

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in special session on Thursday, March 2, 2023 at 4:30 PM.

Committee members present: Dr. Darcy, Mrs. Dahlheimer and Mr. Roraback

Committee members absent: Mr. Mennone

Staff members present: Mrs. Mariani, Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Johnson

Board members present: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mrs. Roy

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Durkin, Memorial School Principal, Mrs. Quarato, Learner-Centered Specialist and Mrs. Siegel, Learner-Centered Specialist

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Roraback made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy and Mr. Roraback.

Approval of Minutes - May 25, 2022

Mr. Roraback made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to approve the minutes of the May 25, 2022 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of May 25, 2022, as presented: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy and Mr. Roraback.

Elementary Literacy Program

Dr. Schuch reviewed that the board had talked in February about a timeline for potential implementation of the literacy program and that March 8th is a sort of drop-dead date from the staff if it is to be implemented next fall. They also talked about additional information that the staff had gathered from site visits. He noted that Mrs. Quarato and other guests were on the meeting.

Mrs. Quarato thanked Kristen Allen, Deb Mariani and Noelle Durkin for being at the meeting. Teachers have done a site visit to Guilford and they have been implementing EL since 2020. They started training staff on the Science of Reading in 2019. They are not yet fully implementing EL at this time, however

they do want to move in the direction of implementing the entire program. The three teachers that went on the site visit were invited to tonight's meeting, but they were unable to join. Mrs. Quarato read notes from the teachers who all really liked the program.

Mrs. Quarato explained that they had three third-graders read a portion of a story to them with the goal to rewrite a part of the story. They explained how they chose that piece of the story and why they rewrote it as they did. One of the students is a very shy kid and everyone was blown away that she could present to them.

At this point, Mrs. Quarato asked for any questions and comments. Mrs. Petrella asked what she meant about the program not being fully implemented. Mrs. Quarato stated that Guilford is only working on the first two of four EL modules to start and then still using Wit and Wisdom for the rest of the year. The Guilford teachers like that the EL program encompasses everything. They are using EL K-5. Mrs. Quarato explained that it is very hard to get through all four modules because there is so much content. Guilford set a goal to do the first two modules until teachers and learners got comfortable with that and then add another module next year.

Mrs. Mariani explained that the EL curriculum has four skills blocks, four modules and four labs. They each get implemented within a three-hour block. Full implementation is quite overwhelming to roll out. The skills blocks cover the standards, the modules cover more content and the labs are an extension. Mrs. Brand has taken it upon herself to implement some of this in her kindergarten class and Mrs. Mariani reviewed some of what is being done. The skills blocks kind of go away in grades 3 through 5 and turns more to language/vocabulary.

The literacy team has been having multiple conversations about implementing this curriculum. They are considering starting off with the skills block and slowly embedding the modules. They can start off with implementing two units at a time until everyone is comfortable. Mrs. Quarato would like to continue conversations as a team and with the teachers during PLCs to get their input. They haven't provided the teachers with the information yet because they want to make sure this is the direction the district is going in. Once the board has given the thumbs-up, they want to sit with the team and teachers to see what would be best for the learners and the teachers as well.

Mrs. Petrella asked if they were looking at just K-2 or K-5 and Mrs. Quarato explained that that is another conversation they have been having. Mrs. Mariani felt that the most problematic domain for the district has been vocabulary and she would vote for a K-5 implementation. Dr. Schuch explained that Mrs. Gonzalez is very interested in seeing this program implemented to help with some of the challenges she sees with some of the learners at Strong. He hopes that 3-5 is part of this, even if it's not on day one. Mrs. Caramanella agreed with Mrs. Mariani and felt that it would be a disservice to the kids to have it in K-2 and then not in 3-5. She believes that a K-5 implementation would be most beneficial and she added that she also heard that the teachers that made the site visit were very impressed. Those teachers were also impressed with the way that Guilford rolled it out and Mrs. Caramanella would like to see the district take their time with the implementation as well. Guilford did just the skills block in the first year with small groups, implemented the first module in the second year and have just started implementing the second module this year. Mrs. Caramanella added that Guilford is not going to the labs until their STEM person goes through them and incorporates them into NGSS units of science.

Mrs. Quarato described units that her children have done in Guilford and hoped that the district incorporates the labs into the NGSS science units and maybe even embed some Social Studies skills as well.

Mrs. Siegel stated that because they are not yet planning to implement the labs and those are materials that could be obtained from another source, they decided to take them off the quote. From the initial quote of \$140,000, that took it down to \$120,000. She also talked to the rep and got the price for materials, including the online program, down to \$107,000 for the K-5 program. In addition, some professional development is optional but looks like it would be good at least for coaches, principals and lead teachers at an estimated cost of \$21,000. Looking at how that will be paid, it can be done through several funds left over that had been earmarked for curriculum writing in the current budget. There are also some leftover grants that can be used and there is some money in the software budget that could be repurposed for the online portion of the program. Mrs. Siegel felt that all of the initial costs would be funded through those sources.

Dr. Darcy asked what the recurring costs would be and Mrs. Siegel explained that it would be estimated at \$6,000 for print materials if the district buys decodables each year. Some districts use decodables year after year. There may be some cost for books that need to be replenished after years. The online K-5 platform is estimated at \$40,000 but can be possibly offset by some of the i-Ready cost and other online platforms. There is also an estimated \$5,000 for professional learning. The total would be approximately \$51,000, but there are currently decodable and supply budgets.

Dr. Darcy felt that the key would be to backwards design from full implementation in the 2025-2026 school year. She would like to see it as part of preK-12 literacy plan. Mr. Roraback has heard rumblings at the State Department of Education and decisions could possibly change. He asked how confident the team is that this platform is approved and will continue to be approved. Mrs. Quarato felt that that is a huge question that a lot of districts have. She felt that the state has really looked at programs that follow the Science of Reading and this program does that. Mrs. Quarato did not feel that the legislation will be going away and the state selected seven programs because they strongly believe that they follow the Science of Reading. Mrs. Mariani added that the seven programs were approved because they have all the components of Structured Literacy. Mrs. Allen felt that the district was headed in that direction anyway and have done a lot of work around Structured Literacy and the Science of Reading. Mrs. Allen added that she and Mrs. Mariani really looked at this with a critical eye to choose the program that would serve the learners in the district, moving toward learner-centered education and small group instruction.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that no program will be perfect, but she was grateful that the staff feels this is the best option. She would like to see the implementation happen as soon as possible. Mrs. Quarato explained that they hope to meet again on March 8th to finalize plans and get the materials in the hands of the teachers in May. They hope to provide professional learning for teachers on March 16th, if possible, and personalized learning for coaches. If there are teachers who are ready and willing to implement a unit at the end of this year, they would be ready to support that. They also hope to provide professional learning when the teachers return from summer break. The literacy team certainly does not want to overwhelm the teachers and they will provide the most support possible.

Dr. Schuch did not see any possibility that the State would rescind their requirements on this. He added that this had been a concern for Mrs. DiMaggio when she left and had been a high stress level item for the elementary principals as well. Dr. Schuch also noted that teachers have been asking for something to be done as well. He thanked the literacy team for going the extra mile.

Mr. Roraback asked if the data that will be available will be easily deciphered. Mrs. Quarato stated that the data is accessible through the online platform. She added that Guilford does not do any benchmark testing because this program naturally embeds formative assessment. It is easy to input the data and is not time-consuming. She did admit that they will have to work with the teachers to make sure that data is actually used. Mrs. Petrella asked if that data can be used to monitor progress over time and presented to the board and Mrs. Quarato explained that that can be done.

Mr. Roraback asked if they have spoken to the IT department about handling the program and Mrs. Quarato explained that they have spoken to Mr. Pietrasko as well as other districts who use it to make sure that it is user-friendly and something that will work with what the district has. She explained that it is really just a website that they log into.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked how the program is being piloted within special needs. Mrs. Quarato stated that they have had a lot of conversation about that. The small groups are based on the progress monitoring data and are not the same every week. Modifications will be necessary, based on the learners' needs. Mrs. Quarato also had discussions about multi-language learners. Mrs. Mariani added that students are grouped by stages and specific needs. Mrs. Allen added that there are suggestions in the teachers' manual on how to accommodate different learners and is all based on a pre-assessment that changes over time.

Mrs. Quarato added that the team appreciates the board's support. Mrs. Dahlheimer and Mrs. Caramanello appreciate the team's patience with the board's questions.

Dr. Schuch added that he would like either consensus or a vote on record so that the staff can move forward. Mrs. Dahlheimer will do a committee report at the board meeting and she would like to see the board vote on it.

Review of i-Ready/SAT Scores

Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that there were a lot of questions and concerns at the board meeting about this. She asked if there was anything between i-Ready scores and SAT scores and where the district is looking to target intervention.

Mrs. Quarato stated that interventionists have been continuing to pull the group of learners that they have identified as needing intervention and coaches have been working with the classroom teachers and interventionists. Of course, they would love to have more interventionists, but when you have this many learners who are struggling, it may require shifting curriculum and current practices rather than intervention. They are hopeful that the literacy curriculum will help support students at least in K-5. Mrs. Quarato added that a lot of the teachers at the middle school level are focusing on building reading comprehension and vocabulary skills.

Mrs. Allen added that she focuses on data and they have looked at every student at Strong that fell in the “red zone” and put plans in place. They have also put together resources for teachers to pull from. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it was important for the students to understand that it is not their fault that they are behind. She added that frustration breeds behavioral issues. Mrs. Dahlheimer was concerned that the staff is not being supported enough because teachers are having to help kids make up two and three grade levels.

Dr. Darcy felt that there needs to be a plan and that you can’t intervention your way out of a curriculum or instruction that may be lacking. However, there are kids who need support and require a plan, but they need to also focus on tier one. Dr. Darcy is anti-intervention in general because intervention places the blame on the kid as opposed to looking at how the system is not meeting the child’s needs. She stressed that the system has failed the kids and it is not their fault.

Mrs. Durkin agreed that it’s been a rough few years and the teachers have a lot on their plates. They need to be cognizant of where the learners are and what needs to be done for them to make at least a year’s worth of growth. They have been using strategy groups in reading, writing and math to help with that. The biggest piece that she has heard from teachers is they need acknowledgment that it’s okay that they are not where they were in the curriculum a few years back at a certain point in time. She felt that the switch is happening now to the learners showing when they are ready for the next skill.

Mrs. Quarato added that there is a lot of pressure on education in general with the emphasis on testing. Teachers do not want to teach to the test, but there’s pressure to do just that. Mrs. Quarato felt that the goal of education is to make sure that learners are prepared for whatever they choose to do when they leave school. It is hard to make that shift because that’s been the emphasis for so long. They stress to teachers that test scores are not the priority and they want to focus on learners learning, growing and becoming confident.

Mrs. Quarato explained that they have been developing play lists in math with the goal of developing a pathway to help the teacher see the end goal and the steps to get there. Materials have been compiled and are in a Google drive, with the hope to link documents in the future. There have always been deficits in math, but there are more now than ever. They are working on how to progress monitor in the moment and then grouping and supporting the learners.

Mr. Roraback would love to see more tech offerings in the lower grades in collaboration with the math teachers. Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed that that would give kids more confidence. Mrs. Siegel added that the learners’ self-confidence can be built with these play lists and with more interdisciplinary activities. Dr. Schuch felt that the term “interdisciplinary” will become obsolete in a learner-centered environment and the learners will not have a problem with that. He felt that applying math in a real-world setting is more important than learning it in math class. Mrs. Quarato gave an example of a project designing a garden bed. Mr. Roraback shared a project he had worked on in his classroom. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that this is all part of well-being for the kids.

Grades 6-12 Elective Offerings

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they need to figure out ways to get more kids into electives and find their passions. She is very concerned about electives at the middle school level and surrounding districts are

finding creative ways to do it. Dr. Schuch explained that it is a priority for Mrs. Gonzalez and she is working on it, but he wasn't sure what could be done this year. He added that the teachers at Strong also want this to change and don't feel that tutorials make sense for most of the learners. Mrs. Quarato noted that they are having conversations with Mrs. LaRosa, the enrichment teacher, who has a lot of great ideas and they are starting to look at that. Mrs. Gonzalez is doing a great job with looking at overall scheduling, but they also have to be mindful of teacher contracts and how much they are doing. Mrs. Quarato felt that a passion project would be a good idea since it won't take too much time from the teachers. Mrs. LaRosa had been on maternity leave, returning in January and, unfortunately, the robotics competitions happen in February, but she does plan to continue the robotics club at Strong. Mrs. Hurlbert and Mrs. Schaefer are also planning together.

Mrs. Siegel added that Mrs. LaRosa has also been pushing into some classrooms to help with some STEAM activities. She is trying to add more Makerspace activities with 15 to 20 learners and she would like to have that available once a week. Mrs. LaRosa works with every sixth grader on foreign language schedule rotation and part of that includes personal interest projects and goal setting. She also works with learners identified as gifted and talented in fifth and sixth grade and is hoping to continue with seventh grade next year and eighth grade beyond that.

At the high school, there are a large amount of learners who have study hall at the end of the day and they are looking at different online opportunities for them. Courses are available online where learners can earn certifications. In addition, some learners are interested in things that the district doesn't offer and Mrs. Siegel is looking into providing them with those courses online.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if there is any grant money or money set aside for summer school that could go to an elective or exploratory for sixth and seventh grade. Mrs. Siegel will look into that. Mrs. Quarato added that she is meeting with an organization that may have some free summer offerings in hands-on learning. Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that the board is looking at the budget and will look for a way to add or redistribute funding to support that.

Mr. Moore noted that he offered to come in to tutorials to talk about his years in environmental management and felt that other professionals could do the same. Mr. Moore left the meeting at this point. Mr. Roraback added that the district used to have community members of various vocations come into the schools. Dr. Schuch noted that they are looking closely at schools in Mesa, Arizona who are doing learner-centered work and part of their model is to more regularly integrate community members. Mrs. Dahlheimer mentioned that Mesa is a much larger community and the resources are not that readily available here. Mrs. Siegel noted that they do a Learn and Lunch at the high school with speakers from all different backgrounds and careers. She felt that they could do that in the middle school as well.

Mrs. Petrella explained that she had parents come into the classroom years ago to talk about their careers and Mrs. Quarato added that Guilford promotes parents to come in and do science investigations once or twice a week. Parents go through a training before they run the investigation. Mrs. Quarato added that all volunteers have to be trained in Guilford.

Future Committee Meeting Dates/Times

Dr. Schuch hoped that the board and committee leadership could talk about putting a schedule together, including topics to be discussed. He would like to consider staying with virtual meetings in order to encourage participation.

Mrs. Petrella stated that the Building committee meets on the first Wednesday of the month, the Finance Committee on the second Wednesday, Policy on the third Wednesday and Student Achievement could meet on the fourth Wednesday. She feels the remote format is great, however they may want to meet in person for certain presentations. Mrs. Dahlheimer was good with either format.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy and Mr. Roraback.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:29 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First