

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in regular session on Wednesday, September 27, 2023 at 4:30 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Committee members present: Dr. Darcy (arrived late), Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback

Committee members absent: Mr. Mennone

Board members present: Mrs. Caramanello (by phone), Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Moore and Mrs. Roy

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools; Mrs. Quarato, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Development; Mrs. Siegel, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Accountability; and Mrs. Durkin, Principal of Memorial School

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Approval of Minutes - May 24, 2023

Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes of the May 24, 2023 meeting, as amended.

In favor of approving the minutes of May 24, 2023, as amended: Dr. Darcy, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback.

EL Curriculum

Mrs. Quarato reported that teachers were given the opportunity to log flex hours over the summer towards the June PD this year. There were a significant amount of individuals that took advantage of that. In August, a district-wide professional learning conference was held and two of the sessions were on the EL curriculum, one for grades K-2 and the other for grades 3-5. They also offered two sessions on the Kiddom digital platform that aligns with the EL curriculum. The teachers feel that the digital platform helps them to navigate some of the materials. The state has not provided much professional development on this. Our district will now meet once a month to collaborate with two other districts, Clinton and RSD 16. A professional learning cohort will also be started in the state, grouping districts who are using the program, to offer professional learning.

Mrs. Quarato also reported that they printed some materials over the summer and are still working on that. They have also created a digital database to track the benchmark assessments. Coaches continue to work with the teachers and Mrs. Quarato also collaborates to be sure any necessary support is provided. She plans to meet with the PLCs starting next month to hear how things are going.

Dr. Darcy asked what teachers are saying and Mrs. Quarato noted that it is a mix. Some teachers are excited about it, but there is still stress with the fact that it's the first month of a new program. Other teachers are struggling and find it challenging. She felt that they just need to continue providing as much professional learning as possible. Mrs. Quarato also reviewed that the professional learning that was provided in May was not good and they received some refund on that. Mr. Roraback wondered if the teachers who are comfortable with it could provide some training for those who are not.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked how it was working with assessments and if they are on the level with what they are teaching. Mrs. Quarato stated that third and fourth grade are having a little bit more of a hard time which they expected because their level of understanding was already at a point where they knew they need to work on it. The coaches have been working with the teachers to find appropriate benchmark assessments. They should know more about that in the upcoming weeks as it's a little too early to know now. Mrs. Quarato added that all of the teachers have had some professional development at this point.

Mrs. Caramanello added that she is hearing that the more experience the teacher has, the easier time they are having with this. She has also heard that some teachers are very upset that the district did away with Foundations. Mrs. Quarato noted that they had conversations with the team leaders about that in March and the majority of the teachers wanted to go with the skills block. Coaches are having discussions about this with grade levels. Mrs. Caramanello finds it refreshing that there is a sounding board for the coaches. She also reminded everyone that she is a big advocate for a Director of Curriculum and wondered if that would be beneficial.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked how independent reading works with the digital program and Mrs. Quarato explained that it is not really a digital program and there are independent reading times built in. Books are being read, grade by grade, for the content modules. Mrs. Dahlheimer did not want to see independent reading go by the wayside.

Evaluation plan

Mrs. Quarato explained that the state approved new guidelines for teacher and administrator evaluations in June. She feels they are wonderful and that it focuses a lot more on helping teachers to grow and improve rather than a rating. They had an optional PDEC meeting in July which was recorded for those who couldn't attend. She shared the new guidelines at that meeting and brainstormed the current evaluation system and what this year would look like.

At their meeting next week, Mrs. Quarato will try to get a co-chair for the PDEC and re-introduce the guidelines. They will then reflect on the current evaluation plan and what they might want to consider changing or adding. They will also look into the platform that is being used which is not a fan favorite. The board will then need to approve the evaluation plan and it needs to be implemented in the 2024-2025 school year.

Dr. Darcy stated that they had a development team meeting yesterday and explained that there will be a state model for this. Some people are saying that PDECs should do as much as work as they can this year and then adopt the model and change it next year. She will share documents with Mrs. Quarato as they become available. Dr. Schuch felt that the opportunity is to replace a system that no one feels is useful. It is frustrating for both the teachers and the administrators. He felt that this would put the teacher more in the driver's seat and recognize that the vast majority of teachers are competent. He does fear that the district will settle on something that's not that different because of everything else that is going on. Dr. Schuch also noted that this gets away from one-size-fits-all evaluations and will help get away from a formal observation as the core tool. He mentioned that they would still do walk-throughs vs. observing for an hour. Mr. Roraback explained how they will be doing evaluations in his district. One of Dr. Darcy's concerns is going too far away from data in some districts.

Mr. Moore asked if they ever use any student feedback in evaluations and Mrs. Quarato didn't know if that was normal practice now, but it could become part of it. Dr. Schuch felt that that is one of the best sources.

Assessment Data (SBAC, NGSS, SAT)

Mrs. Siegel reviewed that the Next Generation Accountability System is intended to provide a more complete picture of a school district and allows for more ownership of all the staff to lead change. This was started in 2014-2015 and implemented in all districts across the state in the following year. There are 12 indicators and Mrs. Siegel reported on indicators 1 and 2 tonight as not all of the indicators are out yet.

There are four assessments in indicators 1 and 2, including the SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment) for grades 3 through 8 and the NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) for grades 5, 8 and 11, the SAT which is taken in March for grade 11 and LAS Links (the English language proficiency test) taken in grades K through 12. In 2016-2017, six students took the LAS and the district is now up to 18.

Indicator 1 (academic achievement) uses the SBAC in grades 3 through 8, NGSS in grades 5, 8 and 11 and SAT in grade 11. This is based on skill scores and not levels which is thought to be a better way to show actual scores and be more sensitive to individual learner achievement. The index scale is 0 to 110 and the target is 75. The state says that students are on average performing solidly in the desired achievement levels at that target. For the performance index, there is a certain obtainable score within a grade level. That number is then moved to a vertical scale score between 0 and 110 and then averaged. As an example, the lowest score for a third grader is 2,114 and the highest is 2,623 which is based on one child's SBAC. That score is then indexed between 0 and 110.

Mrs. Siegel then explained that indicator 2 (academic growth) is based on SBAC scores in grades 4 through 8 and LAS Links for students who take that year to year. It measures student growth of the same student from the prior year and is a scale of 0 to 110 percent. It is reported as an average percentage of target achieved. As an example, a student earns a SBAC ELA vertical scale score of 2,350 in third grade. The student is expected to grow 71 points by the end of fourth grade or 2,421. If they achieve a 40-point growth, their percentage is 56 percent. All targets are then averaged together to get an average percentage of target achieved for the district or grade levels.

Mrs. Siegel went on to explain that the colors represented cohort groups of children. The performance index in mathematics showed that some cohorts had more gains than others and are at or above state

average. They are still not at pre-pandemic levels, but are moving forward. Dr. Darcy commented that the gains are pretty small between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

Mrs. Petrella added that the whole state is pretty low. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked Mrs. Siegel for scores between comparable districts. Dr. Schuch explained that it would be pretty easy to pull together the summary data to compare against other districts. It would take a tremendous amount of time and effort to do that by grade level. Dr. Darcy would be interested in looking at what interventions are happening that will support more than a 2-point increase and really doesn't care what other districts are doing. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they need to explain to parents why comparisons aren't being done like they used to be. Mrs. Roy added that the district got away from that several years ago. Dr. Darcy felt that the information may be confusing to parents.

Dr. Schuch added that this is not how a lot of states report their data and these are averages. Mr. Roraback stated that what he hears in the community is that it's okay to spend more on the kids, but they had better be making progress. Mrs. Petrella felt that the most they get out of comparisons within the DRG is whether the district is higher than or lower than others. Mr. Moore felt that they could also state what the district's goals are for each grade level. Mrs. Petrella felt that the math scores are disappointing and have always been so and felt that they need to report on what's being done to address that.

Mrs. Dahlheimer also mentioned tier one intervention and what's happening with that. She felt they need to look at the middle school level as well. Mrs. Quarato stated that they had two individuals working on the curriculum over the summer and the coaches started working with the teachers last year to incorporate more reading strategies into the separate content areas. The co-teaching model will also help with that. Mrs. Siegel added that they are bringing more people into SAT meetings and the change in structure will boost intervention in both math and reading.

Mrs. Petrella asked what's happening with math and Mrs. Siegel stated that they have been working on building math pathways which some teachers are using. Some teachers have shifted to bringing more of the building-thinking classroom routines into the classroom. It's about getting the kids out of their seats, working on problem-solving and critical thinking. She has seen kids walk over to other groups to ask questions which helps with collaboration. Dr. Darcy added that that also allows a differentiation in tier one with no effort. She noted that this is exactly what she is talking about when she talks about tier one improvement.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if they have looked at reinforcement with homework and whether homework is beneficial in math. Mrs. Quarato felt that that depends on the homework. Practice problems are usually just done to get a grade but something a little more meaningful is helpful. She added that more and more districts are navigating away from homework. Dr. Darcy stated that homework is negatively correlated to progress.

Mrs. Caramanello asked what the guidance is on students who don't do well on a quiz or test in high school and how they can learn and grow from that. Dr. Schuch stated that one of the advantages of a competency-based system is that it doesn't include grades impacting the record for the whole year. He felt that some teachers may allow test corrections, but that doesn't change it completely. Dr. Schuch always told his own learners that if they mastered it by the end of the year, he wouldn't average all of the grades for the year. He does feel he was an outlier on that and the prevailing practice seems to be grades

are averaged throughout the year. Mrs. Quarato added that she never used to put a grade on tests because kids look at that rather than the feedback.

Mrs. Caramanello added that they need to honor the students who are taking the initiative to learn from their mistakes and improve their grades. She stated that she knows of three departments that do not allow test corrections or redoing tests or quizzes which she finds very frustrating. She hoped that that could be looked at. Dr. Darcy added that if a teacher is teaching and no one is learning, they are just talking. She felt that if a student can pass the Biology final exam on day one, they deserve the credit without taking the class. Dr. Schuch stated that that is the competency-based philosophy.

Mrs. Petrella stated that grade 4, in 2021-2022, had 64.7 and goes up to 65.8 in the next year, but if you look at the growth percentage, it was 67.5 in 2021-2022 and went up to 71.1 in the next year. Grade 5 shows even more significant growth. Dr. Darcy encouraged everyone to turn the numbers around and look at those who didn't have growth. Mrs. Caramanello wondered how the scores would change if they allowed the kids to learn from their mistakes. Dr. Schuch agreed and felt that young people get messages early on that maybe they're not so good at a subject and, by the time they get to middle school, they already have an idea of whether they are good or not good and stop trying as much. Mrs. Petrella stated that interest plays a big role as well. Mrs. Siegel reviewed that the growth scores are how much growth is made by each student and that is what the teachers look at. Dr. Schuch added that the better a student does in one year, the more limited growth they will show in the next year. Mrs. Siegel was asked if the numbers included special needs students and she responded yes.

Mrs. Petrella reminded everyone that they are only looking at two indicators and there are 10 more. Mrs. Siegel thought that the whole report should be out somewhere between December and February. Dr. Schuch added that this is how the state has defined success.

Mr. Moore asked if it was acceptable to have a 36 percent growth rate in fifth and sixth grade and, if not, what is the district doing. Mrs. Siegel stated that it was not acceptable and they are working to make it more vocabulary-rich in all subject areas and the SAT process is changing to ensure more intervention services. Mr. Moore asked if they have looked at the teachers and what they are doing. He wondered if there was a skill issue at the teaching level that has brought some of this about. Dr. Schuch felt that that is certainly possible and goes back to the evaluation system. Mr. Moore did not want specifics, but wanted to know that something is being done. Dr. Schuch reminded everyone that doing something about someone who has longevity and tenure is not a simple task.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if they could do something budget-wise to increase intervention at the grade level. Mrs. Quarato stated that they definitely need more intervention at that level. Dr. Schuch stated that intervention is not the same as adding interventionists and could be how the people are currently being used and if they have the right skill sets. Mrs. Siegel stated that there were not enough people in the SAT meetings last year to evaluate what a child needed. That system has been changed and she is hoping that will help intervention services at Strong. Mrs. Quarato added that one of the teachers has started to provide professional learning on tier one support and strategies. Mrs. Siegel stated that a lot of the middle schoolers missed a lot of instruction in the comprehension and vocabulary years, so they are making sure that is added to all subject areas.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if the district literacy position can be shifted between buildings to target that area at Strong. Dr. Schuch felt that they would need to have Mrs. Keane speak to that. Mrs. Siegel added that

they are using iReady for both ELA and math at the middle school and they are now looking at the initial data. Mrs. Petrella also asked if the data is examined by teacher and/or compared to other teachers. Mrs. Siegel felt that it could be broken down that way and they would like to have a culture where a person can look at their data and see that they are not doing so well in a particular area rather than have it be a competitive culture.

It was agreed to read the slides on NGSS and SAT.

Discussion on legislation for Kindergarten Age

Dr. Schuch stated that the state has changed the age of entry for kindergarten to align with the rest of the country. They are now saying that a child has to be five years old before September 1st where it used to be January 1st, though it does allow for discretion. The legislation puts a lot of pressure on the principals to decide who, less than five years old, could be admitted into kindergarten. It could become very awkward for families, both educationally and economically. The state has not provided any assessments that can be used to determine who is ready to start kindergarten.

Dr. Schuch added that there are currently kids in the preK program whose birthdays fall in that timeframe. Other districts have what they call a TK (transition kindergarten) for those who fall in between and those kids can actually go to first grade the following year. Dr. Schuch noted that they really have no idea of how many kids will be affected by this. He thought they could get the information out in the Spring during kindergarten registration and Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they should maybe add the information to a newsletter.

Draft of competencies

Mrs. Quarato noted that she sent everyone a copy of the draft. They started meeting with teachers back in November and getting their input. The team then developed common themes which led to these overarching competencies, including a global citizen, mindful learner, skillful collaborator, solution seeker, effective communicator and inspired innovator. In the Spring, they met again and each group was assigned a different competency and were asked to use the notes from the teacher conversations to develop small descriptions. Over the summer, they took everyone's responses from May and summarized them, resulting in four data points, using ChatGPT.

Dr. Schuch added that he is going to all the grade level teams and departments at the high school, introducing these in a soft way. He is being sensitive to the fact that the EL curriculum is overwhelming and isn't sure they are ready to embrace this quite yet. At the secondary level, they have had good conversations about these.

Mrs. Petrella asked how these incorporate the Portrait of the Citizen and Dr. Schuch felt that it is incorporated in that the input they received was from people who had gone through that process. Mrs. Petrella noted that that process included staff, community members and younger students as well and she felt it was important that that was included. Mr. Moore felt that the ideas are the same and suggested giving these to a high school class to get their input.

Mrs. Siegel stated that they plan to do a couple of focus groups to really get some feedback about things like this and other things. The next step is to develop a name for the competencies. Mrs. Dahlheimer has

a hard time with the wording of learner-centered at the middle school level and wondered if there should be different sets with different language. Mrs. Siegel stated that, after they are named, they will then break them down into levels.

Dr. Darcy asked them to consider why “exhibits ethical conduct and accountability through integrity, ethical behavior, personal accountability and work habits” is under a mindful learner and not in the global citizen.

Update of current district student-centered learning practices

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that the committee had asked for updates on what is happening in the individual schools and any future plans. Dr. Schuch asked to be able to discuss this at next month’s meeting and hoped to bring in some teachers and administrators to give concrete examples. Mrs. Petrella hoped that it could be presented at a board meeting as well.

5th grade social studies scope and sequence **Current 5th grade EL/SS scope and sequence**

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that the social studies and EL program was combined in fifth grade at Memorial and asked about the scope and sequence. Dr. Schuch asked if they were looking for more information than Mrs. Durkin presented at the August board meeting. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they were looking for more of an update.

Mrs. Durkin explained that their goal for the first month of school is to establish climate, connections, routines and rituals. Of course, academics are happening but they are working to get everyone acclimated to a new school year. A lot of the 3-5 teachers are finding that they are going over things and the kids have never even had a student notebook before.

As far as social studies and EL, that is not really unique to just grade 5 because K-4 is doing exactly the same thing with both science and social studies. Mrs. Durkin’s goal for the year is to increase the amount of instructional time while working on climate and connections. Social studies is now part of the EL block, but also part of other things. The coach has been explaining what Open Studio could look like in fifth grade and how it can be run with stations and small groups. For grade 5, the coach has gone in and modeled and co-taught with one of the fifth-grade teachers as well. She will also delve into the content piece of that and the goal is to give students time to explore the content by January/February and then the students will pick their social studies discovery projects.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked how the students will stay up on that when Open Studio is when they are pulled for intervention and other things. Mrs. Durkin did admit that instrumental lessons could be during some of it, but not all. Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that it feels very hectic, with a whole new program on top of kids being pulled out. Mrs. Durkin asked interventionists and other support services to pull students in the second half of an Open Studio block so they are there for at least half of the time. Right now, there are three units in social studies and two modules in EL for the year.

Mrs. Petrella asked what content was covered in the traditional social studies program vs. what is being covered now. Mrs. Durkin reviewed that the driving force is to get more toward student-centered learning. The first unit in social studies is maps and geography, including some Native American

experiences and why different areas were settled. The second and third units are all about the American Revolution and colonies. A lot of districts have chosen that the American Revolution would be covered in grade 4, but not here. In the grade 4 module for EL, it includes the American Revolution. Grade 5 modules are about human rights and social change. The content topics don't jive with the social studies curriculum, but the inquiry standards are the same. Therefore, they are working to put the content standards more into Open Studio.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if there were other areas where the modules do not fit with the curriculum and Mrs. Siegel stated they are looking at that in both science and social studies. If they want to move the American Revolution studies into fourth grade, they can do that. They are trying to get into a cohort with the state to see how shifts can be made. Mrs. Durkin added that the teachers in each grade level chose the modules and the fifth-grade teachers felt that they had a strong understanding of the science content and standards, but needed social studies support. Mrs. Dahlheimer cautioned that sometimes with flexibility, comes chaos.

Adjournment

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First