

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in regular session on Wednesday, January 24, 2024 at 4:30 PM remotely via Zoom.

Recording of meeting: <https://youtu.be/81ZvJUKM-G0>

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

Committee members absent: Mr. Mennone

Board members present: Mrs. Caramanello and Mr. Moore

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools; Mrs. Quarato, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Development; Liza Siegel, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Accountability; Mrs. Stone, Principal of Coginchaug Regional High School and Mrs. Gonzalez, Principal of Strong School.

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 4:33 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

Mrs. Petrella read a letter from Tina Hurlbert into the record. “Tonight, I’m sharing from the perspective of both a former employee at CRHS for 15 years, a parent within the district and a Durham resident. The CRHS National Honor Society selection criteria and process need an overhaul. Unfortunately, CRHS has historically and steadfastly adhered to the constraints outlined in the scoring rubric negatively impact fairness and equity. We can and should be doing better by our kids. Number one, the first-time applicants are made aware of the selection criteria and points that can be awarded is when they receive the application for NHS which, historically, including this year, has been distributed two weeks before the due date. This is too little too late. Number two, in addition to a minimum GPA of 3.66 required, applicants are scored in leadership, character and service. The leadership score is subjective and inequitable. Students receive two points for every CRHS leadership position they submit. One point is allocated to positions held outside of school. It could be argued that a student organizing a community roadside clean-up should get the same number of points as someone who is the president of any of the CRHS clubs, but does not under current guidelines. Placing more value on activities within the school could also be counterproductive to greater community involvement. Number three, the character score is determined at an after-school staff meeting where only certified staff are given a list of applicants’ names and are asked to put a check mark next to the name if they can vouch for the student’s character. Each check mark equals a point to be used in the rubric. Teachers who are absent, paraprofessionals and coaches are not given the opportunity to participate. Some CRHS teachers refuse to participate as they are uncomfortable with the process. Also, if students attend a half-day public magnet school and CRHS, those magnet school teachers are not asked for character input. Number four, regarding the service score, per the CRHS application, ‘in order to qualify, a total of 30 or more volunteer hours are required’. In the scoring rubric which students do not have access to, additional points are given if students show more than 30 hours of service. This should be made clear and accessible to students beginning their freshman year. Number five, per the NHS National Constitution, the faculty council and the NHS council selection committee ‘shall meet at least once a year to review the procedures of the chapter, select members and to consider non-selection, dismissal, other disciplinary actions and warning cases,’ article 7, section 3. Also, in section 4, ‘the faculty council will develop and revise, when necessary, all chapter procedures for

selection, discipline and dismissal of members, all of which must remain in compliance with this constitution and NHS policies. Let's not blame COVID, difficulty recruiting members for the faculty council or changes in staffing for this lapse. And finally, number six, per the NHS National Constitution, 'the faculty council shall reserve the right to award honorary membership to students who warrant special consideration, including those who receive accommodations for a disability or foreign exchange students, in recognition of achievement and/or outstanding service rendered to the school in keeping with the purposes of the National Honor Society'. There is a whole segment of the CRHS population that has never been considered and should be considered for membership. This suggests that atypical situations that do not align with the current rubric should be considered when evaluating applications. Thank you, Tina Hurlbert, parent of 2021 and 2024, RSD employee 2008-2023, Durham resident 2006 to the present."

Nick Faiella, from Middlefield, also felt that the National Honor Society selection process needs to be improved. He was sure that the district has heard complaints from many parents over the years and how the selection process impacted their kids. He emailed in May, 2023 about his concerns over the selection process and noted that he felt there was severe gender bias, as significantly more female students are included every year. When pressed for a response, it was never really explained to him as to why that happens or what would be done to fix it and it remains a concern for him. Mr. Faiella felt that the district can continue to defend the existing process or look for ways to improve it. He felt that the overall goal should be to have more students achieve this status, rather than fewer, including as many juniors as possible in order for it to be included on college applications. He suggested that they look at the GPA requirement of 3.66 at Cuginchaug, while it is 3.25 at Xavier and Mercy and 3.5 at Sheehan. Lowering the GPA would make more students eligible. He has heard that approximately 40 to 60 kids are eligible each year based on upon GPA alone. He also felt that they need to work on increasing the application rate. He also felt it was important to include parents in the eligibility notification. As far as community service hours, neither NHS nor the CRHS handbook requires a minimum but he has been told there is an internal number of 30 hours while Mercy and Xavier use 12. He felt that the students are not made aware of that number until they are juniors, which is far too late. He also felt that they need to stop looking at a difference in service hours outside the school. Mr. Faiella also felt leadership is hard to quantify and should not be challenged. Character should be very easy to verify. Mr. Faiella suggested they look to automate the process and the faculty committee should only be looking at the applications that are automatically denied to see how many should be overturned. Mr. Faiella gave an example of his son Evan who was denied as both a junior and senior. The admissions officer at Brown University asked why he was not in the National Honor Society and he could not answer. He reiterated that the overall goal should be to have more students admitted in the National Honor Society, not less.

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: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback.

Approval of Minutes - October 25, 2023 and November 29, 2023

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes of the October 25, 2023 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the October 25, 2023, as presented: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy and Mr. Roraback, with Mrs. Petrella abstaining.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes of the November 29, 2023 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the November 29, 2023, as presented: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback, with Dr. Darcy abstaining.

National Honor Society Selection Criteria

Mrs. Stone noted that the district first had eight members inducted into the National Honor Society in 1957, being inducted by the Guilford chapter. The current application process is outlined in a Board of Education policy that has been in place since 2009 and reviewed, but not revised, in 2011. The original policy dates back to 1994. There are 21 members in good standing this year.

Mrs. Stone explained that a list of juniors and seniors with a cumulative GPA of 3.66 is compiled and they may elect to apply. She reviewed the three pillars of NHS, character, leadership and community service. The applications are then reviewed by the faculty committee. Mrs. Stone explained that they have not been able to get a faculty committee together this year. She believes that, in the past, FOI requests had been submitted to the faculty council when some students didn't get in and it became very uncomfortable. Mrs. Stone felt it was a professional responsibility to get people to serve on this committee and they will do that. Administration stays out of the selection process, but does review and certify the applicants after. Juniors who are not selected can apply again in their senior year.

Mrs. Stone then reviewed the GPA requirements from other schools, ranging from 3.5 to 4.2. She then reviewed the numbers from 2019 to 2023 for who was eligible, who applied and who was accepted. This year, there were 58 students who were academically eligible. This included 44 (12 boys and 32 girls) out of 106 juniors (47 boys and 60 girls) and 14 out of 85 seniors. There are already 21 seniors in National Honor Society. Out of the 58 students who were eligible, 35 applied.

Mrs. Stone added that they also offered extending some junior privilege to any junior that applied, with permission of their parent. This meant that if the student had a study hall first thing in the morning or last of the day, they could come in late or leave early. Mrs. Stone wasn't sure that this actually made any difference in applications.

Mrs. Stone did feel that the application process should be looked at and would be welcome to having members of the Board work with them on that. She added that the NHS range of 3.0 to 4.0 is actually an unweighted GPA which means that honors and AP classes do not carry any more weight. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they need to form a committee and overhaul this process. Mrs. Stone also felt they need to look at how to handle transfer credits.

Mr. Moore felt that the process for the seniors needed to be done in September or October. He felt that both Mr. Faiella and Mrs. Hurlbert made a lot of good points and he also felt that they should go to the current NHS members for recommendations on the process. He felt that a lot of the criteria needed to be in the handbook and students need to know about it earlier. He added that the current members should

talk to the students about its importance and what they get out of it. Mrs. Stone added that the district has a community service requirement and this year's seniors have to have 37 hours by graduation and next year's seniors will need to have 50 hours by graduation.

Dr. Darcy felt that all students should know what the requirements are and the rubrics should be public. She also felt that reviewing this process may get into the need for grading reform in general. Mrs. Stone agreed and added that Mrs. Hurlbert had taken over as the advisor before she left the district and it was Todd Petronio for four or five years before that.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked Dr. Darcy to take a look at this and Mrs. Stone added that she would like to have some of the academic teachers take a look as well. Mrs. Petrella summarized that the consensus is to take a look at this and then upgrade the Board of Education policy as well. Mrs. Caramanella felt that the biggest disappointment was that students were denied or not even given the chance to become part of the National Honor Society. She felt that if they continue to drag their feet on this, it will become detrimental to yet another group of kids. She requested that this be made a priority. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they should recommend to the full board that this be done as soon as possible, but it may take a while.

Dr. Schuch would be interested to know what the true impact of National Honor Society membership is on college admissions and scholarships. He wondered if NHS had more value in past generations and would hate to have the district spend a lot of time on something that is no longer that important. Mrs. Stone stated that her guidance counselors can certainly find that out and Mrs. Dahlheimer will also touch base with CABE. Dr. Darcy felt that NHS is a filtering system to take actual data and filter it through faculty as opposed to what goes on college applications that include actual data. Mrs. Caramanella also felt that they need to be aware of a huge population of kids who have this as a personal goal, college entrance aside. Mrs. Stone assured that feedback will be a key component to the process.

EL Update

Mrs. Quarato reported that K-5 teachers are into module 2 at this point and are starting the middle-of-the-year benchmarks. There will be some one-to-one coaching for some of the instructional coaches, with a goal of the coaches building a schedule with the coach that will work with them on EL. One of the big things they're questioning is assessment in the skills block and the All block. The next professional learning day will be on February 16th where teachers will be given the flexibility to build their day.

Mrs. Quarato hopes to have more specific feedback for the next meeting because they will be meeting with coaches and interventionists this week. They continue to hear very positive things from the students. Teachers are seeing a lot of progress, especially with students who are in special education, but it continues to be a challenge for the teachers.

Mrs. Quarato stated that she received an email from the Kiddom rep offering a grades 3-5 phonics program that is separate from but in alignment with the EL curriculum. She will meet with the rep and two coaches on Friday to look into that. Right now, there is no phonics instruction in the program for grades 3-5. The rep has also offered to provide some in-person PD between April and June. Mrs. Quarato explained that Kiddom is the digital platform the district uses for the EL materials.

Mrs. Gonzalez then reported that they are looking to start the program in sixth grade next year. Next year's students will have had experience with the program and they will keep building on that each year.

They have allotted extra time for both ELA and math to continue with the foundational skills. Mrs. Quarato added that the teachers are excited to learn about the pieces of the program and the one-to-one coaching is ready to go for the middle school coach.

Mrs. Petrella asked to hold off on approval for sixth through eighth grade until they really look at the results of the current program. She also asked Mrs. Quarato to send the link to the actual materials once again. Mrs. Quarato will do that and explained that it will include K-8.

Mrs. Petrella asked if all the students read the same book in a module and Mrs. Quarato explained that there are two different components. In one piece, they will read a book together as a class, but there is another component that offers the students a choice. Some of the students will bring in their own books and the teachers will allow them to read those during their free choice time. The teachers also have books in the classroom libraries that are aligned to the modules.

Mrs. Dahlheimer was a little concerned about expanding the program to sixth grade because she feels that the fifth-grade schedule has not been as expected. It is now January and they still have not done an ounce of social studies and parents have reported that their kid hasn't read a book this year. Mrs. Quarato stated that the fifth grade EL program has the additional All block and the sixth-grade curriculum does not and is just specifically modules. That cuts the time needed for the program by a lot. Mrs. Gonzalez added that they are looking to increase time in academic areas. They will increase both math and ELA, with a very negligible decrease in social studies and sciences. Both ELA and math would happen every day. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that the state now allows 19 programs, rather than just seven which may make it hard for the board to move the EL program into sixth grade without seeing progress.

Dr. Schuch stated that they will make improvements to the grade 5 schedule with the reconfiguration of grades 4 and 5. They also felt that the sixth-grade schedule can use some revamping, regardless of the program. He also felt that they may lose the opportunity to train if they wait too long to approve the EL program. He asked if they can come to the next board meeting with information and Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that would be helpful as there is some confusion about the content of the program.

Evaluation Update

Mrs. Quarato reported that they are in very good shape. She has attended a couple of trainings over the last few weeks and, in hearing from other districts, realized that they are in good shape. She felt that the district has a really strong PDEC (Professional Development and Evaluation Committee) which is made up of elementary and secondary teachers, administrators, special education teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists and social workers. They did branch off a smaller committee to work on specific projects. The subcommittee met on January 10th and made a lot of progress.

Mrs. Quarato noted that they have selected the standards that they will use for the 2024-2025 school year, CCT for educators and service providers, but the goal for next year is to continue to research other standards in order to bring more diversity into the evaluation process. They then created a timeline and they are doing their best to stay away from traditional terminology because they want everyone to know that this process is meaningful for them, with ongoing feedback.

Phase 1 will happen between September and November, with every educator going through self-reflection. They are working on a form to provide to the teachers. They will then create their goal which

can be an individual goal or a group goal and can be for up to three years. They will then take that goal to their evaluator and collaborate on that. Phase 2 will happen between December and April and will include a growth plan being implemented. The educators will spend their time on professional learning and research. They would modify their practice at this point, based on what they learn. The educators would then do a mid-year self-reflection as to where they are from the beginning of the year and get constant feedback from their evaluator. Phase 3 would be done between May and June and would again include a self-reflection, thinking about the year as a whole and how they can continue moving forward. The evaluator would end the year writing a summative report that would be provided to the individual.

The committee did decide that if an educator has less than two years in district, they would have at least two or more observations. Educators with two or more years would have at least one. Those observations will be really focused on feedback and they are 100 percent against using a scale and grading staff during observations.

Mrs. Quarato summarized that they still have a few things to work out and are beginning to create some forms. The full PDEC will meet again at the end of February and the goal for that meeting is to bring all of this work back and spend some time gaining feedback.

Adjournment

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First