

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in regular session on Wednesday, March 23, 2022 at 4:00 PM.

Committee members present: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback  
Committee members absent: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello  
Community members present: Bronwyn Commins  
Board members present: Mr. Moore  
Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. DiMaggio, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment  
Guests present: Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Mariani

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**Public Comment**

None.

**Approval of Agenda**

*Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the agenda, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the agenda as presented: Mrs. Booth, Ms. Commins, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback.*

**Approval of Minutes - November 17, 2021**

*Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes of the November 17, 2021 meeting, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of November 17, 2021, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Ms. Commins, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback.*

**Literacy changes K-5**

Mrs. DiMaggio explained that she invited Mrs. Mariani, a literacy coach, and Mrs. Allen, a preK-12 reading specialist, to assist her in providing this information.

Mrs. DiMaggio reviewed that the district adopted the use of study through Lucy Calkins, Columbia University, about five years ago which is a resource within the curriculum. Coaches have received a lot of training on this. They then noticed a lack of phonics and phonemic awareness and researched different programs, arriving on the Foundations program which was adopted for preK-3. They also realized that the

study units were very comprehension heavy and the students in K-3 were not getting enough structured literacy.

The district applied to attend the Literacy Leadership Institute and were selected by ReadyCT. Mrs. DiMaggio, Mr. Ford, Mrs. Barrett and Mrs. Nickle attended and were provided with a lot of professional learning. They also had to present at the institute and were invited to be panelists at a conference. They have now started to infuse phonological awareness within the curriculum.

In approximately 2018, there were reading wars between balanced literacy and structure of literacy that became quite a national interest. Mrs. DiMaggio will send the associated articles to the committee members. Mrs. Allen is an OG (Orton Gillingham) trainer and the district's in-house specialist. Mrs. Allen, Mrs. DiMaggio, Mrs. Davis, Mrs. Barrett and Mr. Ford were panelists at ReadyCT and talked about what they were doing in the district as they were ahead of others in the state.

Mrs. Allen reviewed that back in the 1990s, reading wars were focused on whole language vs. balanced literacy which then shifted to balanced literacy vs. structured literacy (the science of reading). This was ignited by a journalist, Emily Hanford, who started investigating the reading crisis in the country, largely because 50 percent of college students required remedial reading support. She found an abundance of research, but found that it wasn't being implemented within school systems. Through the Science of Reading, there is an emphasis on explicit systematic phonics instruction, but it's not solely on phonics.

Mrs. Allen also explained that Orton Gillingham is an explicit, systematic approach (not a program) to teach students, particularly with dyslexia, how to read. Amy Emory had felt it was important to have an in-house specialist rather than sending people out for training. She has now trained 25 people in the district who are now certified dyslexia practitioners. OG benefits many students, not just those with dyslexia. Mrs. DiMaggio noted that that was done by design as they thought that that would benefit the students. Mrs. Allen noted that it requires 45 hours of seminar work plus 100 practicum hours, including various tests, a lot of which is done on their own time. Mrs. Allen also conducted a summer institute last year which ran over two weeks and included K-2 teachers from both RSD 13 and East Hampton.

Mr. Roraback asked when children are identified and Mrs. Allen explained that two pieces of legislation were passed last year, including the Right to Read bill which was passed in response to the reading crisis. Through that, the Center of Literacy was established in the Connecticut State Department of Education and they will oversee curriculum, professional development and support for districts as well as coordinating with teacher preparation programs. They are a little behind on their timeline, but the goal is to have curriculum aligned to the Science of Reading in every district.

Mrs. Allen added that another piece of legislation was passed related to dyslexia and an Office of Dyslexia was created within the State Department of Education. That legislation is to reinforce identifying, assessing and providing support to students with dyslexia. RSD 13 has a process in place and are doing a phenomenal job. Mrs. Allen explained that they had redone the SRBI (scientific research-based intervention) system a couple of years ago and there are measurable goals. Mrs. DiMaggio added that they have rewritten the handbook to assure there is consistency across all schools in the district.

Dr. Schuch asked how early they can typically identify someone as dyslexic and Mrs. Allen felt that could be done as early as kindergarten. Mrs. Allen added that 20 percent of the population demonstrates characteristics of dyslexia. She added that there are assessments that can be done at various ages.

Mrs. Allen reviewed that reading is not a natural process and our brains are not programmed to read. Some students learn it naturally, but many students require explicit, systematic instruction to develop those pathways in the brain through phonics. She emphasized that the Science of Reading is not all about phonics and there are five areas of reading instruction, including phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Reading comprehension is the end goal for students, but they need to be able to decode the words first and know what those words mean. She also emphasized that spelling is very important.

Mr. Roraback asked if spell check and Google are harmful to students, but Mrs. Allen felt that they are great as an assistive technology since our language is complex, with many rules. Students with dysgraphia use assistive technology to express their ideas.

A video by Emily Hanford was then played for the committee.

Mrs. Mariani then went on to describe structured literacy, a phrase coined in July, 2016 by the International Dyslexia Association, which is an umbrella including all of the reading programs. The elements of structured literacy include phonological awareness, sound/symbol association, syllables, morphology, syntax and semantics. Mrs. Mariani explained each of the elements and how they address them in the district.

Mrs. Petrella asked if students still diagram sentences and Mrs. Mariani explained that they do not.

Mrs. Mariani added that she is the 3-5 literacy coach and the coaches have been working hard to make the shifts necessary in the curriculum, starting primarily with K-3. Mrs. DiMaggio stated that the coaching is critical to this. The science coach will also join the team to help integrate content as well. Mrs. DiMaggio summarized that they are essentially ripping apart the entire curriculum and redoing it. Teachers will not be teaching content in silos anymore and it will all be integrated.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if this work flows into the Reimagining work that Dr. Schuch is doing and they all agreed that it does. Dr. Schuch added that they still need to figure out how to what extent this can be learner-centered at that age and to what extent needs to be teacher-directed. He added that everything that they are focusing on learner-centered education depends on the learners' ability to read. Mrs. DiMaggio also felt that they will need to add competencies within the curriculum as well.

Mrs. Petrella commented that integrating the teaching and having it not done in silos is exactly what the Integrated Day program did. Mrs. DiMaggio reviewed that they had committed to combine the programs and make one curriculum design. Dr. Schuch felt that educators will do the heavy lifting in the younger grades and the learners will navigate those competencies in the older grades based on their interests. He acknowledged that it takes a lot of work to have things cross-curricular. Mr. Roraback reviewed that the teachers in the ID program used the older kids in the class to assist with the younger kids.

Mrs. Commins left the meeting at this point.

Mrs. Mariani went on to review the training that the literacy coaches have participated in this year. They are also continuing with advanced coaching training on strategy groups. Mrs. DiMaggio explained that strategy groups focus on student needs in the lower grades.

Mrs. DiMaggio noted that they will continue to write curriculum and integrate content subjects, provide professional learning to teachers, coach K-3 teachers to become proficient in the elements of structured literacy and continue professional learning for the coaches.

Mrs. Petrella stated that the information that comes out in these meetings is so incredible and this is information that the rest of the community does not hear. She feels that it is phenomenal and would like to see this information get out to the public.

Dr. Schuch summarized that there are three options for the board to decide. First would be to keep things as they are. Second would be to have these presentations made at regular board meetings. Third would be to have these as work sessions which could be live-streamed. Mr. Roraback felt that the time used for committee reports at regular board meetings could be used for this.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it would benefit the entire district for everyone to have this information. Mrs. DiMaggio will send her presentation to the committee members. Mrs. Allen added that they would like to provide community outreach. Mrs. DiMaggio stated that they used to do curriculum nights for preK-5 which were phenomenal. Dr. Schuch thought they may be able to get PTAs to include this information in their meetings. Mr. Moore thought they would draw more parents if some of the students put on the program.

Mr. Moore asked how parents typically react when they are told their child has dyslexia and Mrs. Allen felt that it was an individual reaction. With the support systems available in the district, they are able to relate to parents on a personal level and focus on the strengths of the learners. They acknowledged that dyslexia is not in any way an intelligence issue.

**Public Comment**

None.

**Adjournment**

*A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting.*

*In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback.*

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First