

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 25, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m. Present were members Chair Joe Sokolovic and Joseph Lombard. Board member John Weldon arrived subsequently as noted.

Mr. Lombard moved to change the order of the agenda in the following order: agenda item 1, 5, 2, 4, and 3. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Lombard moved to approve the committee's minutes of April 27, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on Ready to Grow's Early Steps to Literacy program proposed for 2020-21 and 2022-23.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins, executive director of ELA, said the program is proposed for Bryant School and Marin School for the 2021-22 school year, with the possibility of adding Dunbar and Claytor Schools in the following year.

Suzannah Holsenbeck, executive director of Read to Grow of Branford, said she was thrilled to bring the program to Bridgeport. She said the program had been around for 21 years in the state and had donated over 2.2 million books to children and families.

Ms. Holsenbeck said the Early Steps to School Success program is in partnership with Save the Children. She said it is the most intensive program in terms of time that the staff spends with families and children. She said the program was launched in New Haven three years ago and there are four coordinators doing home visits with families and children up to the age of three. The goal to ensure children are kindergarten-ready. They also work with preschool teachers at four New Haven schools to distribute books and with parents on reading books with the children.

Ms. Holsenbeck said each coordinator would have a caseload of twenty home-visiting families and up to thirty children for the preschool-age program.

Ms. Holsenbeck said Save the Children developed this program and currently runs it in eight other states. She said her organization does all the fundraising for the program and there is no financial cost to the district. She said the coordinators would not be responsible for a child without the presence of a teacher and when with the families there would always be a parent present.

Ms. Holsenbeck said the priorities are families that are experiencing poverty, trauma, immigration, challenges with language and racism, with children aged 0 to 3 and 3 to 5.

Sarah Onisto of Save the Children said she supervises the coordinators in New Haven and would supervise Bridgeport coordinators if approved.

Ms. Holsenbeck said we aim to hire from the community.

Mr. Weldon joined the meeting.

In response to a question, Ms. Holsenbeck said home visits typically happen twice a month and are about an hour. During Covid the visits have been virtual. The support of the district is requested in getting the word out to potential families. For preschoolers, the teachers are used for initial outreach.

In response to a question, Ms. Holsenbeck said there is no federal funding currently and funds come from private funding and foundations. She said candidates for coordinator should have a bachelor's degree, but for the right candidates an associate's degree is accepted.

Mr. Lombard moved *“to present to the full board for implementation of the Read to Grow Early Steps literacy program at the Claytor and Bryant School for the school year 2021-22 and for Marin and Dunbar Schools for school year 2022-23.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

Dr. Jenkins said the district would like to launch the program at Bryant and Marin for 2021-22 and Dunbar and Claytor for 2022-23.

Mr. Lombard amended *“the motion to state Marin and Bryant for the 2021-22 school year and for the 2022-23 school year, Claytor and Dunbar.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a special education update. Dementred Young, director of social work, reported. He said the increase in out-of-district placements this month is two, and now totals twenty-four for the year. There are a total of 319 students placed out of district as of May 25, 2021.

Mr. Young said there was an increase in six special education students at charter schools. He displayed an evaluation summary. He noted the number of reevaluations and initial evaluations missed is declining. He said some of the numbers went up during Covid.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said he could provide the grade level at which the new charter school special education students were.

The next agenda item was on Effective School Solutions.

Supt. Testani said this was something that was explored pre-Covid. He said it has been used at South Windsor High, where he visited it along with Mr. Young and Mr. Arnold. He said use of the program would decrease the numbers of out-of-district placements. He said it would be cost-neutral and serve the district in saving money and will keep students in district, where families would prefer to have them. He said many out-of-district students are not attending school and the district is not made aware of that, while paying high tuition costs.

Duncan Young, CEO of Effective School Solutions(ESS), made a presentation. He said districts like Bridgeport are looking at the mental health of students in post-Covid education. He said research is pointing to an uptick in intensity and frequency, which will put a strain on existing clinical resources. There will also be increased behavioral challenges and increased need for therapeutic outplacements.

Mr. Young said there been discussions with the district on a plan to strengthen the multitiered systems of support with a two-pronged approach that would aim to build educator

capacity around trauma-informed practices for Tier 1, including mental health warning signs, and at the Tier III level to create in-district therapeutic programs.

Mr. Young said his organization began 13 years ago as a spinoff from a private, therapeutic day school. He said we are now in over 79 districts across 9 states, serving about 2,000 students every day. He said there is data to demonstrate improvement in grades, discipline and attendance.

Michael Roseman, vice president of district partnerships at Effective School Solutions, said there was a growing mental health epidemic even before Covid. He said the pandemic had created a lot of stressors, including academic, family and economic, anxiety about Covid, and social isolation.

Laine Whitaker, director of professional learning at Effective School Solutions, she was seeing a lot of impulsivity, depression/anxiety, maladaptive behaviors, and school avoidance.

Mr. Young said adverse childhood experiences can be negatively correlated a lot of different effects later in life. He said children had experienced trauma all around them. He pointed to statistics that showed a rise in pediatric emergency department visits related to mental health and an increase in suicidal ideations during the pandemic.

Mr. Young said the goals of the partnership will be better care for students; maintaining students in the least restrictive environment and reducing a district's reliance on out-of-district placements; and measurement around students' improvement.

Mr. Young described the multi-tiered systems of support framework, which delivers different levels of support relative to different levels of student need. He discussed the approaches at the Tier I, Tier II and Tier III, levels. He said true Tier III care is typically not done by districts alone. He said the Tier III goal is to deliver true clinical quality mental healthcare delivered within the school building.

Mr. Young said a three-year plan is conceptualized. The first year is about targeted out-of-district placement prevention. The second year is explained ODP prevention and strategically returning students from out of district. The third year includes a comprehensive effort to return students from out of district while continuing prevention efforts.

In 2021-22, 90 students across six schools at the Tier III level would receive intensive programs. The schools identified are Dunbar, Marin, Harding, Claytor, Bassick, and Curiale.

Mr. Young said at the Tier I the focus would be on districtwide professional learning and a targeted coaching plan to identify mental health warning signs and educate teachers on the signs of trauma.

Ms. Whitaker described the clinical services available in the wraparound program, including biweekly family therapy. It is requested the district provide a dedicated space to perform the interventions.

Ms. Whitaker said there are specialty protocols to combat school avoidance, along with substance abuse and other specialty groups.

Ms. Whitaker described the professional development approach, which include trauma-informed practices.

Mr. Young said last year through the first two marking periods to shut down there was 99 percent retention of students in district of those enrolled in the ESS. There was a 97 retention rate from students who returned from out of district. There was a 16 percent increase in GPA, a 35 percent in student absences, and a 38 percent reduction in disciplinary incidents.

Mr. Roseman discussed costs. He said Tier III programming often can be self-funding or create a budget surplus. He said often out-of-district placements become semi-permanent. There are also challenges with academic rigor and commuting.

Mr. Roseman said on average out-of-district placements costs \$100,000. He said in an ESS program typically 30 percent of the students worked with are at risk of an out-of-district placement.

Mr. Roseman said the proposed partnership is a Tier III program at Dunbar, Marin, and Harding serving up to 60 students, with six clinicians. At Curiale, Claytor, and Bassick there would be up to ten students at each site, with three clinicians. There will also be a dedicated project manager for the district. Also included is the Tier I professional development at six sites.

Mr. Roseman said the cost would be \$1.6 million annually. Discussions with the district have included a three-year contractual commitment at \$1.4 million each year.

In response to a question, Ms. Whitaker said one topic to be used for next year will be the power of play due to the loss of social skills. Another topic will be the impact of trauma due to poverty and racism. She described the capacity building that it is hoped will occur with the professional development.

Mr. Weldon said it was a very good presentation. Mr. Sokolovic said it was an awesome presentation and it was like the presenters had been listening in on the board over the last year and a half.

Mr. Sokolovic noted there are other significant languages in the district than Spanish and English. Mr. Young said ESS works with a good translation service and he felt confident the other languages could be supported.

Supt. Testani said the coach he works with from CAPPS indicated the program was used in the Berlin district, as well as urban settings. He said with funding coming in this is the perfect opportunity to have ESS show what they can do. He said when parents see what is offered it will be a game-changer to getting students back in the district.

In response to a question, the superintendent said the professional development component is desperately needed. He said a draft contract could be ready for the next regular meeting of the board. Mr. Weldon said if the contract is reviewed by counsel he would have not a problem having the matter go to the full board next.

Mr. Lombard moved “*to present to the full board for approval the Effective School Solutions program as presented to the committee.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on summer programming. Supt. Testani there is a lot planned for the summer. He said there were challenges about staffing some of the programs.

The superintendent said the usual high school credit recovery program, led by Vernon Thompson, will be held. There will be a small tuition cost.

Supt. Testani said there will be a first-time transition program for 8th graders which is mandatory for those who need to complete the promotion process. There will be academics in the morning and enrichment in the afternoon. The enrichment will also be offered to current 9th graders.

The superintendent said the normal Early Reading Success Academy will be held, with a coordinator to be hired, Christine Neary. He said there has been work with the Lighthouse Program to ease the transition of these students into Lighthouse in the afternoon.

Supt. Testani said English Learner Summer Academy will be held at Waltersville School, to run from June 28th to July 23rd. There will be no transportation at this time. He said it was hoped to hold this at multiple sites, but there were recruiting challenges, mainly because of Covid teachers are burnt out.

The superintendent said students with IEPs will participate in the extended school year. This year it will be held at three

locations to keep kids more regionalized and to have less busing.

Supt. Testani said the SOAR music camp will have 40 participants from Grades 6 to 12. He added there will summer sports at Central High and Walter Lockett's program at Bassick High.

In response to a question, the superintendent said staff in summer programs receive hourly pay and there have been adjustments to try to recruit more teachers.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said programming for 6th and 7th graders is a neglected area. The ELL program covers Grades 4 to 8. He said a robust middle school program around the arts and STEM is being looked at. Mr. Sokolovic noted the changes going on in middle schoolers' lives creates challenges.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod