

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Well-Being Committee met in special session on Thursday, January 9, 2020 at 4:00 PM in the Library at Strong Middle School, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback  
Other Board of Education members present: Mrs. Booth  
Student Advisors present: Conner Byrne and Molly Yale  
Teacher Advisor present: Mrs. Schaefer  
Administration present: Dr. Serino, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Manning, Director of Organization Development

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**

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

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

**Approval of Minutes - October 29, 2019**

Mr. Roraback mentioned that he expressed slight reservations on the self-leadership professional development from his personal experience and would like the minutes to reflect his feelings.

*Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the minutes of October 29, 2019, as amended.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of October 29, 2019, as amended: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried unanimously.*

**Review of School Climate for Optimal Learning Survey Results**

Dr. Serino distributed the results of the climate survey to the committee members and asked them to take a few minutes to review them.

Mrs. Booth asked if the high school students do a course evaluation at the end of a semester and Conner Byrne stated that Ms. McClintock does a reflection, but Molly Yale stated she doesn't have any teachers that do it. Molly Yale felt that some of the comments were crazy and added that she teaches herself over and over again with homework. Mrs. Booth felt that Molly and Conner were in a select group of students.

Dr. Serino felt that the homework theme is in two buckets, one being the volume and the other being quality and that both were reported to create stress on the students. Molly Yale felt that homework on top of athletics is an issue. Dr. Serino added that it's the homework, plus a job, plus athletics, plus volunteering and extra-curricular activities can be what creates the stress students talk about. Mrs. Booth mentioned that homework should be more consistent from teacher to teacher and Dr. Serino stated that she has heard that it should be more consistent districtwide. Other people have heard that homework is used to catch up for what cannot be taught during the day because the teachers need to keep up with the curriculum. Molly Yale added that some teachers grade on accuracy and others grade just on completion. Dr. Serino explained that homework should really be independent practice, but not self-teaching. Conner Byrne noted that he's had homework where he felt like he was teaching himself, but other homework that was practice. Mrs. Schaefer felt it would help everybody to be consistent. They also noted that there was no time to read for pleasure.

Dr. Serino summarized that there is a link between homework and well-being and administrators have accepted that this needs an examination and some clarity of expectations. She also felt that some teachers feel like they need permission not to give homework. Dr. Friedrich asked if the teachers know how long the homework should take when they assign it. Dr. Serino felt that sometimes the teachers have no idea as it depends on each student. There was also discussion about the level of support the students receive at home.

Dr. Serino also mentioned that students are witnessing unkind/bullying behavior. She feels that the students have an accurate expectation of what it means to be kind and respectful. Mr. Moore asked if the younger kids were allowed to write comments and Dr. Serino explained that they were.

Dr. Serino asked the committee to review the survey results and they will discuss it again at the next meeting. Mr. Moore asked if the results will go on the website, but Dr. Serino did not feel comfortable putting the comments on the website. Mr. Hicks asked about the response categories and Dr. Serino explained there were five, strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree.

### **RSD 13 Well-Being Committee Update**

Mrs. Manning explained that they will use the climate survey at the Well-Being Committee as well as the Equity committee. She highlighted the first ever Be Thankful spirit day and all the schools participated. At Strong School, they have actualized the self-leadership model, with the Power of Pause and restorative practices.

Mrs. Schaefer explained that Strong School is not doing the five-hour professional development on self-leadership and they are linking the restorative with the self-leadership. Dr. Serino asked Mrs. Schaefer to give an example of taking a restorative approach. Mrs. Schaefer explained that it starts by forming communities within the classroom and connecting with the students so that when something happens, you come together to deal with the issues within the classroom. This helps to put the pride back in the classroom instead of a teacher being in charge of minions. However, this can't happen if the teacher and students aren't self-regulated. Mrs. Manning added that they describe it as being proactive and reactive. She added that a lot of time is spent every month to make sure that this process works for the teachers.

Mrs. Schaefer reviewed the ambassador program at Strong School. They are leading the program at Strong School and work with the other teachers. The program leader meets with small groups and with single teachers as well and the group meets as a whole. Dr. Serino asked a teacher today about their faculty meeting and was told that they reflected on how they had handled a particular situation and

realized that they handled it very poorly. Mrs. Schaefer had a circle of students ask her this week if she would teach other teachers to do what she does. She stated that Mr. Fitzgerald is doing a great job with this as well and tells many stories about his military background. Mr. Roraback noted that kids are very savvy and can perceive the genuineness of it.

Mrs. Schaefer added that the Well-Being Committee also wants to give them the time to start going to the elementary schools to help them absorb the model as well.

Molly Yale asked if the Coginchaug teachers are getting taught this approach and Mrs. Schaefer explained that Mr. Bajoros, Ms. Torres and Ms. Bowman are all on the Well-Being Committee, but they have not received this training yet. Mrs. Schaefer hopes that this goes from the bottom up and changes start happening in the high school as well.

Mr. Moore asked if any students have engaged in any of this training and Mrs. Manning explained that it has really been just the teachers though Mrs. Schaefer's classroom has been an informal lab site. Dr. Serino explained that the plan is that this will roll out to teachers first and to students next. Mrs. Schaefer felt that it will become a core ethical value. Mr. Moore suggested engaging a team of students into this.

Mrs. Caramanello asked about the next steps and Mrs. Manning explained that they are looking at the high school and Memorial. They will also continue to reflect on it and will share the next phase with the committee by the end of the year. She did feel that Memorial will be the likely choice because of some of the things that are already happening there.

### **Equity Committee Update**

Mrs. Manning reported that they will use the climate survey in the equity committee as well. The focus groups that were held at the high school showed that students wanted to continue to have conversations and the book club, in partnership with Middletown Public Schools, is going very well. This month, they will be doing team building activities. The authors of Tell Me Who You Are, the book they are reading, have agreed to Skype with the students in March and will include additional students as well. Mrs. Manning did not know if the book was in the library at Coginchaug or not, but she will check on that. She took a minute to review the book with the committee members. There are currently about 15 students in the book club. Molly Yale and Conner Byrne do not know any students in the book club.

Mrs. Manning added that they have also embarked on a project with SERC and some consultants who were able to work with team leaders at the high school and the feedback was that the conversations were very impactful and allowed the teachers to think about the courses they teach and their conversations with students. They met with Ingrid Kennedy from SERC and are working on how to continue that partnership.

Dr. Serino added that faculty is as overwhelmed as the students and all of them want to get better at what they are doing. Mrs. Manning agreed and noted that the team leaders had a meeting during the afternoon on a school day. Dr. Serino noted that state agencies want to work with District 13 and they are receiving some grant money to do that.

Mr. Moore reviewed that there are state requirements about what needs to be taught in equity and asked if those have been addressed. Mrs. Manning explained that they are revising and updating the social studies curriculum and antisemitism instruction is being included as well as the Black and Latino course being included in the 2021-2022 school year. She believes that Coginchaug will be offering more than one

course on diversity. Mr. Moore asked about Dr. Good's story being integrated into the program and Dr. Serino stated that Scott Sadinsky has talked to Dr. Good, but she didn't know anything further. Mrs. Manning added that a good number of teachers from Coginchaug are on the Well-Being Committee and the committee members are acting as ambassadors and doing things district-wide. The focus at the high school was equity this year, which began with team leaders and will roll out to the entire faculty.

Mrs. Schaefer asked if it would be possible to sell RSD 13 t-shirts/sweatshirts. Deb Stone had shared a letter with Dr. Serino from a fifth-grade ID class to a fifth-grade contemporary class, thanking them for inviting them to Feast with Friends. They felt that everyone was open to meet new friends.

### **Public Comment**

None.

### **Adjournment**

*Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to adjourn the meeting.*

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First