

**Revised**

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met remotely in regular session on Wednesday, February 28, 2024 at 4:30 PM.

Recording of meeting: <https://youtu.be/D9aaGpqauGg>

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; Mrs. Siegel, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation and Accountability, Mrs. Stone, Principal of Cuginchaug Regional High School, Mrs. Durkin, Principal of Memorial School and Mrs. Mariani, Instructional Coach

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 4:36 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. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback.*

**Approval of Minutes - January 24, 2024**

*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.*

**EL Update/Middle School Discussion**

Mrs. Quarato reported that teachers had time on February 16<sup>th</sup> and were happy to collaborate during that time. Coaches continue to receive one-to-one coaching and conversations continue about what is happening during PLC time and work that needs to be done. Mrs. Quarato also explained that Kiddom is the online platform used in grades K-5 for the EL program. It is available for both teachers and students but is used more by the teachers in the younger grades. The platform has a lot of resources and is being continuously updated. Teachers get information that EL has gathered. If the district didn't have that platform, they would either not get updates or have to continuously purchase teacher editions year after year. There are also a lot of activities within the platform that teachers can use and differentiate them as many times as they want.

Teachers can provide immediate feedback within the platform and also watch learners working in real time. Teachers can also leave recorded directions or messages for the learners.

Students have the ability to listen to lessons and can also submit their work through the platform. There are also embedded unit assessments and teachers are able to grade and provide feedback. Mrs. Quarato spoke with the Kiddom representative in January and he was very impressed with the usage, noting that he has never seen such high activity so early on. He reported that 75 teachers have been accessing the content pages, 61 teachers were accessing the presentation and slide decks and 249 students have been active in the platform.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked how they felt the assessments are and if they are meeting the kids at the grade level they are at. Mrs. Mariani explained that the students are put into microphases that are competency based, based on their assessments. There may be a second-grade student working in a first-grade micro phase, so they are able to access those resources through Kiddom. Mrs. Quarato added that they are very good module assessments for the older kids and the teacher has the ability to modify them.

Dr. Darcy asked what the cost of the platform is and Mrs. Quarato explained that it is a little over \$5,000 for elementary and they received a quote for sixth grade at a little over \$3,000. She thought it would probably be about the same cost to get it for the whole middle school. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it was between \$13,000 and \$16,000 for each school and Strong was just over \$13,000 for the texts, courses and Kiddom. Kiddom was \$6,000 at Lyman and a little under for Brewster, \$5,900 at Memorial and \$3,240 at Strong.

Mrs. Mariani offered to meet with anyone who has questions about Kiddom. Mrs. Dahlheimer would love to take a look at it. Mr. Roraback asked if Kiddom had the ability for the administrators to collect data. Mrs. Quarato explained that Mrs. Mariani will present an overall look at the data and trends for benchmark assessments for the K-2 skills block. That is not included in the Kiddom platform as of now, however individual data sheets have been created. That feature will become available in the Fall.

Mrs. Mariani reviewed the components of the EL benchmark assessments in the skills block. The four different components are letter ID and letter sound, phonological awareness, spelling and fluency. Each grade level has an assessment path for the year. Some assessments are required while others are suggested. Students who are ready for suggested subtests are assessed. Mrs. Mariani felt that grade one has incoming students with a wide range of abilities. She reviewed the assessment pathway for that grade as well. Teachers are provided a lot of information for next steps.

Mrs. Mariani's favorite part of the benchmark assessments at the K-2 level is the conversion chart. She described the modules and microphases and noted that Kiddom allows teachers to provide targeted instruction for students.

Dr. Darcy asked what data decides whether a student is ready to take a benchmark. Mrs. Mariani explained that if they are close, they give the assessment a try. If they aren't successful, they work more on it. She added that there are cycle assessments in grades 1 and 2. Intervention goals are also aligned with the cycles. Dr. Darcy noted that one of the powers of this type of program is that it can make intervention be a lot more flexible, so kids go in and out of intervention. She asked if they have been able to start creating that system. Mrs. Mariani admitted that they are new, but that is her hope. It is more of a transient population in kindergarten.

Mrs. Mariani then explained that she reviewed grade level data in K, 1 and 2 and put together some trends which are very positive. In kindergarten, the growth in letter name and sound has been significant. They have also made a lot of gains in phonological awareness. In grade 1, students are moving from partial alphabetic to the full alphabetic microphase in spelling. They have grown in decoding skills. They are continuing to work on encoding and bringing in the fluency piece.

Mrs. Petrella asked Mrs. Mariani to explain the key names which she did, including rhyming, phonemes and blending and short vowel words. Encoding is spelling and fluency is the ability to read a text with accuracy. In second grade, they are working on encoding and decoding. They are working on vowel teams and compound words. They are working to increase fluency which is assessed by their word count per minute and accuracy. They are also given comprehension questions.

Mrs. Mariani summarized that they are constantly assessing, but not in a bad way. Dr. Darcy asked if they could see the actual data rather than the interpretation of the data. Mrs. Quarato explained that they are trying to find the best way to compile that data. The data will look very different than what everyone is used to seeing. Dr. Darcy asked if it sets a goal for the kids and you see the percentage of kids met their goal. Mrs. Mariani explained that the skills are introduced based on the Science of Reading and the platform gives her a specific goal for a specific student. The goal is not really an end-of-the-year expectation but more based on individual students. She gets much more targeted data from EL than she ever got from iReady.

Dr. Darcy asked how they will decide if the platform is doing what they want it to do. She will need to see data that shows that every kid is making adequate yearly growth. Mrs. Durkin added that they also want to see that they're making progress on grade level or closing the gap on the DIBELS screener. DIBELS shows trend lines for individual students. Dr. Darcy summarized that the platform and EL are really informing instruction, but then they will use the assessments and progress monitoring to keep track.

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that concerns had been expressed about grade 3 not having phonetic skills and asked if there was information for grades 3, 4 and 5. Mrs. Quarato stated that they are using some components and assessments of the grade 2 skills block for the kids that need it in grade 3. They are also looking into a phonics program embedded within Kiddom for support. It is a nationwide problem that grade 3 through 5 readers are struggling with literacy. Mrs. Durkin added that the phonics part from Kiddom was just recently released. The teachers took the assessments and broke them down to create groups for targeted instruction. Kiddom also has goal trackers for the students and lets them track their performance. Mrs. Petrella felt that they are still in the beginning stages of implementation and asked how they can determine if they are having success. Mrs. Durkin reiterated that they are still using benchmark assessments through DIBELS and progress monitoring. Mrs. Petrella emphasized that they want to see that the students are making progress and how that is determined.

Mrs. Petrella stated that she spent some time going through the grade 5 and 6 materials to look at the books they used and the lessons. Mrs. Quarato explained that they use the workbooks in grade 5 but they do not plan to purchase the workbooks for grade 6 because they can access the information from Kiddom. Mrs. Petrella was quite impressed with what was in the workbooks. She was concerned about the content of the materials that are used and felt that there was a racial theme in both the first and second books and she saw the same theme later on in the program. Mrs. Petrella believed that children need to know about their world but felt that it wasn't good that a couple of books in a row focused on the same thing with whites being against Mexicans and blacks. She also noted that the main characters are boys and the girls are really more

in a subservient role. Mrs. Petrella suggested that they look carefully at the modules and if one of them talks about social issues, the other ones should deal with other issues.

Dr. Darcy felt that the push-back would be that the themes are different, with one being about immigration and another about the space shuttle. Within those themes, there may be a discussion of how these different scientific or historical themes impacted people of the world. Dr. Darcy stated they should think long and hard before tinkering with the content because of their personal inclinations as these are very well-researched. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that she thought this came about because social studies was not being run in the fifth grade this year.

Mrs. Quarato explained that the modules were not selected with the idea that social studies wasn't going to be taught. She reminded everyone that the goal is to add another module next year. The rep had suggested that they do the first module and then the other module was selected with discussion amongst the literacy team and the teachers. Mrs. Petrella asked if there were additional modules available and Mrs. Quarato explained that there are just four for each grade level.

Mrs. Petrella understood that social issues are in the middle of everything. A module in grade 6 is titled Remarkable Accomplishments in Space Science and the key book is about three black women who are very good at math and their contributions were not recognized. They also included excerpts from other things, including support and development of the space program, and then got to another article called Moon Dust and Black Disgust. Mrs. Petrella quoted from the article and encouraged the other committee members to read it. The students are then asked to write an essay on a black and white world. Mrs. Petrella felt that it was a little too one-way. Mr. Moore felt that that was the country's history and facts.

Mrs. Caramanello felt that it all has to do with context and the discussions that are happening around the material. They need to be careful to make sure that history is taught as it actually was, but not breed more hate in the process. She asked Mrs. Petrella to share the article with everyone.

Dr. Schuch reiterated that history and social studies will be taught separately in grade 6 from ELA. Mrs. Durkin explained that they are working on the schedule for fourth and fifth grade and keeping in mind where they've come K-3 and where they're going 6-8. Revisions were made to the instruction happening at Memorial. Instead of doing the next science unit in fifth grade right now, students are doing some social studies content standards. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if they felt that switching off the science content is losing their instruction in science. Mrs. Durkin stated that science is still being taught, but they might revise some of the lessons that were taught in addition to the current curriculum. They have yet to come to a complete consensus on what it will be.

Dr. Schuch felt that they are all committed to putting a greater emphasis on ELA and mathematics in grades 4, 5 and 6. Once fourth and fifth graders are under one roof, they are brainstorming how to go from a single teacher model to what happens in seventh and eighth grade.

### **Evaluation Update**

Mrs. Quarato reported that the full PDEC met yesterday and reviewed the drafted process and timeline as well as the forms that the subcommittee has created. The feedback so far has been really good. The next step is for Mrs. Quarato and Mr. Tabor to meet almost weekly until May about what needs to be done. The subcommittee meets again on March 12<sup>th</sup> when they will take the feedback and start making some changes as

well as discussing other things. They will work on the consensus protocol and the next full PDEC meeting will be on April 22<sup>nd</sup> when they will get more input. If needed, the subcommittee will meet on April 25<sup>th</sup> and the hope is to bring everything to the Student Achievement Committee on May 8<sup>th</sup>. If approved, they would like to start sending information out to all staff members. Next year, they will continue to collect feedback and make any necessary modifications. They will continue to review more standards as well.

### **Competencies Update**

Mrs. Siegel reported that they have been working on building competencies in math and ELA as well as over-arching competencies. The next step is to work on the implementation plan for the competencies. They have brought the K-8 math and ELA competencies to the instructional coaches, interventionists and the leadership team for review. They would now like to bring them to the teachers for review. Competencies for 9-12 are in the works. They also brought the over-arching competencies to the leadership team and plan to bring them next to the competency-based team to review and get feedback. The next step would be to make an implementation plan.

Mrs. Quarato added that the coaches and interventionists met and talked about the goal being to get into a PLC to talk about these at least once a month. They want to start having discussions about what this will look like in the classroom and get their feedback. Several teachers have expressed that they are eager to jump into this.

Mrs. Siegel added that they are also looking at examples from other districts that have implementation plans. Mrs. Petrella asked if this will all come to the full board for approval before it gets implemented. Dr. Schuch did not view this as something that is a one-shot approval but more of a progression. He did feel it would be a great step to get approval of the competencies, but they are all rooted in the state standards and Common Core standards. They are creating a different system by which the learners can progress through them which is a little different than a pacing guide model. He thought it would be best to implement the strategy slowly. Dr. Schuch stated they would gladly bring the draft competencies to the full board. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that some of the hesitancy comes from wanting to know the difference between where we are experimenting vs. where we are sure the kids are getting what they need. Dr. Schuch agreed but felt that a pacing guide has never guaranteed that anything is learned. A competency-based approach comes at it from the learning side. Dr. Schuch also noted that the EL program has competency-based practices embedded in it and it's making it easier for the teachers.

### **HS Pathways Update**

Mrs. Stone had shared the Health and Human Services pathway document with the committee. They started with that pathway because there are existing classes and staff that fit into it. The document is a draft because they still need real pictures. There are three concentrations: health services, human services and government law and public administration. They will share that pathway document with the kids and their families at the end of the year. There will be flexibility for kids to change classes. They would also like to give some upperclassmen the opportunity to take some of these classes as well.

Looking at the Business pathway, they also found three concentrations: marketing, business administration and finance. The group questioned whether this was truly an elective pathway and whether some of these classes would fit into Social Studies. The Business pathway document should be complete by the end of the school year. They have decided to articulate seven courses next year, including Accounting 1, Physics,

Macroeconomics, Intro to Psychology, Criminal Justice, Chemistry and Exercise Science. Seven different teachers will work directly with seven different professors from the University of Bridgeport to offer these three-credit classes. It will cost \$50 per credit if the student decides to articulate. These classes will be available to all levels of kids.

Dr. Darcy asked if there was a plan for kids who qualify for free or reduced so that the tuition is subsidized. Mrs. Stone explained that they will ask students to reach out if they have a financial need. Mr. Moore asked if they have looked at staffing requirements for the Health and Human Services pathway. Mrs. Stone explained that these classes are based on the classes that sort of exist already. There is room in the PE and Health schedule to be able to dedicate a class for Exercise Science. They are confident they have staff available for the classes that she listed. Mrs. Stone did feel that more staff will be necessary for the Business and Engineering/Manufacturing pathways.

Mr. Moore was also concerned that freshmen might assume this is the only pathway but Mrs. Stone explained that that would be where the counselors come into play. Mrs. Stone wants her staff to have control over the messaging, being able to explain that there are lots of things the students can take. Mrs. Siegel added that the students take a career survey in middle school and high school and the class of 2024 ranked manufacturing and IT the highest with health and human services just behind that. Business, marketing and finance came next. With that data, they can target individual students. Mr. Moore asked if they were dropping the UCONN credit courses and Mrs. Stone stated they are teacher-specific and one wasn't run this year, but they are not generally dropping the UCONN classes. Mr. Moore asked about the University of Bridgeport and Mrs. Stone explained that they parted ways with the Unification Church in 2019 and are now independent, but she wouldn't be surprised if they were part of Quinnipiac. Mrs. Siegel noted they are part of Goodwin. Mrs. Stone added that these credits will transfer to most Connecticut schools.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if they had any indication of how the eighth graders are looking at the pathways. Mrs. Stone stated that the incoming freshmen won't know their schedules until later but if their career cluster showed an interest in different classes, they will try to help them change their electives. The incoming freshmen were instructed to choose six primary electives and nine secondary electives. Mrs. Stone felt that some students with an IEP can be extremely successful in a class like Exercise Science and they should have the opportunity to earn three credits like everyone else.

Mrs. Stone encouraged everyone to email her any questions or comments. She reiterated that she hopes to get the Business pathway draft by the end of the year and possibly even the Engineering/Manufacturing. Mrs. Petrella asked how the information is getting out to the parents and Mrs. Stone explained that she would like to couple that with sharing it with the kids. She would like to have two available, with a coming soon for the other one. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that it would be nice to get this information out to the community as well. Mrs. Stone also mentioned that the second-year Capstones are fabulous and welcomed everyone on the afternoon of March 8<sup>th</sup>.

## **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 6:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First