

Revised

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in special session on Thursday, January 28, 2021 at 4:00 PM remotely.

Committee members present: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor

Committee members absent: Mrs. Caramanello

Community members present: Ms. Commins

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. DiMaggio, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment and Mr. Ford, Principal of John Lyman School

Mrs. Petrella 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. Roraback, to approve the agenda, as presented.

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

Approval of Minutes - October 21, 2020

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the minutes of the October 21, 2020 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of October 21, 2020, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor.

Grade level planning

Mr. Ford reviewed that the decision has made to transition to a single-grade configuration beginning next year. He explained that they began by thinking about what is the experience that they want for all of the students and why. Going forward, they feel this is the configuration that is best for the students. It will allow teachers to focus on one grade level. Mr. Ford explained that the curricula and the standards really make a single grade configuration the best option moving forward. They feel there will be better alignment

and more opportunities for integration of content units. The NGSS science standards and new social studies standards are challenging, especially in a multi-aged setting.

Mr. Ford stressed that this change in grade configuration will not mean a change in classroom or building culture. They are committed to the emphasis of being a community of learners and have a strong belief in the Integrated Day and HOT philosophies and practices. He explained that the Integrated Day philosophy is not just a multi-age design and is really a student-centered approach. The basic premise is that it's about student exploration within the curriculum and the idea of student voice and choice. He summarized that they are committed to both the ID philosophy and the HOT approach.

Mr. Ford reviewed that the multi-graded experiences outside of the classroom will continue, including things like assemblies and Book Buddies. They all feel it's important to maintain the culture of John Lyman.

Mrs. Booth asked if this was being talked about before COVID and Mr. Ford stated that the decision was not a result of COVID though COVID has presented different challenges. He noted that the teachers feel they can do it better and more effectively while still maintaining the same ID and HOT culture. Mrs. Booth fears that those good things will be lost and also asked if looping will be an option. Mr. Ford stated that there are both pros and cons to looping and they would not be looking to a looping approach initially. Looping still requires teachers to be aware of curricula for two grades. He noted that that could be considered in the future.

Mrs. DiMaggio added that math has been split up in grades 3 and 4 over the past few years. Mr. Ford also stated that they have talked about how to maintain the vitality of the HOT and ID approaches. He added that a lot of the parent feedback is specifically about those pieces.

Mrs. Booth is frustrated because Dr. Serino had said time and time again that when the district becomes one program, certain things will be maintained and they were told that looping would be an option and that multi-age could be an option. Mrs. Booth knows how hard the teachers work, but she feels like Lyman is dying. Mr. Ford certainly doesn't feel that way, but they are changing and they know the reality of potentially closing the school at some point. Mr. Ford noted that this is not something done "to them" and that he respects the opinions of the classroom teachers. He also noted that Integrated Day has changed over the years as well and he believes it will continue to evolve.

Mr. Roraback agreed that Lyman is a special place. He stated that he was part of the very first ID class and that it was never easy on the teachers. He recalls the sense of excitement in learning who his teacher would be the next year and believes that the kids are resilient.

Mrs. Petrella asked if this information has been shared with parents and what kind of feedback was received. Mr. Ford explained that it has not been shared with parents yet as he wanted to share it with the board first. He plans to share the information with parents very soon and will report back with any feedback. Mrs. Petrella asked if looping or the multi-aged classrooms could be an option in the future and Mr. Ford wouldn't rule anything out. Mrs. Petrella asked if this will have any effect on staffing and Mr. Ford didn't feel it would have a dramatic effect as he would expect the school population to be the same.

Dr. Friedrich asked how many current learners think they know who their teacher will be next year. Mr. Ford felt that probably 70 students in first and third grade feel that they already know who their teacher will be. He also noted that there have been times when teachers were changed in the past.

Dr. Taylor stated that he is a pretty passionate Lyman supporter and the uniqueness of the school was part of their decision to move to town. He was concerned that the district is being slightly submissive of the ability to instill or generate the same culture that is currently there. He felt there are benefits to the multi-age component that haven't really been discussed. Because of the multi-age groups, there are no age divide barriers. It is quite common to have all ages sitting with each other at lunch tables. He also felt that students are able to move intellectually within the classroom. From a family/community standpoint, Dr. Taylor noted that a lot of their friends have children in other grades at Lyman.

Dr. Taylor felt that he hasn't heard a super-compelling reason as to why this is happening and felt that if a multi-age environment was a priority, they would find ways to make the other things happen. He does understand that the curriculum may be more difficult, but believes that there are distinct advantages to multi-age classrooms and looping. He added that he has not heard from a large group of teachers that they want to get rid of the multi-age classrooms. Dr. Taylor agreed with Mrs. Booth that the essence of Lyman will be gone. He felt that, with the loss of the building as well, they will have effectively moved into the more contemporary approach and they should look hard at that. He reminded everyone of all of the people who came to board meetings concerned about losing the culture of Lyman and felt that they weren't wrong in their feelings. Dr. Taylor felt that he knew all along that this would happen when he couldn't get Dr. Serino to promise that they would have multi-age classrooms or looping within the new configuration. He felt that they will now look like every other public school system and no longer be unique.

Mrs. DiMaggio understood where Dr. Taylor and Mrs. Booth were coming from, but noted that they have been able to take aspects of the Lyman culture and permeate it throughout the district. She noted that assemblies have started at Brewster and they now have had teachers-in-residence at Brewster, Memorial and Strong schools. They have been working hard on designing an approach that will benefit all students. Although not a multi-age classrooms, she is seeing those experiences throughout the district. Mrs. DiMaggio stated that the multi-age experiences are going to be at the forefront as they redesign the single approach.

Mrs. Petrella recalled Dr. Serino explaining that they don't even call them HOT schools anymore and that things continually change. She believes that the expectations of the students have changed dramatically. Mrs. Petrella hoped that the discussion tonight gives Mr. Ford some insight into what he will be hearing from parents.

Mrs. DiMaggio explained that she was the principal of a HOT school in Rocky Hill with all of the Lyman attributes, but no multi-age classrooms. HOT grants are gone, but grants are still available and the concept is still there.

Dr. Schuch stated that he has listened intently to many conversations about this and assured everyone that he came into the district with a completely open mind about all of these topics. He would certainly not promise what things will look like in the future, but he is committed to learner-centered education. He feels that some of what Mr. Ford described at Lyman sounds very learner-centered to him and he asked for a little bit of time and patience for him to be better grounded. Dr. Schuch stated that he did not take the job to have the district look like every other district in Connecticut. He also believes that the world has changed, but education hasn't changed nearly enough.

Mr. Roraback added that he believes they are under-estimating the power of the community of the two towns. This district is made up of a lot of people, other than the schools, that have a huge influence on young kids' lives.

Wednesday, in-person student schedules

Mrs. DiMaggio had initially wanted to respond to the board's question about what is happening on Wednesdays, but other concerns have surfaced. The school year started with the hybrid schedule, with no school on Wednesdays. They then decided to go to a half-day schedule on Wednesdays and it was extremely important to ensure that students had bona fide, in-person school on Wednesdays. She is proud that the district made that decision.

They had proposed the K-4 Wednesday schedules to focus on literacy and math. Remote students also received recorded lessons in SEL as well. Grade 5 has 30-minute classes with no recess or homework on Wednesdays. Grades 6-8 have 30-minute classes and no homework is issued unless classwork is unfinished. They have a seven-period day on Wednesdays and the enrichment specialist provides enrichment activities as well. The high school has 37-minute classes, with no homework unless classwork is unfinished. They have a 5-minute transition in between classes.

Mr. Falcone believes that this is an effective schedule. Mr. Sadinsky is open to further suggestions, but believes that it appears to be working. They did talk about interdisciplinary work amongst the teams on that day as well. Literacy and math remain essential at the elementary level.

Mrs. Booth stated that she had heard that the middle school feels like it is too quick and they weren't getting enough accomplished. Mrs. DiMaggio stated that she recalls hearing they said 25-minute classes that are back to back, so she went to the principal to verify that and it is not the case. Mrs. Booth remembers Mrs. Caramanello having concerns about the amount of work at the high school.

Dr. Friedrich felt that the concern was that, by the time you get the kids settled to start a class and end a class, there is not a lot of time. He too remembered that it was a problem at the middle school. Mrs. DiMaggio reiterated that Mr. Sadinsky was definitely open to additional ideas. She summarized that the students in the middle school use Wednesdays as a touch-base day and have a short time in each subject. Dr. Friedrich gave the example that was discussed at the Well-Being committee of students coming into art, getting their stuff out, taking a few minutes and then having to clean up. He stated that that was viewed as completely, totally unprofitable use of time. He felt that they need to consider specific activities that may be unsuitable for that schedule. Mr. Moore noted that it was Mrs. Schaefer's comments in the beginning of the program. He believes that she has since accommodated that by having other than art during those time periods. Mrs. DiMaggio agreed and stated that Mrs. Schaefer is one of the district's Social-Emotional Learning ambassadors.

Mr. Moore also noted that his grandchildren are all appreciative of the Wednesday schedule at the high school to give them time to catch up. Mrs. DiMaggio acknowledged that there are parents and some teachers that don't care for the Wednesday schedule, but the benefits really do outweigh the negatives.

Mrs. DiMaggio noted that she looks at the list of teachers absent every day and has noticed that it seemed as if less teachers were out. She reviewed four years of data from August to January. This year there were 690 absences (other than COVID-related). That same time period last year, there were 1,058 absences, 904 the

year before and 1,025 the year before. She feels that Wednesdays have really helped and supported the teachers. She also feels that the teachers may feel guilty about calling out sick with the difficulty the district is having getting subs. Essentially, the students are getting better and more consistent instruction.

Mrs. DiMaggio also explained that they had to pull out some PLC and grade level support time during the school day because of the mitigation strategies. As an example, there would have typically been a chorus class at Lyman for grades 3-4 and teachers could have used that time to meet together.

Mrs. DiMaggio also noted that there are quite a few teachers who meet with small groups of students on Wednesday afternoons, especially cohort C students at the elementary level. Related arts teachers are recording SEL videos for elementary students. Some of the remote teachers are teaching four different grade levels or several different subjects. Teachers meet with special education teachers and interventionists and have SAT and PPT meetings on Wednesday afternoons. This allows for more consistent instruction for the students.

Professional learning is also happening on Wednesdays. Training has also happened for related arts teachers who are working with some intervention students in reading. Mrs. DiMaggio added that the teachers are very isolated from one another and that social time is important. Wednesday afternoons allows for some of that time. Strong School has virtual lunch groups on Wednesdays and some of the staff takes wellness walks. They have also provided hot chocolate to the staff.

Mrs. DiMaggio explained that she spoke to Dr. Schuch about the two remaining early release days for professional learning and they are going to propose that they be moved to Wednesdays. She also explained that if there is a delay on Wednesdays, there will not be an early release.

Mrs. Petrella asked to confirm that PPT meetings are held on Wednesdays so that teachers are not pulled out of the classroom and Mrs. DiMaggio stated that not all of them are held on Wednesdays, but they try. Mrs. DiMaggio reiterated the difficulty in getting subs and noted that any time they don't have to pull a teacher out of the classroom is a good thing. Mrs. Petrella knows there is a concern about students missing out on instruction on Wednesdays, but also noted that there are other schools that are not even back in school. Mrs. Petrella is grateful that Connecticut schools have reopened and are leading the way. Mrs. DiMaggio agreed and noted that the teachers have done a remarkable job.

Mrs. DiMaggio also noted how exhausting it is for teachers to be in a mask all day long talking with little children. She felt that the time on Wednesdays is well spent and she wouldn't want to see it any other way.

Mr. Roraback stated that his district switched to the same mode back in November and one of the most valuable things was he took that time to meet with all students who chose to be remote only. Mrs. DiMaggio added that Glastonbury has always had early-release Wednesdays, even pre-COVID, and her children received an awesome education. Mr. Roraback also mentioned that schools everywhere have had to close due to staff shortages.

Mrs. Petrella asked what ever happened to the proposal from Dolphin Days for daycare in the schools. Mrs. DiMaggio did not know the answer to that, but Mrs. Booth thought it was because there wasn't enough interest to make it worthwhile for Dolphin Days. Mrs. Booth added that people do not want to pay for the extra daycare and she, personally, does not want to subject her kids to another cohort of students. She added

that she doesn't even have her kids ride the bus because it would be another cohort of students and she has heard that from many people.

Mrs. DiMaggio stated that she understood that perspective and Mrs. Booth felt that she did, but she didn't. She is very frustrated and stated that COVID is not going away any time soon. Mrs. Booth felt that they will be wearing masks for a long time. She knows that working people are feeling this and reminded everyone that the working people are the ones paying everyone's salaries. She felt that people may lose their jobs if they keep getting stretched like this. Mrs. Booth also mentioned the lost educational time for the students.

Mrs. Booth mentioned that the calendar had been updated in December and they used to get out at a certain time for conferences which was different than the time they got out for professional development, but somehow that all changed. She does not feel that that was well-publicized to the parents. She also mentioned that the time school gets out for weather has also changed. Mrs. DiMaggio stated that her understanding was that they changed early release time to be the same for everything because it was too confusing. Mrs. Booth did not feel that the board voted on that and that it was not very well-communicated to the parents. She does feel that having the same time is a good thing, but with an 11:15 or 11:30 AM release time at Strong, parents can't even get three hours of work in.

Mrs. Petrella agreed that a lot of parents drop off and pick up their students and she wished there was some way to help parents without changing the Wednesday afternoons. She felt these are extenuating circumstances and there may not even be an answer.

Dr. Schuch stated that they were happy to have been able to shift the calendar so that there is no more than one early release day in a week. He also hoped that everyone agreed that there would be no early release on a day when there is a delay in the morning. They did not want to have to go to a full remote learning day. Dr. Schuch knows that schools are a place for learning, but acknowledged that schools have historically provided a childcare service to families in the communities and it is a hardship when that is disrupted. He is very happy that the district is in school four full days and a partial day a week because half the kids in the country haven't gone back to school at all since last March. He also added that the absentee data is not at all what he would have expected.

Public Comment

Heidi Pizzo stated that she has four children in the district and she is not a fan of the early release on Wednesdays. She feels that the virus rate in the community is low enough for the kids to go to school full-time. Mrs. Pizzo also felt that school is not daycare and is a place to learn.

Adjournment

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

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First