

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Well-Being Committee met in regular session on Tuesday, October 5, 2021 at 4:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Committee members present: Mrs. Caramanello, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Stephan

Committee members absent: Dr. Friedrich and Mr. Hicks

Student Advisors present: Nora O'Connell

Student Advisors absent: Gage Rovelli

Teacher Advisors absent: Mrs. Schaefer and Mrs. Schmidt

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mr. Warner, Principal of Coginchaug, Mrs. Gonzalez, Principal of Strong School and Mrs. Trainer, Assistant Principal of Coginchaug

Mrs. Caramanello called the meeting to order at 4:03 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Public Comment**

None.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Nora O'Connell, to approve the agenda, as presented.*

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

### **Approval of Minutes - June 1, 2021**

*Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Nora O'Connell, to approve the minutes of June 1, 2021, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of June 1, 2021, as presented: Mrs. Caramanello, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried unanimously.*

### **Welcome to new administrators**

Dr. Schuch noted that Mr. Warner started on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, Mrs. Trainer started on August 27<sup>th</sup> and Mrs. Gonzalez is now in her second week. Dr. Schuch is excited and energized by these three leaders who all have different perspectives and experiences.

Mr. Moore explained that the board has four goals: budget, student achievement, engagement and well-being. They created the Well-Being committee two years ago and they talk about issues that are affecting the kids and the teachers. They established an Equity policy which is now a year old. The board wants to be sure that the well-being of the students, faculty and staff continue to be affected by what the board does in a positive way.

Mr. Warner noted that they have staff members who talk about restorative practices at the high school and are looking to see if things need to be revisited. He explained that both he and Mrs. Trainer are not making any presumptions about the school that may detract from what the staff members are trying to do. Mr. Warner has been through restorative practices training himself and is excited for this to move forward. A survey went out to the staff yesterday to get their thoughts and opinions about it and they will put stuff together for departments to work through, then eventually come together as a total staff.

Mrs. Gonzalez added that she also had restorative practices training and has sat in with Mr. Fitzgerald as he did a remediation and was quite impressed. She has also felt that a lot of work needs to be done with the students in conflict resolution and appropriately advocating for themselves.

Mrs. Trainer agreed that the students need the best support of the district throughout the school year. Mr. Warner noted that his colleagues have all agreed that September was bad. He noted that the students will be living this year with masks, but they are going to try to find a way to make normal events happen.

Mr. Moore asked if the administrators felt there was anything that the board could do to help and Mr. Warner mentioned that they may revisit the advisory program. They will be meeting with Durham-Middlefield Youth and Family Services to talk about how they can partner. Mr. Warner stated that they will definitely let the board know if they can use help.

### **School reopening and COVID response**

Dr. Schuch felt that the district had a great opening this year. The two biggest issues remain masks and vaccinations. He is thrilled that over 96 percent of the district's employees are vaccinated. The handful that are exercising their rights for exemption are doing weekly testing and are complying. Teachers are taking advantage of outdoor learning opportunities, when possible, to allow for mask breaks as well. The hardest part is not knowing when the mandates will end. The goal will be to manage it as best as they can.

Dr. Schuch did report that there have been a handful of positive cases as well as quarantines, but the vaccination strategy is working as it pertains to contact tracing. They have not even had a whole classroom that had to go remote. Last year, staff quarantines were what caused quarantines for the learners. Dr. Schuch stated that he just received an update from the State Department of Health this morning. A superintendent from another district felt that schools are over-quarantining learners and asked if the state would consider an alternate contract tracing protocol whereby instead of unvaccinated close contacts being automatically quarantined, they would be tested, both immediately and frequently, and could return to school upon a negative test and being asymptomatic. The state's answer was that they are investigating that possibility. Everyone does agree that it is really important for learners to be in school.

Dr. Stephan asked what the interpretation is of Executive Order 14 which she felt was just applicable to State employees. Dr. Schuch felt that there was detail in the order that clearly continued the indoor mask mandate for venues, including schools, through February 15<sup>th</sup> or when amended. School employees are lumped in with state employees for the vaccine mandate as well. Dr. Stephan was hopeful that they will hear about the vaccine for children by the end of the month. Dr. Schuch also noted that the CDC is pushing boosters for anyone over 65 or certain health conditions, but schools have also been included in

the group of front-line essentials. They are not saying that all teachers should get a booster, but are saying that they may. Dr. Stephan added that Pfizer's data did show a significant decline in antibodies after six months, but would not push boosters unless people are over 65 or immunocompromised. Dr. Stephan also noted that they will not know the impact of masks and interactions for years, so the sooner to get everybody out of masks, the better.

Dr. Schuch felt very good about where Connecticut is positioned on the mask issue and it could be a very different dynamic if they were in another state. Dr. Stephan felt that a cultural change is needed where everyone washes their hands and wears masks if they even have a cold. Mr. Roraback stated that 150 students walked out of sixth period at Ellis Technical High School in Danielson yesterday.

### **Reimagining Education update**

Dr. Schuch stated that he has been pleasantly surprised at the interest there has been in this topic. He had thought that he would be here for at least a year before these conversations began. They had 33 participants in the series of six Zoom meetings that were held last spring and then scheduled one-day in-person sessions. They challenge people to think differently about what education has been and what it could be as well as the barriers could be. Most everyone agrees that the current system works perfectly fine, but it was designed over 100 years ago and so many things have changed. Learners need better or they will not be prepared for what faces them outside of school. They held a session in August with 20 participants and 26 participants on the Monday after the fair, with another 33 signed up for the next session.

Dr. Schuch reviewed that these groups include students, parents, board members, teachers and administrators. The president of the local community college participated in one session as have community members. Dr. Schuch felt a great sense of energy and fun in all of the sessions. They are trying to take the outcomes from each group and link them so that they can begin to present a strategic plan for the district this fall.

Dr. Schuch reported that more than 80 percent of survey participants have said that they would like to stay involved in this work. They were also asked about training that is provided by a national organization called Education Reimagined which Dr. Schuch is a part of and two individuals went through the training in the summer and seven more will be trained this fall. There are also another dozen or so that would like to take part possibly next spring. It is very important to Dr. Schuch that everyone understands that this is not his work or his vision. One of the people trained happens to be a parent who is the first parent to ever attend this national training.

Another question that was asked was if the participants would be interested in networking and/or visiting other environments and more than half of the people would be interested in that. Dr. Schuch noted that themes and designs have come out of this work that include a heavy wellness, well-being, mental and physical health element. Mr. Warner had found that some faculty were concerned and invited Dr. Schuch to a faculty meeting. He gave a brief presentation to the faculty to help get the conversation going. Dr. Schuch explained that this will only work if everyone is on board.

A question was asked about if the state will reimagine how they evaluate teachers and Dr. Schuch felt that they could be sitting here 50 years from now waiting for that. He does not believe that the teacher evaluation system will be a barrier to this work. Dr. Schuch believes that the evaluation system is

compliance-driven, well-intentioned, and poorly-executed and in a learner-centered culture, adults are learners too and the current system is very insulting to the teachers. Dr. Schuch also mentioned that the state really doesn't evaluate anyone, the district does. He added that the compliance concern has come up in all of the sessions. He also noted that the district has to be willing to step into the gray area and provide the learners with what they need. Dr. Schuch also mentioned that the district needs to be accountable to the learners, the families and the community as they get so little funding from the state. Mr. Moore stated that it will be the board's job to get it through the state. Dr. Stephan commented that it comes down to what is regulation and what is guidance and Dr. Schuch felt that most of it is guidance.

Mr. Moore felt that they will have accomplished what they needed to do when people start coming to this district rather than leaving it. Dr. Schuch emphasized that they need to get people to agree on the why before they get into the weeds of the what. He also noted that everyone's voice is critical, but the work will not go forward without buy-in from teachers. Mr. Moore added that student buy-in has also been helpful to the teachers. Dr. Schuch also noted that the inclusion of young learners is critical. He has spent some time with folks from Google and they always include end users in their design development.

### **Student activities and issues**

Nora O'Connell reported that things are basically back to normal, with masks. She felt that kids are really happy and glad to be back to a bit of normalcy. Clubs are back and running. Sports are ongoing. The Powder Puff game will be held on November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

In terms of negatives, Nora has heard of a lot of bullying. She gave two examples and felt that kids are forgetting to be nice as they are just focusing on the fact that things are getting back to normal. She also felt that there is a disconnect with the lower grades in the high school. The connection among each class is very important and she felt that the sophomores and freshmen don't really have that. She hoped that events could help with that.

Last year, social-emotional learning was a big thing and teachers were very supportive. Nora felt that teachers are kind of forgetting that now that things are getting back to normal. She also mentioned mask breaks and liked having class outside. Nora hasn't really had that this year other than at lunch.

Mr. Moore felt that the kids need reminding about the core ethical values and some help with dealing with where they are now. Advisory time is probably key to that. Mrs. Caramanello reported that the issues with Tik Tok have been going on for several months at Strong School and it has been very difficult for her family. She felt that no tolerance has to be followed through. She noted that the SRO came to their house in the early summer about this and it was very difficult to hear that there was nothing that they could do about it.

Mrs. Gonzalez spoke to the SRO about this as well and he explained that a judge is needed to sign off on a warrant to go after the IP address and no judge will do that because there is no threat. Mrs. Caramanello felt that it needs to be addressed and the kids need to know it will not be tolerated. She noted that over 240 parents have commented on this issue. Dr. Stephan added that probably even more parents are feeling this. She agreed that there is nothing legally that the district can do and noted that the parents who are asking for that are the same parents who tell you to stay out of their kids' phones for privacy issues. Dr. Stephan felt that the children of some of the parents who were commenting were obvious owners of some of the Tik Tok accounts.

Mrs. Gonzalez stated that she spent all day talking to students to try to figure this out and now has her own Tik Tok account as well. She noted that the students all called it a mystery. She did report some of the videos and each one was deemed to not be a violation. Dr. Stephan commented that some have been removed, but new ones are started up. She also felt that they may be able to monitor this and possibly see a trip-up if the videos are allowed to continue. There are many issues with trying to find out who created the accounts.

Mrs. Gonzalez and Trooper Hesseltine also talked about how they will address the student body to have the greatest impact. They will follow up with the students. Mrs. Caramanello explained that their family took care of their situation, but there is still a population of kids who are affected by it. She felt that the more kids know that they can talk to someone, the better. Dr. Schuch added that the other side of this is victims thinking of harming themselves or someone else which can also be helped with adult connections. Nora O'Connell asked if guidance was regularly talking to kids about this because not everyone has someone at home to talk to.

Mr. Moore summarized that they are aware of the issue and that it is not just here in the district. They know that relationships between the faculty and students are key. Dr. Stephan asked if the district was following up with parents. Mrs. Gonzalez stated that kids that were instigators were also considered victims. She gave students ways to talk to her without other people knowing and does anticipate getting more information. She also noted that some of the accounts were banned, private or closed.

Dr. Stephan felt maybe the district could provide something about social media and how parents can monitor it. She mentioned the bus driver who targeted the kindergarten boys and when the district held a meeting, only five parents showed up. Dr. Stephan also mentioned an adult who has been trying to friend her child. Dr. Schuch felt that there would be no danger in facilitating something, but it is also right to be skeptical. The people that show up will probably not be the people who need it.

Nora O'Connell added that bullying is always going to exist and social media is not going away. She believes that providing students with the resources at school to help them get through the issues is important. Guidance is overwhelmed and she believes it would be beneficial to train teachers to be able to address the issues.

Mr. Roraback hopes that reimagining education will provide something so engaging that this will no longer be a problem. Dr. Schuch added that teaching responsible use of social media is becoming more and more important as it impacts employment. Mrs. Caramanello reminded everyone that these are 12- and 13-year-olds and what their friends think of them is highly important. Dr. Schuch noted that students from a class in his last district created a video on sexting and then held an assembly with the student body. Dr. Stephan suggested asking the Honor Society students to reach out to the middle school students. Mrs. Caramanello added that athletes and musicians should be included as well.

Mr. Moore asked Nora O'Connell if she could suggest two junior students to join the committee.

### **Employee Wellness Program**

Dr. Schuch reported that there is a wellness program for employees that will incentivize them to get a physical and fill out a health screening questionnaire. They will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card for doing that as the program is tied to insurance. The hope is to be able to decrease claims by having a healthier workforce and that will also help the budget.

Dr. Stephan asked if there was any avenue for staff to provide anonymous input about morale. Mr. Moore stated that they had tried to do a survey, but the union interpreted it as asking if employees liked their boss and it was killed. There is a well-being survey done statewide every other year. Dr. Stephan was looking for more of an anonymous Drop Box type of thing for staff to use. Dr. Schuch felt that it was hard to follow up when something is submitted anonymously though they have received good responses on ThoughtExchange.

Mrs. Caramanello mentioned that each school used to have a liaison for staff to go to and Dr. Schuch noted that Craig Bradanini brings a lot of issues to him anonymously. He also added that he had an advisory process in his last district that may work well here, but it may overlap with some of the board committees.

### **Public comment**

None.

### **Adjournment**

*Mr. Moore made motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to adjourn the meeting.*

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First