

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in regular session on Thursday, February 18, 2021 at 4:00 PM remotely.

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

Committee members absent: None

Community members present: Bronwyn Commins

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. DiMaggio, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment, and Mrs. Hamilton

Dr. Friedrich called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Public Comment**

None.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*A motion was made and seconded 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 - January 28, 2021**

*Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Booth, to approve the minutes of the January 28, 2021 meeting, as presented.*

Mrs. Booth asked to have the word “not” added to her comments that were included on page 6. Mrs. Petrella accepted the amendment.

*In favor of approving the minutes of January 28, 2021, as amended: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor.*

### **Enrichment and Gifted and Talented Presentation - Maureen Hamilton**

Mrs. Hamilton explained that the whole goal of enrichment is to impact achievement and it does that by increasing engagement, enthusiasm and encouragement. Mrs. Hamilton is currently teaching remote science to fifth and sixth graders as well as teaching social-emotional learning for sixth grade at Strong. She is also trying to do as much as possible with enrichment. Mrs. Hamilton reviewed a few of the projects they have been working on, including collecting snacks for the Middlefield Food Bank, making Sumerian bricks, using chopsticks, making cherry blossom paintings, baking bread and others. They also worked with a scientist from Portugal and he has now volunteered to work with anyone in the district.

Mrs. Hamilton explained that she meets every week with the Strong Social Studies, Strong Science, the remote fifth grade team and the remote 6-8 team. She has also occasionally met with the World Languages team. She supports those teams by providing extra resources and giving new ideas and went on to review a few projects they completed.

Mrs. Hamilton has started some work with the Media Center at Strong where students have tutorials. Some of the projects there have included cuneiform writing kits, gratitude journals, information on monarch butterflies and milkweed seeds, problem solving activities, Valentine woven hearts and a science fiction book club.

Other things Mrs. Hamilton has worked on include enrichment padlets for individual students, the Strong School Wordmasters Team, The Writer's Club and the Strong School Sixth Grade Math Olympiad. Mrs. Hamilton has also worked with students during tutorial time which includes online coding classes, drawing classes, a fantasy book club, some personal interest projects and a couple of different contests, Languages Celebrate Our Differences poster contest and Strong School Vocabulary Video contest.

Moving on to Gifted and Talented, the state requires that the district identifies those students but not have whole programs for them. This year, all students in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile or greater in both math and language arts were administered the Otis-Lennon Ability Test in the fall as well as students who were teacher-identified. From that group, students who were in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher were identified. Training for teachers in grades 3-5 is scheduled for March. Grade 3 students will receive the OLSAT testing in the spring.

The students who were identified filled out extensive interest surveys and their parents were surveyed as well. Mrs. Hamilton has held individual goal meetings with all of the identified students. As a result of that, two students are working on a book review bulletin board, one student is doing a writing contest, one student is working on a statistical poster contest, a fifth grade student is looking to interview an architect, one student started a science fiction book club and one student is striving to write 3,000 words a week. Mrs. Hamilton advocates for advanced educational opportunities for these students and she has also acquired books on topics of interest for these students. At this point, eight students have been identified from grades 5-8.

Mrs. Hamilton has been in contact with a geologist who will talk with students, has been working on a Witness Stones project about enslaved people in the community, has been working with the third grade on a project-based learning unit about buildings and has arranged for author/poet Doe Boyle to work with fifth graders.

Mrs. Hamilton is very satisfied with the progress made this year in some areas, but not in other areas. Parent involvement is something she'd like to really work on, possibly with a newsletter. She is looking forward to being able to do this all day long, hopefully next year.

Dr. Taylor asked about the rationale for the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile and Mrs. Hamilton explained that that came from the expectation that 2 to 5 percent of the population is identified as gifted. She also has the opportunity to meet with students who have not been identified.

Mrs. Booth asked about the Media Center for the sixth grade and if students are allowed to participate if they do not have their tutorial there. Mrs. Hamilton explained that that would be available to any student.

Mrs. Booth stated that her daughter and her friends believe they aren't allowed to go to the Media Center unless they are going to get a book. Mrs. Hamilton explained that all of the S'Mores activities are on the students' advisory Google classrooms, but she will be sure that the students know they can pick up the materials from the Media Center.

Mr. Roraback thanked Mrs. Hamilton for all of her hard work. He asked what Mrs. Hamilton thought could be taken away from the whole remote experience. Mrs. Hamilton felt that it forced all of the educators to try things in a new way and learn things they've never had to learn. They are all sharing resources and ideas and there is a far more collegial atmosphere. With the students, she feels it has built an awareness of how their actions impact other people and creating empathy. The students are also becoming more flexible and independent. Mrs. Hamilton feels that most students have risen to the occasion and doesn't feel that students will be left behind.

Mr. Moore thanked Mrs. Hamilton for taking on this challenge and all of her hard work. Mrs. DiMaggio thanked her as well and stated that it has been a pleasure to work with her on this program. Dr. Taylor added his thanks as well and asked if there was any thought to continue this work with the students as they move into the high school. He also asked if 8-10 students are enough to create a culture around this program and asked if opportunities for personalized learning have opened up for all students.

Mrs. Hamilton confirmed that they have talked about the program moving into the high school, especially with online learning. She would love to see more interdisciplinary courses at the high school with opportunities for team teaching. They are looking at long-term plans for students. Mrs. DiMaggio added that they have been working on trying to match the middle school and high school schedules for next year so that there could be an opportunity for students in eighth grade to take high school courses. There are some interdisciplinary courses that have been written, but there are challenges with the amount of electives that can be offered and the amount of students who sign up for the classes. Mrs. DiMaggio would also like to see more interdisciplinary courses at the middle school as well. She also mentioned that Dr. Taylor's wife had proposed one of the Social Studies projects that Mrs. Hamilton will be working on.

Mrs. Hamilton felt that the personal interest projects are really needed, but students are feeling pretty overwhelmed this year. In terms of the number of students and community, Mrs. Hamilton isn't sure what the number should be but she does feel that it has been very helpful to the students who have been identified.

Dr. Friedrich liked the idea that activities are also available to students who are not identified and asked if the goal is to have a G&T program or is it to have G&T programming. Mrs. DiMaggio noted that when they were designing this, the intent was to have enrichment for all and then to support identified students. Dr. Friedrich felt that that is really important and noted that there are people with particular gifts.

Dr. Taylor worried that the recognition component may be missing. He mentioned that no one knows the last time the district had a National Merit Semi-Finalist or Finalist and felt that they should be applauding these accomplishments. He felt that the district fails to recognize academic achievement and that they need to do that in order to create a culture of academic achievement. Dr. Friedrich agreed that that is very important and felt that it is corrosive to give awards for potential. He worried that some kids would feel they are very special while others would not. Dr. Taylor added that sometimes that message needs to be sent, but Dr. Friedrich felt that kids need to hear that from their parents, not see it on the auditorium stage.

Mrs. Hamilton added that she felt that the competition-like academic activities are important because it allows for students to identify with a group of students that are excelling. She added that they will do a whole school geography bee next year. Mrs. DiMaggio agreed that it does build a culture when you recognize the academic pieces. Mrs. Hamilton noted that the Debate Team at Strong School is very successful and has a number of members.

### **Math and Reading Diagnostic Update - Grades K-8**

Mrs. DiMaggio felt that the district is doing well overall. She commended the staff and families for their heroic work as well as the learners themselves. For the most part, the students are doing a fantastic job.

Mrs. DiMaggio reminded everyone that the iReady data is just one data point and this is mid-year data. Students are at 50 percent median growth or higher in grades K, 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7. In fact, 50 percent by mid-year is what you would want to see. Grades 3 and 8 achieved 50 percent or higher when looking at the matched cohort data. Special education students have made significant growth in grades K, 1, 2, 5 and 6.

Looking at achievement scores, Mrs. DiMaggio showed where students started in the fall, where their scores were in the winter and the growth percentages. Looking at grades 3, 6 and 8, the scores are below where they would like them. iReady is noticing nationwide trends in grades 3 and 4 growth and achievement scores being lower. Mrs. DiMaggio went on to review that the mid to above goal students were at 9 percent in the fall and are now at 22 percent. Early on grade level went from 20 percent to 28 percent. One grade level behind went from 54 percent to 38 percent. Two years behind went from 10 percent to 7 percent and three years behind went from 7 percent to 5 percent.

Mrs. DiMaggio then went on to compare scores over the past few years. The students at grade level is at 49 percent overall in grades K-8. Students approaching grade level is at 39 percent and students below grade level is at 12 percent. Comparing that to prior years, the district was typically in 54 to 57 percent on grade level and students below grade level was 8 to 9 percent. She noted that there are some differences, but not drastic differences.

Mrs. DiMaggio then explained that she wanted to look at the matched cohort of students and compare special education with regular education students. Looking at eighth grade, 64.8 of regular education students have met or exceeded goal. There is a gap with students who receive special services and individualized education programs are written for them. She then reviewed the percentage of students who made growth this year and students are making growth across the board. Mrs. DiMaggio did mention that in grade 3, iReady tests on fractions and the district's students had not learned that yet.

Dr. Taylor asked if there was enough of a gap from last year to this year for the district to do something like an enhanced summer school to get students back to where they should be. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that the teams are meeting and analyzing the data. They are identifying needs and providing strategy groups for the students. They are also taking a look at how the curriculum can be adjusted. Mrs. DiMaggio added that there is money in the budget for summer school and that typically addresses intervention students. She did feel that an extended summer school could benefit students, but wouldn't be sure they would get the attendance they'd need or have the staffing. She will talk with the teacher leaders and teachers about this.

Mrs. Booth stated that she had asked Dr. Serino last year about funding an extra interventionist because this possibility could occur and wondered whether this was the case now. She was concerned for the kids who are in between and don't necessarily qualify for an interventionist. Mrs. DiMaggio reported that she is planning to do a bit of reorganization, knowing that that will be a concern next year. She would like to have two reading interventionists at Brewster as there are at Lyman, but isn't sure it's necessarily a budgetary item. Dr. Schuch added that they intend to have more thorough discussions about this during the budget meetings and hope to get the board's input. Mrs. Booth explained that they still don't know what next year will look like and it may be similar to what is happening now. Mrs. DiMaggio felt that they were much more aware of what is needed now.

Mr. Roraback added that he felt that, as the weather gets warmer, more students tend to check out and teachers need a rest too. He felt that it takes three to five hours or more to plan one hour of successful instruction. Mrs. DiMaggio felt that people in general are just tired, but explained that Kristen Allen is Orton-Gillingham certified and has trained many teachers. They are proposing in this year's budget to pay teachers to attend this training during the summer.

Mr. Roraback would like to see a survey of the students to get more input on their feelings about iReady as he has heard some students feel it is being used as a substitute for actual teaching. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that a diagnostic tool is required by the state and iReady has been found to be very valuable for the teachers. As far as the iReady lessons, they should not ever take center stage. She has asked the teachers to have the students get 45 minutes per week with iReady because research has shown that math aptitude increases with that. Right now, instructional time is more like 25 minutes per week.

Mrs. Caramanello asked if iReady is just practice or can it be used by teachers for giving a grade. Mrs. DiMaggio stated that she has asked the teachers not to use it as a grade because they really want the students to have practice. Mrs. Caramanello asked her to reiterate that to the staff.

Dr. Taylor has heard that iReady doesn't provide feedback on what they got wrong and why. Mrs. DiMaggio will speak with the math coaches about that and then provide input to iReady.

Mrs. DiMaggio then went on to review reading scores and explained that students are at 50 percent median growth or higher in grades 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Kindergarten was not given the iReady reading test. Grades 1, 7 and 8 achieved 50 percent or higher when looking at the matched cohort data. Special education students have made significant growth in grades 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7.

Looking at achievement scores, Mrs. DiMaggio showed where students started in the fall, where their scores were in the winter and the growth percentages. She reiterated that they would like to be at 50 percent or above. Looking at grades 5 and 6 shows that the median student was at 104 percent. Mrs. DiMaggio is concerned with grade 1, but is not surprised by the data. She also noted that iReady is seeing this same thing nationally.

Mrs. DiMaggio then reported that 33 percent of students are approaching or at one grade level behind, 7 percent are in the light red compared to 13 percent in the Fall and 5 percent of students are in the dark red area. Looking at scores over the last three years, the 2020-2021 scores are above on at grade level which is at 55 percent. Those numbers were 59 percent and 60 percent in the past two years, so they are really not that far off. The percentages in red are at 13 percent and were at 12 percent in the last two years.

Looking at the matched cohort scores, Mrs. DiMaggio explained eighth grade students at or above grade level is at 71.1 percent. She then showed the percentage of students who have made their growth targets.

Mrs. DiMaggio then summarized that they are continuing PLCs to address curriculum alignment, continuing to develop strategy groups and target instruction to decrease learning loss and continuing to develop strategies to increase stamina and engagement. They would like to increase time spent on iReady online math lessons and to continue to be aware of the social and emotional needs of the students.

Mrs. Petrella noted how well the special education students did with the differences in instruction, going from online to hybrid and back and forth. Mrs. DiMaggio also stated that she is quite impressed with the growth scores of the Cohort C students which she attributes to the teachers and parents as well.

**Public Comment**

None.

**Adjournment**

*Mr. Roraback made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to adjourn the meeting.*

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First