

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in regular session on Wednesday, November 29, 2023 at 4:30 PM remotely via Google Meet.

Recording of meeting: <https://youtu.be/DKAPK7neanI>

Committee members present: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback

Committee members absent: Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone

Board members present: Mr. Moore

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, Mrs. Stone, Principal of Cuginchaug Regional High School, Mrs. Trainer, Assistant Principal of Cuginchaug Regional High School, Mrs. Anderson, Science Teacher, and Mr. Thompson, Social Studies/Career Counselor.

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. Petrella asked to add an update on the High School Personal Finance courses, as item 10. Mrs. Stone suggested adding it right after item 5, HS Pathways.

*Mr. Roraback made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the agenda, as amended.*

*In favor of approving the agenda, as amended: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback.*

### **Approval of Minutes - October 25, 2023**

Mrs. Petrella noted that she would abstain on the approval of the minutes as she was not at the meeting and Mrs. Dahlheimer suggested holding off on the approval until the next meeting when they have a majority.

### **HS Pathways**

Mrs. Stone thanked her group for attending tonight's meeting. She will review where they were, where they are now and what the plan is moving forward.

Mrs. Stone explained that Mr. Thompson has been raring to go for a long time with career and college pathways and getting the Capstone up and running. Mrs. Trainer, Mr. Thompson and Mrs. Stone met with Mrs. Siegel to talk about developing pathways. Mrs. Trainer and Mr. Thompson met with Westbrook where there is a very robust program and they were overwhelmed. Since then, the district

received the dual enrollment grant which set a plan in motion to start working with Goodwin to develop pathways and to articulate some of the district's classes. The goal is not to necessarily have everyone on a pathway and have that be the only path they take, but to have robust experiences in things that the kids are interested in to help them make future decisions without costing a lot of money.

Dr. Menzo, from Goodwin, has been instrumental in providing a path and a plan. They take what already exists and divide it into sections to give students an idea of what they should be taking. They very quickly noticed that Cuginchaug offers a very strong health and human services pathway. They have noted that a lot of kids have interest in science or public policy. An EMT course is currently running and they are piloting a fire science course this Spring, with Mr. Bradanini and the fire departments of Middlefield and Durham. They have spent a lot of time going through course work and what they can build upon. In doing that, they have found they have a lot of connections and opportunities in town.

Mrs. Stone explained that they had all wanted to do 14 pathways, but quickly decided that they don't have enough students for that and settled on four pathways, with some branches. One would be in the technology/manufacturing area, one in health and human services, and one in business and marketing. They now want to begin with the health and human services pathway which will require some changes in courses because a lot of courses can be articulated for about \$50/credit. Those classes can be matched up with Goodwin, UB and UCONN. The goal is to have students get anywhere up to 28, maybe even 30 credits in that pathway for a very low amount of money. The students can still take the classes without enrolling for college credit, but Dr. Menzo has explained that sometimes students who didn't think they were college bound might be interested in getting their associate's degree if they have already gotten college credit. They may also decide that wasn't the route for them. They do want to focus on certificates as well as articulated courses and would like the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders to get CPR, first aid and Stop the Bleed certified. They could also become trainers of trainers once they are 18. They are also talking about OSHA and ladder certifications in the manufacturing and engineering pathway. Mrs. Stone noted that these certifications can be offered within the classes that already exist.

The group has a meeting on December 11<sup>th</sup> to do a heat map of the courses that they want to offer next year in health and human services. They need to make sure they have the right people teaching the right courses so that the students know what's coming and the teachers know the requirements for articulation. None of these pathways will be completed by any of the learners unless they are a freshman coming in next year in health and human services, though they would like sophomores to be able to jump in or take an elective as a junior. Mrs. Stone noted that there are 104 eighth graders at Strong School and she would like to be able to retain them. If there are three or four pathways, that would be about 20 kids per pathway.

Mrs. Stone reviewed that there had been a lot of talk about not having study halls. Kids would rather be in a class that is of interest to them than in a study hall. Mrs. Stone asked Mr. Thompson to talk about what was presented to the staff.

Mr. Thompson explained that, as a parent, it gives his kids and everyone else's children the opportunity to feel out their interests before making a life-changing decision. It also gives them the option to accumulate college credit at a reasonable cost and it really picks up the level of the learning by giving a robust offering. He also felt that they will be able to help guide kids on a path to explore. Mrs. Trainer is excited about the opportunity for students to have such a voice in their learning.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked how long Westbrook's pathways have been in place and if they've been successful. Mr. Thompson stated that they laid the groundwork in 2018/2019 and hired a full-year administrator who acts as a career counselor as well. They went with all of the official federal pathways. He noted that Electric Boat is right down the road and gave quite a bit of money to build programs. The high school is also smaller than District 13 so they have layered classes where they offer one every other year. Mr. Thompson is not sure they are doing 100 percent of what is in their book, but they are doing fairly well. Mrs. Stone added that they will also be able to partner with other districts and she gave examples of what other districts are doing.

Mr. Moore felt that a music pathway already exists and Mrs. Stone agreed. She added that this will, by no means, get rid of music or arts and they will build individual pathways in that. There will be room for two electives in the schedule for incoming freshmen where they could choose to take music or art. Mr. Thompson added that they are looking to build out more pathways as they go along and are starting small, knowing that there will be need for expansion. Mr. Moore added that he felt there is a fairly large interest in engineering. Mrs. Stone also explained that they will offer an off-ramp at any time to change pathways.

Mrs. Dahlheimer thought maybe they should offer a focus on career at the end of eighth grade as well. She applauded everyone for their efforts on this. Mrs. Petrella asked what the timeline might be to build in additional career opportunities. Mrs. Stone explained that Mr. Thompson and other counselors will begin heading kids toward those classes. Mrs. Anderson added that they have talked about adding a new pathway at least every year over the next three years. Mrs. Trainer felt that these courses will be able to be taken by everyone. Dr. Schuch thanked everyone for their hard work on this. He added that, while they need to build these pathways, the next logical step should be a sampling of those pathways at the middle school level to give everyone exposure. While everything may not be up and running, pieces of it will be available. Dr. Schuch is also excited that the pathways will have logical connections to job shadows, internships or community-based employment. He felt that they are saying that everybody works at some point. Some jobs require different degrees, but the hope is to get everyone excited about a pathway. He cautions everyone that they don't promise too much too soon because it will take a while and may have a budget impact as well.

Mr. Roraback advised them to be cognizant of expiration dates on certificates they offer. He noted that the courses do have a cost and would require human resources on the district's part of monitor students' progress. He reviewed several of the certification classes they offer in culinary. Mr. Roraback noted that it's a different world today and very few high school kids actually have a job, but he hoped there was something like a job board in Guidance. Mrs. Stone hoped to get some ideas from Mr. Roraback in the future.

Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed that it's important for kids to find their passion, but also would not want to over-promise. She also hoped that Student Achievement could get pathway updates every two to three months, especially with budgeting.

### **Update on the High School Personal Finance courses**

Mrs. Stone reported that they reached out to Mr. Donecker in the Business department this past summer and he had room in his schedule for the second half of the year. It is now in Power School and there are 26 kids registered. This class will be a graduation requirement for this year's freshmen and it will be

offered every year. They are also piloting a macroeconomics class this year with Mrs. Noheimer and 14 kids are now registered in that class as well. Mr. Thompson added that teaching FAFSA is also a requirement from the state. He didn't feel it would make sense to have the personal finance course early in their academic career as it becomes more tangible toward the end of their high school career. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if kids will eventually have to make a choice between an elective they want vs. financial literacy. Mrs. Stone explained that there is a free online option that kids can take though that is not ideal. Mr. Thompson added that Electrical Wholesalers gifted the program to the district. Several nonprofit groups also have programs available. Mrs. Stone added that they would also do an independent study if a kid is in a tight spot. Mrs. Stone explained what a great group she has to work with on this and Mrs. Dahlheimer added that both students and parents appreciate everything Mr. Thompson does.

### EL Update

Mrs. Quarato explained that they are continuing to implement modules and skills block was started in October. All block has been started in grades 3-5. Most of the grade levels are finished with module one and some are near the end of it. They met with the coaches and interventionists and had a lot of conversation about things they are seeing and hearing from teachers and learners. Some of that feedback was that phonological awareness skills are increasing overall, but some are still struggling with background knowledge which was to be expected.

The special ed team is seeing a lot of gains in learners with microphases within the skills block. They are seeing an increase in small group instruction. There is a lot of new learning for the teachers, but they are starting to see a lot of positive outcomes. They have also had a lot of conversations about report cards and that it may not be 100 percent aligned. The district is standards-based, but parents are probably not going to see as many markings on the report card as in the past. A letter will be sent home with the report cards so that parents are aware and that all of the standards will be marked by the end of the year. Report cards will be adjusted next year to better align with the program.

Mrs. Quarato reviewed that a professional learning day was held on November 7<sup>th</sup> and teachers were provided with time to work collaboratively or independently and the feedback was that the teachers really appreciated that time. They are also looking at one-to-one coaching with Better Lessons, the organization that provided the professional learning back in the Spring that they struggled with. Mrs. Quarato has been collaborating with other districts and they have said that the one-to-one coaching has been beneficial. They have also been officially accepted to the professional learning cohort and the first meeting is tomorrow. That meeting will focus on the multitiered support system and how to look at the data and make informative decisions in the classroom. It will also touch on support for multi-language learners.

They have also noticed that the skills block really ends at second grade and there is an expectation that third graders will have really strong spelling skills. They have talked about ways to bring in more assessments that focus on encoding for the third graders. There have also been conversations at the middle school about whether or not EL will be brought up to grade 6 next year. No decisions have been made as of now. If they are going to make changes to the middle school curriculum, it will be a lot of work. Vocabulary remains an area of concern.

Mrs. Dahlheimer acknowledged that there are frustrations when bringing in a new program. She asked if they were expecting the teachers to do the professional learning cohort and the one-to-one PD outside of their regular day. Mrs. Quarato explained that there will be options and she has reached out to the

coaches and the building principals. For the first meeting, coaches have been invited and it will be held from 3:30-4:30. Teachers can log those hours towards their June flex days and the meetings will also be recorded. Mrs. Dahlheimer also felt that they need to find a way to encourage more substitutes in the district or they will continue to burn out staff and kids as well.

Dr. Schuch felt that there is an opportunity that hasn't been explored in maybe being a little more deliberate of building extra time into the schedules for ELA and math. Those two areas tend to be the areas that hold learners back in all subjects. He noted that the sixth-grade team at Strong has heard that the EL program is better than what they are currently doing. They would like to bring the EL program into sixth grade, but not if the master schedule doesn't change. Dr. Schuch felt that the new configuration may present an opportunity to rethink some of these things. The teachers also hoped for shared teaching across grade levels. He summarized that the teachers are all feeling the stress of the extra hours, but no one has said it was a bad program.

Mrs. Dahlheimer would worry about the middle school taking on the EL program without significant time. She also noted that she has heard comments about the writing skills in the program and how that is rolled out vs. reading. Mrs. Quarato explained that writing is done in the content modules in K-2 and grades 3-5 do the majority of their writing during the all block. Because this was the first year, skills block and all block were delayed until October.

### **Evaluation System Update**

Mrs. Quarato reported that they had a PDEC meeting on November 7<sup>th</sup>, with a lot of participation and Matt Taber is the co-chair. They looked at the current evaluation plan and documented things that are currently being done that are parts of the state guidelines for must-haves and should-haves. They then focused on things they strongly felt should be changed. Feedback was received about all of the ideas. They also plan to have a smaller subcommittee that will meet every month to take the feedback from the large group and begin to draft the evaluation plan. The subcommittee will meet next Wednesday and look at possible modifications. The large group will reconvene in February. The hope is to have it finalized in April and bring it to the Student Achievement committee in May.

Mrs. Petrella was happy they were working on a plan specific to the district.

### **2022-2023 CT Accountability Report**

Mrs. Siegel had sent slides prior to the meeting and reviewed that she had presented indicators 1 and 2 on academic achievement with the performance index as well as academic growth at prior meetings. Indicator 6 was college and career readiness. Recently, the accounting report for the 2022-2023 school year came out to the public.

Mrs. Siegel reviewed that, in 2016, Connecticut came out with the accountability system to provide a more complete picture. It ensures that more than just literacy and math are involved in accountability and expands ownership to all staff involved in the learners' education. It is meant to have learners view accountability as a tool, rather than a punishment. The Next Generation Accountability System has 12 indicators. In addition to those already reviewed, indicator 3 is assessment participation rates, 4 is chronic absenteeism, 5 is post-secondary preparation, 7 is graduation on track from ninth grade, 8 is four-

year adjusted cohort, 9 is graduation six-year adjusted cohort, 10 is post-secondary entrance rates, 11 is physical fitness and 12 is arts access.

Mrs. Siegel then went over the district's overview, highlighting those indicators that have gone up or down by 2 percent or more over the prior year. She did note that the 2 percent was an arbitrary number that she had picked. The math performance index went up. Science performance index went down by about 4 percent, but Mrs. Siegel added that that test is taken every three years. Growth went up in ELA and math. The chronic absenteeism score went up which means the district has improved in that area. The percent passing exams went down by about 4 percent. Six-year graduation for high-needs students went down slightly. The district's total accountability index increased from 76 to 78.9. Mrs. Siegel reviewed several links for the committee members and what the specific points and rates are.

Mrs. Siegel added that they have diagnostics three times a year in K-8 and she feels that they are much more helpful to the growth of a learner. In K-5, they use Dibbles as a screener and diagnostic in literacy. For math, they use iReady in K-8. They also use iReady in 6-8 as well for the same diagnostic. Within the EL program, a lot of assessments are given. They are also working on math pathways and looking at possible schedule changes to allow for certain subject areas as well as personalized learning opportunities.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that this is incredibly overwhelming and they need to think of a way to simplify these numbers for parents and the community. She would like to see subject weaknesses at grade level, school level or district-wide and what they are doing to improve that as well as future plans. She would also like to see what is being done to prevent the scores from dipping again. She summarized that the board just wants to know if the district is getting there and what resources are needed.

Dr. Schuch felt that the state is trying to come up with an all-encompassing number to somehow grade the district and people will disagree about the weighting of the factors. He felt that parents may want to know the district's accountability score, graduation rates, etc., but they need to do a better job of communicating what their own child knows and doesn't know and what the district is doing for them. The teachers would like to do that as well.

### **Math Practice and Curriculum/Program Changes (Grades K-5)**

Mrs. Quarato felt that the district has a very good math curriculum, however one thing that is lacking is progress monitoring and assessment. They are working to bring in some more progress monitoring checks so that the teachers know more. The EL program has a very seamless point at which the teacher collects data and that is missing in math. They plan to have that ready and the teachers trained for next school year.

Mrs. Quarato added that assessments don't really match with how the content is being delivered in the classroom. They are starting to go back and make a change so that they require learners to put more thought and critical thinking skills into them. It is important to know what the learners need in the moment. They are also working on building math competencies. They are pushing as much as they can within the time constraints.

Mr. Moore asked if the district had enough skilled teachers in math, specifically at the high school, and Mrs. Quarato explained that the district has skilled teachers in every area and has heard positive things about the high school math department. The teachers are now using Building Thinking Classrooms, an

amazing book, which allows learners to be up at the walls, learning and collaborating with one another. Mrs. Quarato noted that there are so many different ways to learn math and this model encourages learners to solve problems in a way that makes sense to them, but to look at what their peers are doing as well. She felt that the district is moving towards being less traditional in math classes and bringing in more of today's models to be more learner-centered.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if there was a text for the math curriculum at K-5 and Mrs. Quarato stated that there was and they are now photocopying. Mrs. Quarato didn't feel that textbooks offer everything that is available digitally. They now use a lot more manipulatives, so that should lower the amount of copying. She noted that textbooks don't really differentiate that much and don't provide critical thinking activities. Mrs. Quarato summarized that textbooks are nice to have, but are really there as a supplement.

### **Adjournment**

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First