there was too much homework and that kids need time to be kids. Mr. DeFilio feels that the family, including the system, has failed. He suggested that the committee's goal be the well-being of all related to the safety, both mental and physical, and security of the children, the staff and all organizations that interact with the school system as a whole. Mr. DeFilio reiterated his stories of why he decided to participate on the committee.

Mr. Moore felt that there were parts to well-being other than safety and security. Mr. DeFilio added that Mr. Falcone would like to see some student groups formed. He agreed to formalize his definition and send it to the committee members for review at the next meeting. Mr. DeFilio also felt it would be awesome to have a few people that relate to kids on a regular basis come visit the committee, like the athletic director, the physical trainer, some teachers. He would like them to tell the committee what works and what doesn't. Mrs. Schaefer stated that that was something that the staff discussed at Strong School and everyone agreed that the teachers also need to be happy.

Well-Being Resources and Support

Mrs. Schaefer explained that school well-being champions are necessary to help push this idea in each building, almost like a buddy system to check in with staff members. She also explained that the district's Well-Being Committee is working on this as well. Up to now, they have been focusing more on students than staff.

Mrs. Manning added that they have been looking at the professional learning calendar to make sure to include the wellness of the children and staff. They will train every staff member in the Flip Your Lid program.

Mrs. Caramanello wondered how the two separate Well-Being Committees can merge somehow to work parallel. She asked if she could attend a meeting and Mrs. Schaefer felt it would be a great idea. Mrs. Schaefer felt it was hard to explain to a teacher that the content isn't what's important and to just be a little kinder and have a bit more compassion. Mrs. Manning added that some of the committee members have talked about a shift in their own personal and professional practice. Mrs. Caramanello asked if she could apply for a grant from CVEF and Mr. Moore did not feel that the Board could apply for a grant.

Mr. Moore felt that the Board's role was to make sure that there is activity at the teacher level that is ongoing and to see if further resources need to be provided. He noted that the Board and administration had sponsored a couple of seminars on equity and that is carrying on at the school level.

Mrs. Caramanello asked the students what they think would be impactful and a way the Board or administration could support. Molly Yale stated that she and Connor Byrne came up with a document, emphasizing promoting teachers to form healthy relationships with their students, a simple joke or anecdote can help a student trust a teacher more and break down the idea that the teacher is the obstacle instead of the actuality of the teacher helping the student. Connor felt that a lot of students see the teacher as the person who's giving them the bad grade instead of teaching them. They stressed communication, including surveys for students.

Mr. Moore asked what makes the students happy at school and suggested going home or having lunch and Molly Yale agreed that those two make her happy. She feels that she only knows a couple of teachers that are enthusiastic. She highlighted Ms. Altieri and noted that she jokes with the students and has really good relationships with all of her students. Mr. DeFilio added that she has good relationships with the parents as well.

Mr. DeFilio stated that he was confused and didn't know why he was there. He thought that they should develop a statement first and then talk about grants, etc. Mrs. Caramanello explained that she is trying to find out what the district's Well-Being Committee is doing so that this committee can support them. Mr. Moore stated that they are trying to define the committee's purpose and are far from where this committee functions on a routine basis. This committee has been created for the Board of Education to find out what they need to do to foster well-being in the schools. Some of the problems have been identified, including too much homework, long days, long bus rides, empty buses, gender issues, transgender issues, equity issues, race issues and a variety of other issues. Mr. Moore does not believe that the teacher-student relationship is the Board's function and that the Board needs to make sure that the teachers have a relationship, but not what it is. Mr. DeFilio suggested that the committee meet more than once a month to jump-start the committee.

Mrs. Caramanello felt that Mr. DeFilio was asked to join the committee to be a parent voice and she can do that as well. She would like to delve deep into these issues. Mr. DeFilio asked for tasks so that they can come back in a month and get something done. Mrs. Caramanello explained that this is just brainstorming at this point as this is the first time this issue has ever been addressed by the Board. Mr. Moore explained that the committees of the Board do not have any real authority and they bring their reports back to the full Board. The full Board would then take any necessary action. He added that the climate survey is mandated by state law and will be done in the fall.

Mrs. Manning added that there is a lot going on and the equity piece will fall under Well-Being as well. The proactive parenting series is based on the climate survey data and will come up in May. Mr. DeFilio suggested that they pick one topic at a time and used the example of the way booster clubs interact with the sports teams. Mrs. Caramanello asked how that would benefit the wellness of all students and staff. Mr. DeFilio thought that the booster clubs were there to benefit the students and staff and developing a protocol would make it more organized.

Mr. Moore explained that the Board needs to know what everyone's role is and those roles should be defined. He used the examples of the SRO, the guidance counselor, ABA staff that have a role in the well-being of the students.

Mrs. Manning stated that well-being questions were included in the professional learning survey that they had done. She gave several examples of things that have gone on. She also noted that several people on the district's well-being committee stated that they had joined the committee because they were concerned about their colleagues. Mrs. Manning will provide a list of the support activities that are going on and what may be missing.

District-Wide Climate Survey

Mrs. Manning had some samples from Dr. Veronesi on the climate survey that was done last year and what may be done in October. This goes from the elementary school up to the high school. She explained that the state requires that the climate survey is done biannually, but other questions can be asked that are more specific to the individual schools. Molly Yale explained that she took the survey on a computer at school.

Mr. Moore thought that maybe the committee could figure out if any additional questions should be added that would be beneficial for determining well-being. Mrs. Manning will provide the feedback from last year's survey and she also mentioned that the Durham-Middlefield Local Wellness Coalition had also done a survey of students in grades six through 12 and she will provide that feedback as well.

Mrs. Caramanello asked if the committee will continue to meet through the summer and Mr. Moore explained that there are usually very few committee meetings in August, but they do go through July. She also asked if there was a reason for the climate survey being done in the fall. Mrs. Manning stated that it certainly can be done in the spring and there may be other options for the fall. Mr. Moore felt that it might be better to do it in the spring as everyone has already been through the year. The state requires the survey to be done every other year, but there would be no reason that it couldn't be done every year. Molly Yale and Connor Byrne also felt it would be beneficial to do it in the spring because things change during the school year.

Mr. Moore asked Mrs. Manning if it would be possible to do the survey this spring, but she didn't know if they would get the anticipated responses at the end of the school year. Mr. Moore suggested that the issue be brought up at the Board meeting. It was also discussed about doing the survey just at specific schools.

Safety and Security Update

Mr. Moore reported that the vestibule security has gone in and they are waiting for a grant. The SRO is in and will be giving a report to the full Board. Mrs. Schaefer felt that the SRO has been a very positive presence at Strong School. He has started a chess club with the students and is making solid connections. Connor Byrne stated that he sees him occasionally and feels that he is really good. Mrs. Schaefer also stated that the trooper has taken some of the students who are facing challenges and personally meets with them. They also commented on his great Instagram page. Mrs. Petrella hoped that the Board could hear more of this type of report about the SRO.

Mr. Moore wondered if the kids are feeling more secure and if they recognize that they are safe at school. He wondered if the drills and lockdowns help and if there was a better method to communicate information to the students. Mrs. Schaefer stated that she was as clueless as the students were during the lockdown and she let the students know that she felt safe and would keep them as safe as she could. She felt that if she had more information, she probably would have told the students. Mr. Moore felt that that was probably a situation where they should have told everyone that the threat was outside of the schools. Mrs. Schaefer added that they knew that they were in a "shelter in place" and knew that they were all secure and safe. Molly Yale stated that they knew they were locked in, but had no clue what was going on yet she felt safe. It was agreed that there should be a debriefing after these kinds of incidents.

Staff and Student Recognition

Mrs. Caramanello asked how staff members and students are recognized. Mr. Moore stated that awards are given out annually for a variety of things, but he wondered if they were the right things and in the right amount. Mrs. Caramanello mentioned recognition for things outside of school as well. Mr. Moore commented that the Board almost never recognizes staff, other than Teacher of the Year for which Mr. Moore uses his personal money. Mrs. Schaefer mentioned that the high school awards a parking spot for a teacher and a student. She also mentioned teachers that no longer coach and the new coaches are not involved with the students all day and don't know as much about them.

Mrs. Manning reviewed the three pillars of student achievement, engagement and well-being. With regard to recognition, she wondered if it is done all in the student achievement bucket or has the district given an award that falls into student engagement or well-being.

Extra-Curricular Involvement Evaluation

Mr. Moore stated that he has spoken to a few students who would like lacrosse as a sport. Others have heard requests for field hockey. It was generally felt that there weren't a lot of options in the spring. Mrs. Caramanello suggested girls' golf as well. Mrs. Schaefer added that a school spirit committee would be good. Molly Yale suggested more social activities and Mr. Moore stated that they are talking about using Korn as a place where students could hang out for a bit. Mrs. Schaefer suggested a van or bus that connected Strong with the high school. Molly Yale stated that she hears people say that they don't even know any of the freshmen.

Mrs. Caramanello felt that a coffee shop would go over very well and both Connor Byrne and Molly Yale agreed. Mr. Moore reported that the school in China has a coffee shop run by students right on their campus. Mrs. Schaefer felt that the teachers would love that too and Mr. Moore felt that it would be even better if it were run by the students. Mrs. Schaefer felt that that may make teachers that don't leave their room actually come out a little bit more.

Mr. Moore added that students also want to be outside and asked how that could happen. Mrs. Manning asked how many teachers teach outside and Molly Yale added that she didn't believe she was ever taught outside. Mrs. Caramanello stated that they did that in the elementary schools all the time. Mr. Moore also mentioned that the students wanted animals, but felt that would be tough due to allergies.

Communication

None.

Public Comment

None.

To summarize the meeting, Mrs. Caramanello felt that they did focus in on the actual definition of well-being and Mr. DeFilio will send the wording out. She also felt that they agreed that it would be great to have the school climate survey in the spring so that the committee can delve deeper into it. A lot of ideas were thrown out and Mrs. Caramanello would like to attend the next district Well-Being Committee meeting.

Adjournment

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Caramanello and Mr. Moore. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz
Alwaz First