

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Well-Being Committee met in special session on Tuesday, March 9, 2021 at 4:00 PM remotely. Committee members present:

Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback
Community members present: Mrs. Olszewski and Mrs. Stephan
Student Advisors present: Nora O'Connell and Gage Rovelli
Teacher Advisors present: Mrs. Schaefer
Teacher Advisors absent: Mrs. Schmidt
Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Mrs. DiMaggio and Mr. Sadinsky
Guests present: Joanna Curry-Sartori and Steven FitzGerald

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. Roraback, to approve the agenda, as presented.

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

Approval of Minutes - February 8, 2021

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes of February 8, 2021, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of February 8, 2021, as presented: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried unanimously.

P.A.U.S.E. and Self-Leadership - Joanna Curry-Sartori

Mrs. Curry-Sartori explained that she has been working with the district for about three years. She is a licensed marriage and family therapist and has an 11-year-old son. She has 25 years in the field of wellness, mindfulness, health and well-being, working with people of all ages. For the last 10 years, she has focused on schools throughout the Greater Hartford area.

Mrs. Curry-Sartori explained that this year has stretched everyone far beyond what could have been imagined. Students feel overwhelmed, disengaged, disconnected and there has been very significant personal and family trauma. Staff are challenged on a personal level as well and many are tired or discouraged. Schedules have been tight, complex and unpredictable. All of this prompted a look at what "well-being" is all about and to Mrs. Curry-Sartori, that is self-leadership.

Self-leadership can be defined as being in an integrated frame of mind, a relaxation response or being mindful. This allows for self-confidence and capacity which develops into collaboration. Mrs. Curry-Sartori feels that self-leadership is more of an umbrella over all of the various SEL programs.

Moving on to how it can be done, there would need to be a formal curriculum and school practices which will be successful if it's reflected in all day, every day relationships. People need to be able to take care of themselves. Mrs. Curry-Sartori explained that the adults have much more awareness, resource and capacity to tend to themselves. She reviewed the design of SEL and explained that it needs to be aligned with CASEL's (Collaborative for Social-Emotional Learning) 5 pillars and IFS (Internal Family Systems). To get into a level one training for this, there is a two-year wait list but Mrs. Curry-Sartori is trained in it. She is leading a pioneering global effort to develop the IFS model and District 13 is the first whole district in the world to be implementing it. The program is being evaluated and researchers have looked at it and it will be published.

Mrs. Curry-Sartori reviewed that the framework is P.A.U.S.E. (Pause, awareness of self, understand the other, search for solutions and experiment.) This is a process for intervention and a curriculum is embedded within each area. She then reviewed what the work looks like within the district and noted that she is first working with staff. They have had P.A.U.S.E. circles with facilitators. There are also ambassadors who get more intensive study of the model. Mrs. Curry-Sartori also has ongoing meetings with the leadership team. As adults and ambassadors study the model, they can in turn take it into the classrooms. Last Spring, Mrs. Curry-Sartori hosted a session for families and they are looking to offer story times.

Surveys have been sent out and she has seen an awareness within the staff. The ambassadors are running with the model and are bringing it to the students as well. Mrs. Curry-Sartori then reviewed several comments that she received on the surveys.

Mrs. Curry-Sartori continued to explain that the work will continue this spring, with the ambassadors meeting monthly. She is doing specialized training with the mental health team. She will be having a two-hour meeting with paraprofessionals tomorrow and plans to do more with families as well as coaching for leadership.

Mr. Roraback noted that more cohort C students will be coming back to school and asked where she thought the greatest need is to help these students. He felt that the students are very happy to be back. Mrs. Curry-Sartori felt that right now is a critical time for reconnecting and allowing space for that. She would continue to allow check-in times throughout the day which she feels will allow them to focus and be productive academically. She also felt it was important to acknowledge transition times.

Mr. Moore asked if Mrs. Curry-Sartori has been following up with students as well as faculty and she explained that the program evaluation is with the teachers right now. Her emphasis with the teachers right now so that they can bring that through to the students. She hopes to do more concrete measurement of what the teachers are implementing with students next year. Mrs. DiMaggio added that the ambassadors help this to build within each school to work directly with students as well. Mrs. Curry-Sartori noted that there are many teachers who are passionate about getting this to the students.

Mr. Moore asked if Nora O'Connell or Gage Rovelli have had any interactions with their teachers. Gage noted that they have tried mindfulness and meditation in some classes and it was effective, for the most

part. He does feel that students do need options, however. Nora loved the idea of regrouping time during transitions and has noticed teachers doing that a lot more this year. Mrs. Curry-Sartori noted how important it is to allow people the space to talk about their feelings and emotions.

Mrs. Stephan asked how the ambassadors were chosen. Mrs. Curry-Sartori explained that they offered P.A.U.S.E. circles in January and people volunteered after that and others were invited by their principals. Mr. Sadinsky explained that this is Strong School's second year working with Mrs. Curry-Sartori and they had a larger ambassador group last year, with most of those people returning this year.

Mr. Roraback shared that he had a mandatory, first day assignment with his students. It included phone numbers, nicknames, birthdays, favorite food, sports, etc. and he refers to his cheat sheet still today.

Restorative Practices - Steven FitzGerald and Amy Schaefer

Mr. FitzGerald explained that the word "with" is talked about a lot in restorative practices. He also shared the joy he feels seeing former students all grown up.

Mr. FitzGerald explained that most of the work is done in circles where the students check in with the teachers. He asked for everyone at the meeting to grab a talking piece and gave three questions for everyone to consider.

Mr. Moore explained that the woman who has had the greatest impact on his life was his sister who was always a pain throughout high school and college. She married one of his high school friends and, after having four kids, later divorced. At 40, she decided to go back to school to be a nurse but was redirected to being a doctor. She finished medical school and ended up having her own practice for several years and now runs part of UCONN health in Storrs.

Mrs. Schaefer stated that she has been reading Kristen Higgins' catalog of books and loves to read her books because she is local and has taught her kids as well.

Mrs. DiMaggio explained that her maternal grandmother has really influenced her life. She grew up with her grandparents in a multi-generational home and her grandmother was her heart and soul.

Mr. Sadinsky stated that his family had a business in Middletown for about 65 years and his paternal grandmother had the role of being the support everyone leaned on. The last couple years of her life were rather unpleasant healthwise, but she had great resilience and strength. He learned lessons from her that stay with him still today, including an appreciation of life and the love and warmth of family.

Gage Rovelli added that his mom was an FBI agent for 20+ years and she has really taught him that hard work equals success. She recently retired from the FBI and now says she has the hardest job ever, taking care of Gage and his brother.

Dr. Schuch mentioned J.K. Rowling and her Harry Potter series because he had the pleasure of reading all seven of those books to each of his two daughters which had a profound impact on their relationship with him.

Mrs. Stephan stated that it is not just one woman in her life, but would be all of her aunts, her great-grandmother and her mother. None of them were typical Asian women and all of Mrs. Stephan's decisions have been with encouragement from them and living by their example.

Mrs. Caramanello added that her maternal grandmother has had a huge influence in her life and also went through a lot of adversity. She saw a lot of family and friends pass before her and taught Mrs. Caramanello that no matter how hard things are, she needs to keep things positive.

Mr. Hicks also felt that his maternal grandmother has had the biggest impact on his life. She was a farm girl and taught him that they shouldn't be judgmental and should be kind to everyone. She jump-started his marriage by gifting them with property off of the farm. Mr. Hicks explained that she lived to be 99 and he loved every minute he had with her.

Mrs. Olszewski felt that her mother has had the most influence on her life. She worked hard to better herself and to make sure, as a single mom, that her kids had everything they needed. She started as a part-time worker at Macy's and worked her way up to being right below the store manager. She took a step back during COVID and now works at Trakside and absolutely loves it. Mrs. Olszewski didn't realize the impact that had on her until she graduated college and her mother reminded her that she was the first person ever in the family to graduate college.

Mrs. Curry-Sartori acknowledged her mother as well, who was a fourth-grade teacher who then went back to graduate school and became a therapist. She worked the Mind Body Medical Institute in Boston and got a massive grant to bring the relaxation response into inner city schools in Newark, L.A. and Boston. In the 80s and 90s, her mom sat with teachers in circles to help them process their experience and find their well-being. Mrs. Curry-Sartori had an internship in college supporting her mom and she has always been her mentor, her well-wisher and always offers her help.

Nora O'Connell stated that her aunt started from the bottom, with both parents passing away before she was 20. She was raised by her grandparents who weren't really very involved in her life and actually worked her way up and is now a senior associate at Prudential. Nora added that she recently lost her son, but is resilient and gets through whatever faces her.

Mr. FitzGerald wanted to hold off on sharing his and moved on to the hypothesis of restorative practice. He noted that the word "with" is underlined because that is where it all starts. Remembering that, Mr. FitzGerald stated that his eight-grade language arts teacher worked with him on poetry after school. He realized that he remembers a poem that he worked on with her, not so much for the actual poem but more for the way she taught him. She really took an interest in her students and in connecting with them on a level that was more than just content.

Mrs. Schaefer asked everyone what stood out to them as the other members shared their thoughts today. Mr. Moore learned that grandmothers are apparently very important in many people's lives. Mrs. Caramanello felt the same thing and found it interesting that one quality that everyone talked about was resilience. Mr. Sadinsky noticed that everybody physically leaned in as they talked about the person in their life.

Mrs. Schaefer then asked why everyone felt they started the session this way and what could be gained from sharing those responses. Mr. Roraback felt that it was engagement and creating connections with others. Mrs. Curry-Sartori added that she felt there was a sweetness about it and led everyone to connect

to something that they cared about. This leads everyone to be more focused to connect with what is still to come in the meeting. Mrs. Schaefer noted that she saw a shift in everyone's facial expressions and a physical adjustment as well.

Mrs. Schaefer explained that 80 percent of restorative practice is proactive and 20 percent is responsive.

Dr. Friedrich felt that they had all been invited to trust each other and they did. He felt that that makes it possible to manage conflict when there is respect and trust. Mr. FitzGerald totally agreed and added that he can see that in the classroom. He added that the connection is so important.

Moving on to Strong School specifically, Mr. FitzGerald explained that they have a 30-minute advisory block every day. He believes that will change to once a week next year. This time is dedicated to SEL topics, circles and community building activities.

Mrs. Schaefer added that restorative is not something you do, but something you are. Every interaction she has with a student, colleague, family member or friend, Mrs. Schaefer tries to come from a place of self and in a restorative way. When students enter her classroom, the first thing they do is establish norms and expectations. She does daily check-ins and is extremely honest with her students. They do journaling and have self-leadership discussions. She uses the five restorative questions pretty much on a daily basis, to both resolve conflict and also as content. She believes it is extremely important for everybody involved to be authentic.

Mr. FitzGerald added that there has been a shift in behavior management and discipline in their building. Before, they would meet with students individually and now they meet with everyone involved at the same time. He has seen a lot of disconnect between intent and impact or perception of something happening that eventually bubbles up into something else. Progress can be made when both points of view are in the room together and they can work to make things right.

Mr. FitzGerald reviewed that both he and Mrs. Schaefer completed a five-day training of trainers session through IIRP (International Institute of Restorative Practice) which allows them to offer training for other groups of teachers. They are doing a training session tomorrow, with Rochelle Cobb from ACES facilitating. The goal is to spread this whole mindset throughout the entire district. Mrs. Schaefer feels that she has also been able to shift her team at Strong and they have become a completely different unit.

Mrs. Caramanello asked how this can really become more of a district-wide way of being and felt that she doesn't see it in the high school. She felt that this is really needed, especially with the older kids. Mrs. DiMaggio reiterated that the plan began with Mr. FitzGerald and Mrs. Schaefer being trained as trainers and now they will go into other schools to provide that training. The high school will actually have this training tomorrow. There are also ambassadors at the high school this year. Mrs. Caramanello feels that there is a whole different response to students at the high school than there is at Strong. Mr. Sadinsky added that this work has changed how he approaches every day and he is seeing its success throughout the school.

Mrs. Curry-Sartori added that there will be people who buy in early, but the point will be how to be human beings together, to support an open community space and access their best selves. She believes that everyone wants to be good, healthy relationships. Culture change will come with an ongoing, open dialog.

Dr. Schuch added he certainly sees a shift in emphasis to relationship building and he added that there are many educators who view themselves as being in charge who very often do not view themselves as working with their students, with their teachers or with the board. Dr. Schuch felt that people need to be brought along one person at a time. He added that he believes you can't really learn anything unless you trust the people you're learning with.

Mr. Moore summarized that one of the board's goals was the well-being of the community and this part will be one of the most lasting parts.

Equity draft policy update

Mr. Moore introduced Leslie Paoletti, a long-time Durham resident and math educator who taught in both Connecticut and New York City. She is now the co-chair of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the Town of Durham and has been assigned to establish a relationship with the district on their equity/diversity policies.

Mrs. Paoletti explained that her committee is brand-new and has only met once. They are mandated by the Board of Selectmen to work with the district, but she believes that that is key to their work. Most committee members attended the housing hearing that was held last night and there are lots of issues about equity, inclusion and diversity. She felt that the way to improve Durham begins in the schools, with the children and teachers. Mrs. Paoletti also noted that their minutes are posted on the town's website and asked Mr. Moore to share her contact information with everyone.

Mr. Moore reminded everyone that an equity policy has been drafted and forwarded to the Policy Committee. The Policy Committee reviewed the policy and asked that it be sent on to the administration and the faculty for input. Mr. Moore invited everyone to make changes or add to the policy.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Dr. Friedrich made motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, 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 5:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
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