

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 16, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:09 p.m. Present were members Chair Joe Sokolovic, Joseph Lombard, and Sybil Allen. Board member Albert Benejan was present.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Allen moved to approve the committee's minutes of January 19, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Rob Arnold, executive director of specialized education, provided a special education report.

Mr. Arnold said there were two new out-of-district placements since the last meeting. There are 24 students at The University School out of 43 seats available. There are 39 students at DRN. There are a total of 317 out-of-district students right now.

Mr. Arnold said the district is serving 429 special ed students at charter schools. He said some of the charter schools have higher special education percentages than the district does.

Mr. Arnold said there was one due process complaint in January; the complaint was ended and the student went out of district. There have been three complaints in January and two in February.

Mr. Arnold said there are 4,242 special education students in Bridgeport, which is down from last year at this time when there were 4,385.

Mr. Arnold said there are 111 reevaluations that need to be completed. The number has been reduced from 299.

In response to a question, Mr. Arnold said the special education charter students in the numbers include Bridgeport students at schools between Norwalk and New Haven. He said charter schools receive in-kind services from the district for special education such as speech therapists and the district pays for the charter schools' special education teachers.

In response to a question, Mr. Arnold said he could provide data on the number of out-of-district students compared to last year. He said he believed the current percentage of special education students (from ages 3 to 21) was 16.2.

The next agenda item was on cultural relevancy in the language arts and literacy curriculum.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins, executive director of literacy/early childhood, said she shared a framework called Ready for Rigor with the committee. She said culturally responsive teaching is not a set of engagement of strategies, but a mindset and a way of looking at the world. She said the district has been working to develop awareness in regards to the culturally and linguistically diverse population.

Dr. Jenkins said the strengths have been around teachers and staff being reflective practitioners through social-emotional learning. She said the book *Culturally Responsive*

Teaching in the Brain by Zaretta Hammond has been used as a resource. Carrie Ramanuskas, the SEL district coordinator, has provided some implicit bias training, and there has been professional development as well.

Dr. Jenkins said a next step is an understanding of individualism and collective learning strategies. She said another aspect was how our own awareness can support or may not support the children we're working with.

Dr. Jenkins said the effort includes creating learning partnerships based in safety and care, including emotional safety, and basing the partnerships on rigor and support. She said based on the school climate survey the majority of students perceive a level of trust in teacher-student relationships.

Dr. Jenkins said she believed in explicit learning partnerships, grounded in clear feedback about learning goals, with concrete steps for improvements. She said after the pandemic there would be not only the achievement gap, but the Covid gap.

Dr. Jenkins said Zaretta Hammond's book emphasizes cognitive routines to improve independent learning. She said most of the district's ELA texts reflect the diversity of the student population. The current K-6 reading includes African-American, Brazilian-American, and Filipino and Alaskan ethnicities.

Dr. Jenkins said the next category in the Ready for Rigor framework is seeing the class environment as a second teacher. She said short inspirational videos, TED talks or poems are used to teach students the environmentally is intellectually safe.

Dr. Jenkins said ELA supports culturally responsive teaching through literature, dialogue, and honoring the students' voice and choice in the class.

Carrie Ramanuskas said she could provide data on SEL training for staff. Mr. Sokolovic urged one hundred percent of the staff receive implicit bias training in the next year or so. Dr. Jenkins said the RULER online training for teachers this year includes social justice components.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said a year-long professional development is being planned to kick off next month with diversity training.

The next agenda item was on psychological and social-emotional Covid-related impacts on student learning.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed the parents, children and staff were suffering from a type of trauma created by the pandemic. He noted there may be issues for remote learning students once they're free of parental supervision. He said undiagnosed issues may lead to more costly interventions in the future, including increased special education.

Dementred Young, social work coordinator, said a lot of the district's students are dealing with chronic urban trauma and the social workers had always helped students dealing with losses. He said he was looking at broadening that capacity.

Ms. Ramanauskas said the district's SEL initiative has specific programs. RULER is used to help emotional intelligence. Restorative practices are also used in academic instruction and conflict resolution. There is training around

adverse childhood experiences and anti-racist training practices.

Ms. Ramanauskas said there are powerful partnerships, including with the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition, a division of RYASAP, as well as with the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, who developed RULER, and the Consultation Center at Yale. Southwest and Optimus, who have school-based health clinics, are also partners. She said tele-health visits since the pandemic have increased services, including for families. She said the SEL task force includes participants from higher education. The task force meets every month, which was increased from every other month after beginning of the pandemic.

Ms. Ramanauskas described events like the Human Library event which brought students to understandings relevant to cultural competency. She added that the SEL initiative in the district started with one pilot school in 2013 and has been grown and built over the years.

Ms. Ramanauskas said there is a Parent Leadership Training Institute where parents are trained to build relationships with each other.

Ms. Ramanauskas said all social workers and school counselors have been trained in cultural responsive teaching. The performing and visual arts department under Ms. Robinson has infused all of the SEL components.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said there are 39 social workers in the district. He said he believed there are a similar number of psychologists. He said it was not enough. He said the national standard calls for one social worker for every 250 students.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the average salary and benefits of a school social worker is about \$85,000 to \$90,000. He said doubling the amount of social workers would cost about \$3.4 million.

Mr. Sokolovic said with Covid relief coming in one of our expenditures could be building on social-emotional learning. He suggested resources be directed to the hardest hit areas and schools and wraparound services allocated.

Supt. Testani said some ideas are being floated by external funders to sustain things beyond two years of federal funding. He said if child acts out, the first inclination for many is going to be to get them to a PPT and special education and out of the school building. He said this is not the way to approach students.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would like to see community school concepts, with wraparound services, and taking advantage of the time when schools are not used with proper funding.

Ms. Ramanuskas said there are discussions with partners that can help roll out a pilot social-emotional learning community school with full wraparound services for students and their families.

Ms. Ramanuskas said there is an International SEL Day on March 26th that the board could possibly support. Supt. Testani said it could be brought to the full board.

Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education, presented on the agenda item on the purchase of a new mathematics program for Grades 2 to 5 and Grades 9 to 10.

Mr. Planas said he was seeking approval for the purchase of the new textbooks, including courses in algebra and geometry.

Mr. Planas said the textbook licenses for Grades 3 to 5 have expired. Licenses for algebra and geometry expire at the end of the 2020-21 school year. He said the eventual goal is to have a consistent textbook for all grades K to 8, as opposed to the current situation with three different ones in use.

Mr. Planas said Into Math was adopted last year for Grades 6 to 8. He said there is work to be done to ensure teachers are teaching with the essence of the program, but the program is going well.

Mr. Planas said a Grade 3 to 5 pilot was implemented at six schools for Into Math and the pilot results were successful. There will be tweaks during the summer to develop the project-based learning aspect.

Mr. Planas said teachers using the program liked the electronic resources that were available beyond the textbook, particularly with remote learning.

Mr. Planas said Grades 2 to 5 will be added in the coming school year, and the year after Grades K and 1 will be added. There is a pilot under discussion for Grades K and 1.

Mr. Planas said the IT department has field-tested all the devices in Grades 2 to 5 in preparation for the rollout.

Mr. Planas said Ms. Siegel indicated that the purchase is subject to available resources and can be modified slightly if the funding received is less than the estimated amount. He said the cost is close to \$1.2 million and will include six-year

licenses of Into Math. The books will be consumable and will be replenished as part of the program. Professional development is also included.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said there is no bidding involved because only one company provides the program. Supt. Testani said it is considered a sole source.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was very happy with the Into Math program.

Mr. Planas last year three providers were looked at and the vendors provided their best prices.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said the funding for the purchased is determine by Ms. Siegel through various sources, including grants such as Title IV.

Mr. Planas said the price was similar to that quoted last year, amounting to about \$200,000 a year.

Mr. Planas said the Grades 9 and 10 situation was looked at by a full committee from seven high schools. Meetings, including teachers, were held from October 2020 to January 2021.

Mr. Planas said a rubric was used to review textbooks and the list was narrowed down to three vendors. Those three vendors made presentations and all three were tried out. The vendors were Illustrated Mathematics, Reveal Mathematics, Into AGA(the continuation of the Into Math program).

Mr. Planas said the three textbooks were ranked and Into AGA was the top-rated. Cost negotiations then followed and final offers were received.

Mr. Planas said the final price was about \$500,000 with Reveal Math a bit higher, which includes a six-year license for all seven high schools and online access. He said many teachers noted hardcover books, which are expensive, were not being used as extensively as in the past. He said the online programs have many remarkable features beyond the use of the textbooks. Professional development is also included.

Mr. Planas said Into AGA was chosen. He said the teachers thought one of the best options is the ability to go down two levels to 7th grade and use it for re-teaching.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said hardcover books will be purchased and students will have to do their work on paper or online. Mr. Sokolovic said he worried about the time students have to spend copying equations onto paper. Mr. Planas said he agreed and would be mindful of that and try to control it. He said the best feature is the ability to get data and self-correction after entering information online.

Ms. Allen moved *“to approve and present to the full board the recommendation that we purchase textbooks as presented for Grades 2 to 5 and Grades 9 to 10.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Ms. Allen moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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