

Revised

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in regular session on Wednesday, October 25, 2023 at 4:30 PM remotely via Google Meet.

Recording of meeting: <https://youtu.be/trzt6xLHOyo>

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

Committee members absent: Mr. Mennone and Mrs. Petrella

Board members present: Ms. Betty and Mr. Moore

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools; Stephanie Quarato, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Development; Liza Siegel, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Accountability, and Mrs. Heikkila, Learner-Centered Coach

Mr. Roraback called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Ms. Betty made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the agenda, as presented.

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

Approval of Minutes - September 27, 2023

Ms. Betty made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes of the September 27, 2023 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of September 27, 2023, as presented: Dr. Darcy, Mrs. Dahlheimer and Mr. Roraback.

Learner-Centered Practices Examples and Discussion

Dr. Schuch felt that the committee wanted more in-depth information about what has been happening and decided that Mrs. Heikkila would be the best person to present this.

Mrs. Heikkila introduced herself as the district's learner-centered coach and noted this is her 18th year in the district. She has a very good relationship with a lot of her colleagues at Strong and the high school. Three levels of self-reflection were developed last year for teachers to think about where they wanted to start. There is a lot of discussion happening and she is working with a number of teachers. She shared

that, in the high school math department, a teacher is trying very carefully to create a self-paced classroom with differentiated activities and lessons for the students. She provides the lesson objectives for the entire unit and students are being encouraged to advocate for themselves. She provides opportunities for learners to build relationships with one another. She is also in the midst of creating a classroom check-in where the learners reflect on their goals, how they feel in general and an opportunity to advocate for help. This teacher is self-reporting a lot of success with this.

Another example is a science classroom in the high school that has built a Google site that provides a myriad of different resources for the students. This teacher has also included a variety of assessments and the students can take the assessments when they are ready. There is also an opportunity for students to have control over their own learning. There are a lot of rubrics so that students know what is expected of them, but they have the choice of how to present their learning. Mrs. Heikkila noted that it has been interesting working with the high school students to get out of their own shell.

At the middle school, a revised social studies curriculum was created over the summer that allows students to move at their own pace through the curriculum. While there is content to be learned, the teacher is trying to hone in on critical thinking skills and reasoning. There is a strong focus on using similar language that the students hear in other academic areas. They are also trying to build a learner community where they see each other as equals and as important as the teacher. They are being given choice of learning output in this classroom as well. Mrs. Heikkila felt that the students are responding really well to this and enjoying it.

In the elementary schools, the choice needs to be a bit more structured. Last year, at Memorial, in the special education room, they created a really nice geography project for students to have choice of what they wanted to study, what resources they would use within certain parameters, how they would present their information and who they got to work with. Mrs. Heikkila felt it was eye-opening to watch their excitement and their conversations.

In kindergarten, they are building communities of learners. Last year, they did a project with a group of children where they shared what makes them happy, their likes and dislikes and hobbies. They found connections in the classroom that they hadn't had. They plan to build on that this year and found a connection in the new EL curriculum and kindergarten is now becoming toy experts, discovering preferences and descriptions. The goal is to have them learn from one another and not just the adults in the room.

Mrs. Heikkila noted that she is helping to facilitate this in all of the classrooms that she mentioned. There is a lot more going on where teachers are asking for resources.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked about the revised curriculum at Strong and Mrs. Heikkila explained that it was just at the eighth-grade level but they are hoping to expand that. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that Mr. Carcaud is up to the challenge and a big asset at Strong.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if there were any concerns about content with regard to indicators for success and how it works when kids are struggling. Mrs. Heikkila explained that certain social skills are developed very strongly at the kindergarten level and, whether they connect with the material or not, they will be able to persevere. She felt that the students can be successful with any curriculum that they face. Mrs. Heikkila is a huge proponent of building executive skills early on. The curriculum can be anything, but if they don't build a thinker and a resilient child, they won't be ready. Mrs. Dahlheimer admitted that she

struggles with executive functioning and how kids that have those issues may fall behind. Mrs. Heikkila felt that those skills will begin in kindergarten; not every student will master them but their personalized education will reflect their strengths and their needs. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it was very important for the board and the community to see that this is being done in small sections. She asked for updates to be able to showcase these practices to help share what the future will look like.

Dr. Schuch added that they are very attuned to that conversation from the board and are working on the long-range action planning part of it. He added that it is hard for some of the teachers to envision their own practices being very different. Dr. Schuch added that the state has recognized that they have gone overboard with hammering in content and test scores which is why the test score requirement came out of the new evaluation system and why the new requirement of play-based learning was put in. He agreed that they need to teach the kids how to make choices and things like that. Dr. Schuch added that they would like to come back in November with Mrs. Stone, Mrs. Trainer and Mrs. Siegel to talk about fundamentally changing how they are helping kids.

Mr. Moore asked which math and science classes are doing this and Mrs. Heikkila stated that the classes are integrated math, geophysical and zoology. Mr. Roraback asked if the rubrics were different based on what the students choose to do. Mrs. Heikkila explained that she asked the teachers for a checklist for the projects, each of the projects did have specific parameters and the rubrics were designed from there. Mr. Roraback asked if she felt that a loose environment is effective for special needs students to be integrated with other classes. Mrs. Heikkila explained that, in the project she did last year at Memorial, they were doing the same project as their typical peers. She felt that if you set the bar where you want the students to be, any student, when engaged, will reach it as best as they can.

Indicator 6: Postsecondary Readiness

Mrs. Siegel explained that the state takes the percentage of students in grades 11 and 12 that achieve a certain mark on the SAT, ACT or AP or IB tests or earning three or more college credits through dual-credit course work. The AP benchmark looks low, but that is of the total learner population and not all students take AP courses. Last year, 149 AP exams were taken and 131 scored a 3 or higher which meets the benchmark for the state at 88 percent. She also noted that the dual-credit course work was 23.4 in 2021-2022 and 27.7 in 2022-2023. They are looking to improve that indicator and have received a grant from the state to help set up possible dual-credit options for the students. They are going to partner with Sal Menzo, from the Goodwin District and University, and try to develop some pathways in health sciences, business and liberal arts. This will allow learners to take courses at the high school that will get college credit. They are hoping to have learners get from three to 18 college credits through a pathway in partnership with Goodwin University. They meet with Dr. Menzo again on Tuesday and hope to be able to pilot one of the pathways in the next school year. Mrs. Siegel added that if students take dual-credit courses in high school, they are more likely to attend college and more likely to be successful in college.

Mr. Moore thought that the high school already had UCONN courses and Mrs. Siegel confirmed, but explained that UCONN only has certain courses available and Goodwin offers more. The requirements for a teacher to be able to articulate a course at the high school is higher from UCONN. At UCONN, they have to have a master's degree in the subject that they are teaching which makes it very difficult. Mrs. Siegel added that most credits are transferable within the state of Connecticut. Outside of the state, it will depend on the specific institution.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if there were any financial implications to partnering with Goodwin and Mrs. Siegel explained that the course fee is the same as UCONN at \$150 per course currently. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if any UCONN courses from past years are not currently running and Mrs. Siegel

stated that some are not running. Some classes are on an alternate year schedule and one is not being offered because the teacher with the master's degree in that subject area has left the district.

Dr. Schuch added that Mrs. Stone and Mrs. Trainer can expand on all of this next month, but noted that he is energized by the fact that they are providing these things for the district's highest achievers, but Goodwin will hopefully offer courses that are not currently being offered and may be of interest to more of the learners. He also felt that the cost of these courses could be a selling point to parents. He added that this could be a good marketing point for Coginchaug.

Mr. Roraback felt that some students take the college-level courses to have something a bit more challenging. Dr. Darcy added that Goodwin is a private, for-profit college and while she understands that this is being funded through a grant, she cautioned that they are profit-driven. She asked what kind of legwork has happened to look into public two-year colleges and was curious why the district would go with a for-profit rather than one that is part of the Connecticut system. Mr. Roraback thought that they disbanded Stone which was their for-profit arm, but Dr. Darcy stated that they are for-profit. A different organization was managing their schools for the Teachers' Retirement Board because they were not allowed to function as a public school system with their magnet schools because they were for-profit. Dr. Darcy stated that grants are always good, but her concern would be setting up a partnership and finding out that the price tag increases astronomically in the future.

Mrs. Siegel explained that the grant is only for start-up costs and cannot pay for anything past this year. Dr. Menzo is the superintendent of the Goodwin District and is not part of the university. He is helping to build the pathways, which can include things from UCONN and Central as well as other institutions. Mrs. Siegel noted that Goodwin is doing some interesting things in the area of cybersecurity and other tech areas. UCONN courses will continue to be offered and they are looking into a business program from Central. Dr. Darcy was even more concerned that the grant only covers the start-up costs as she has experience with other districts trying to use Goodwin as a partner and it comes with an enormous price. She added that Dr. Menzo may be the superintendent of schools, but he functions under Goodwin University. She emphasized that this will come with a price tag after the start-up. Dr. Roraback isn't entirely against for-profit universities, but would not want to see the price increase. Dr. Schuch felt that was a good point and they will definitely look into that. He also felt that Goodwin is working with quite a number of districts across the state through this grant and there are some parameters around this.

Mrs. Siegel noted that the state did ask all of the districts who they were using and Goodwin was the number one selected and is being used by many districts.

Teacher Evaluation Update

Mrs. Quarato reported that they met on October 5th and provided an overview of the state guidelines. They went over the must-dos and the should-dos and broke into smaller groups to reflect on the district's current evaluation system in conjunction with the new guidelines. The meeting was really about providing an understanding of the guidelines. They also talked about platforms and everyone agreed that they do not want to move forward with Protraxx next year. Mrs. Quarato added that she finally has a co-chair and they will plan the next meeting for November 7th. At that meeting, she hopes to start planning what needs to be done.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if Mrs. Quarato has gotten any feedback about students being part of the evaluations and asked her to keep that in the back of her head. Dr. Schuch felt there was a lot of validity

in that, but the negotiation is tricky. They will collaborate with the teachers on this. He added that they will need to be sure the kids take it seriously and not try to punish their teacher. Mr. Moore felt they would get pretty good results in the high school.

EL Education Literacy Update

Mrs. Quarato emphasized that it is very difficult to implement any kind of new program, especially given the lack of time. Professional Development will be offered on November 7th and teachers have been given the option to work either independently or collaboratively throughout the day. The coaches and Mrs. Quarato met with two other districts on October 13th and everything that was a challenge for those districts was also a challenge here. She felt that what is happening is growing pains with a new program. They had a great conversation with the other districts and gained new ideas.

Mrs. Quarato went into a couple of classrooms and noted that the level of engagement and collaboration amongst the kids was amazing. She gave an example of a project that was done in a first-grade classroom. Mrs. Quarato added that time is a massive challenge right now and they are doing everything they can to provide time to the teachers.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if the prep work was because it's a new program or because it's this specific program. Mrs. Quarato felt that it was because it's a new program. There is a lot of reading involved right now with this specific program, but that's not unique. Mr. Roraback felt it would become simpler over time. Dr. Schuch explained that he has met with small groups and acknowledged that it is a lot of work, but he is encouraged to hear that the vast majority of teachers say it's a great program. It will take years to implement and get good at. A few teachers noted that, because this is so new, they don't feel the freedom to take any liberties from the program but they recognize that won't always be the case. Dr. Schuch added that they have implemented this program, but the teachers still need to teach everything else and teachers have asked if they could consider more sharing of learners between classrooms. He believes they need to consider that.

SBAC ELA and Math Improvement Plan

Mrs. Dahlheimer would like more data on where they are going with this. Going back to the Next Generation Accountability report from 2019, there was a good amount of slides about multi-tiered systems support and where we've had successes and need work as well as some targets. She wanted to let Mrs. Siegel and Mrs. Quarato know that they will be looking for more data on that for next meeting.

Dr. Schuch hoped to show some things through the action plans that specifically target math and ELA. He acknowledged that they have to get buy-in from the administrators and the teachers, but he felt it was important for the district not to believe that they can keep doing things the exact same way. If some of the work Mrs. Heikkila talked about could take off more, that would be a great opportunity. He was pleasantly surprised that there seems to be more teachers who are more energized about thinking about doing things a different way.

Mrs. Quarato added they are seeing that as well. People are asking for professional learning opportunities on many different things in order to make changes. Teachers recognize that the way they used to do things is just not working anymore. A lot more teachers are eager to bring new instructional approaches into the classroom. Mrs. Siegel added that relationships and connections are huge and they are striving to work on that.

Dr. Schuch stated that he does have a different approach with the K-5 teachers because they may just get pushed over the edge if they are given anymore expectations on top of the combination of the grade level configuration and the EL program. He felt that more innovative practices will come in the secondary level than in the elementary level because of that.

Mr. Moore was concerned that they need to figure out how to measure what is going on and what the goals and outcomes are. He wondered how they actually measure improvement in delivery and results. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that that accountability is in the 2019 accountability report and hoped they can pull some of the measures from there as well as updated measures. Mr. Roraback hoped that they could get grade level teachers to collaborate.

Adjournment

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to adjourn the meeting.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First