

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 15, 2022, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:08 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Christine Baptiste-Perez and Joe Lombard*. Board member Albert Benejan* was present remotely and in person as noted below. (*Remote participation.)

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved to approve the minutes of the meetings of January 18, 2022. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved to table the first item until later on in the agenda. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the Interdistrict Discovery Magnet School operation plan,

Sangeeta Bella, principal of Discovery Magnet, said every ten years the interdistrict magnet schools have to revise their operations plan. She said she has been working with the state Department of Education on this for the last year and a half. She requested approval of the plan.

In response to a question, Ms. Bella said enrollment has been steady, with close to 2,000 applicants each year. The

urban-suburban ratio has been steady. She said teacher vacancies have been very minimal, with academics and attendance also going up. She said the entry point is pre-K, and 45 students are taken in pre-K classrooms and the rest of the students are on wait lists.

Mr. Sokolovic noted his son has applied to the school every single year since kindergarten, and he finally gained entry in 8th grade. He said we need to strive to make all our schools of the quality of Discovery Magnet.

Supt. Testani said there is consistency in the school resulting from the staffing and the students who enter, remain there and get embedded in the culture. He said students who enter in kindergarten and remain until 8th grade in lower performing schools do very well as well.

In response to a question, Ms. Bella said 2013-14 was the first year there was an 8th grade in the school, which was the first year Fairchild Wheeler was open. Almost 80 to 90 percent of students then went to Fairchild Wheeler, but the amount has dipped down to around 55 to 60 percent.

In response to a question, Ms. Bella said the lottery operates by town. So, if a Stratford student leaves the school, first the slot will be open to a Stratford student, and the suburban/urban ratio must be maintained.

In response to a question, Ms. Bella said the policies are translated into Spanish and Portuguese. She said the operation plan also covers special education.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved *“to push to the full board the approval of the Discovery Interdistrict Magnet School plan for presentation to the Connecticut state Department of*

Education.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the latest available assessment data on reading, writing, mathematics, and science, and strategies to support student learning deficits.

Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary schools and mathematics, displayed the HMH growth measure assessment data. He said there was an incredible increase in Grades 2 and 3; and increases in Grades 3 to 7. Grade 8 was pretty much stable.

Mr. Planas said some schools moved Grade 2 students 50 percent from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year because the students were only one grade level below. He said we are looking deeply at Grades 7 and 8. He said a big issue is the retention and recruitment of teachers, which is a statewide issue. He said a little more than two-thirds of the 31 teachers have been retained, but big schools have had transiency in teachers.

Mr. Planas said we’re looking at using resources for lead teachers; professional development purchased from HMH; and half-day coaching sessions.

Mr. Planas said K-1 students should be assessed as an interview and the district will be piloting a new assessment in six schools.

Mr. Planas said Dr. Rosa works with teachers on a part-time basis in supporting 7th, 8th and high school teachers. He said teachers are encouraged to use data to find what errors students are making and to diagnose what students need.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the majority of our students, or 73 percent, are not at or above grade level at the elementary level.

Mr. Planas said the curriculum has been patched up over the past 12 years by working with the same textbook. In the past three years, a different textbook has been adopted to ensure students have a common way of learning. He said the starting point of the students should be remembered. In the 7th grade there were about 1200 students who were below by two or more grade levels, which was reduced to 800 students one grade level below by the second assessment, so gains are being made.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said there is a lot to work to be done at the middle school level. He said it appears 5th grade is a pivot point where decimals, fractions and percentages come in.

Supt. Testani said the transiency of students in certain schools and at higher grade levels contributes to the issue because students are not with us all the way from kindergarten. He said many of the students who come to the district have special needs or are grade levels behind. He added that most 7th and 8th grade math teachers want to teach in high school. He said one of the city's charter schools will not be offering 7th and 8th grade next year due to the difficulty in finding teachers.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez asked for a more detailed analysis that separated out newcomers and English language learners.

Mr. Planas described the use of data in addressing issues and said the efforts are really paying off, but it will take time to see it. He said he has run the math department for six

years and the purchase of the same book for every student to be used with the same curriculum is a huge deal.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said it is hard to compare data with prior years because a totally different assessment was used. He said in Grades 2 to 4 the data is about ten percent higher than previous years; Grade 5 is similar; in Grades 6 to 8 the starting point was much lower than where we are now.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said typically growth in middle school during the year is less than in elementary schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said on the state assessments the district was only at 8 percent at or above level after Covid. He said this data shows we're doing better. He said he likes to look at multiple data points, not just one test, which is just one bit in time.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins, chief academic officer, said the state provides a Next Generation Accountability Index, and 42 percent of the elementary index is based on student growth, while achievement is weighted at 32 percent. Growth over time is taken into account in student promotion decisions.

Mr. Sokolovic said he still worried about social promotion and said eventually it will catch up to students at higher levels of education.

Mr. Planas said quarterly assessments are being considered for 7th and 8th graders next year to specify the basic competencies students must have in each marking period.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said performance tasks are used to access content in a different way for enrichment. He said the new textbook has one project per unit and teachers are being trained to reach the students who need enrichment. He said the math meet and math Olympics also provide enrichment.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said there is after-school tutoring as part of ESSER funds. Supt. Testani noted the extended day programs in the district.

The superintendent said we're looking at elementary and middle school levels scheduling and incorporating new courses in high school that will meet the students where they are rather than putting them in a course that is setting them up for failure. He said Algebra I has been the most-failed course in the district for over a decade. He said students who need help in the first semester will get help prior to taking Algebra I in the second semester.

Mr. Planas said for five years Greg Tang, a math guru, did workshops for Grades K to 5 and the content is permeating through the data.

Supt. Testani said there was a built-in period at Central High during the pandemic to use the Khan Academy app for 30 minutes, which resulted in tremendous growth. Mr. Planas said there is an app used at Bassick, which students use for 25 minutes on every Wednesday. He said BMA has tutoring during and after school to support students who are behind.

Mr. Benejan arrived at the meeting in person.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez noted in New York she was continually tested throughout and there was math at every grade level through 12th grade.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the Ingenuity app used at Bassick is available for use at home.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the changes contemplated to scheduling are around how to utilize time more effectively.

Mr. Lombard noted he was a middle school math teacher in public school.

Mr. Planas said the district was on a roll before Covid, with growth showing good data. The district then regressed to where it was five years before. He described the present as catching up and on a good path. He said programs and one-to-one technology makes the district much better equipped to handle the gap.

Supt. Testani said compared to other districts in the DRG we are in a better situation. He said there was still a ton of work to do because the results are not acceptable. He said in the past too much time was spent on achievement levels as opposed to growth by all students regarding of performance levels. He said we have a heck of a lot of work to do, but he feels good about the team we have and the systems we're putting in place to help kids.

Dr. Jenkins said ESSER funding is being used to implement PSAT in Grades 8 to 11. She said this is a strategy other comparable districts have employed to look at students' progress.

David Henry, director of science, said there is very little data for NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards), unfortunately. He said he would share strategies and the optimism that his colleagues have. He said he has directed science for about a year and a half and also is the principal of the Aquaculture School.

Mr. Henry said the only data available is the 2018-19 school year. No NGSS testing was held in 2019-20 school year due to Covid. There are local results for the school year ending in 2021.

Mr. Henry said the data points out which strands within NGSS that our students are strong or weak on.

Mr. Henry displayed a slide of the four levels of achievement in science on the district. He said he believed there would be similar Covid-related regressions at the state level.

Mr. Henry said the strengths are in the physical science strands. He said there is a tremendous group of science educators in the district.

Mr. Henry said he had recently delivered plaques to Science Fair winners. Supt. Testani said Mr. Henry would present the new curriculum for science at next month's meeting.

Mr. Henry said meetings on science began in the summer of 2021, which included an honest assessment of what was working and what was not. He said one result was K-5 learners needed more science education.

Mr. Henry described the professional development that has taken place. He described the iQuest kits that are now in all

Grades 6 to 8. He said it is hoped to purchase workbooks for K-5 students next year.

Mr. Henry said he has discussed with Mr. Planas how to best utilize the math/science lead teachers next year.

Mr. Sokolovic said when he first came to the board, he noticed the K to 5 classrooms lacked science posters and visuals. He also found a lot of teachers at that level are uncomfortable with teaching science. Mr. Henry said some of the uncomfortableness continues. He described a program called Mystery Science that is being looked at and will be described at next month's meeting.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said last week she facilitated an overview of the PSAT for all of the Grade 7 to 12 teachers in ELA, science, and social studies. She said an interdisciplinary approach for those grades will be promoted. Mr. Planas said the directors meet together every other week as a cohort.

Mr. Henry said assessment is a part of negotiations for science curriculum, so the district is provided with the appropriate data.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said to his knowledge the state certification requires a degree in the subject the teacher is certified. He said right now there is not a lead science teacher available at every school. Supt. Testani said one of the problems with federal money running out is that the funding for lead teachers will dry up.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said science is tested in Grades 5, 8, and 11. He said that is why internal testing is needed as it exists in math. Mr. Sokolovic said 5th grade

seems quite late to identify deficiencies. Mr. Henry said growth will be measured in the lower grades with a new assessment.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said Aquaculture held a Covid-19 expo in which students strategized about handling the pandemic.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said 241 teachers in the district teach science, including the K-5 teachers. He said the Aquaculture School is about 10 percent Bridgeport students and 90 percent suburban. He said a higher percentage of Bridgeport students is anticipated in the incoming freshman class. He said he could provide the ethnic breakdown of the school via data management.

Mr. Henry said marine biology will be offered during the summer to 7th and 8th grade Bridgeport students as part of the recruiting efforts.

Supt. Testani said recruitment efforts at Aquaculture suffered greatly because there was not a fulltime counselor at the school. He said the numbers from Bassick, and Harding are embarrassing, and Mr. Henry has been tasked to improve things in this area.

Dr. Jenkins presented on literacy. She said she would present data assessment from DIBELS, which was just introduced last year. She said the state believes this assessment is valid and reliable to universally screen our children. She pointed to growth in Grades 4 and 8. She described the components of the assessment in grade levels.

Dr. Jenkins displayed scores for students receiving English as a second language services. She said the numbers are not great. She said kindergarten data indicates there are 212 children who have no proficiency in English at all. She said children who are learning a second language in Grades 1, 2, 5 and 8 did demonstrate growth.

Dr. Jenkins displayed K to 3 data. She said DIBELS is a state-mandated assessment in all Priority districts. She described the results. She said there is currently professional development for teachers in grades K to 3 on instructional routines aligned to the tests. There is also a partnership with Hill for Literacy in training teachers to teach foundational reading skills.

Dr. Jenkins said the Smarter Balance interim assessment is administered in the fall in Grades 3 to 8. She displayed a slide with the results. Comparison data is available for 2019-20 to 2021-22. She said there was a negative impact from the pandemic in the results except for in 8th grade.

Dr. Jenkins discussed PSAT data for 2019, 2020 and 2021. She said the average score for the district has not changed over time. However, the gap between the state and the district almost remains the same. She also described SAT results.

Dr. Jenkins said data is used to make decisions, and each child has an instructional focus and progress monitoring focus in Grades K to 3, that will extend up to Grades 4 to 6 next year. There is benchmark testing for Grades K to 12.

Dr. Jenkins said next year there will be vertical and grade level team meetings, so teachers will understand the instruction at upper grades.

Dr. Jenkins described the variety of digital programs that have been purchased. Every K- to-8 student now has a Lexia license. She said the Early Reading Success summer school will be run this year.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said it seemed what is going on in math is in line with all the subject areas. She said she loved the Lexia program from a parent perspective.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the state got away from CAPT testing at the high school level and is using SAT as the state assessment.

Mr. Sokolovic said it seemed counterintuitive that there was growth from the fall of 2019 to the fall of 2021 by two percent points in the benchmark. The superintendent said he believed the district did a really good job engaging students during the pandemic, which was recognized at the state level. He said the use of resources provided to kids is being monitored to see if they are effective or not.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would be interested in seeing assessment data with the ELL students pulled out. He said this would provide a better picture of the native speakers.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said maturity may account for more positive results in 8th grade. She described factors that are present in schools that make it harder to accelerate learning. She noted for the first time all three high schools have SIG grants, but without equitable support the ability to sustain growth over time may be questioned. She said the greatest challenge is demonstrating growth within cohorts for PSAT. For this, instruction has to improve over time.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she would be interested in seeing the factors that impact the success of schools.

The next agenda item was on changing school start times.

Supt. Testani said it would be quite a journey to make changes in this area. He said he spoke to a colleague where changes were made, and it took about a year to implement. He said that district drew on data from a neighboring district. He noted the transportation vendor's challenges may have to be considered. He added that options in that district were presented for alternative start times. Focus groups including teachers, administrators, board members, parents and community members were also used.

The superintendent said if the board is willing to take on this journey, he was more than happy to be part of it. He said in the end we should do what is best for children and put aside some of the monetary impacts.

Mr. Sokolovic said he has been looking at the research for years. Supt. Testani noted recent action in Washington to extend daylight savings time year-round.

In response to a question, the superintendent said the thought is to examine a later start for high school students. He said through at least the junior year the school day starts at 7:53 a.m. and it ends at 2:30 p.m. Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the start time sounded early.

Mr. Lombard said he was open to the discussion. The other committee members said they would like to see the issue explored.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed there should be board approval to even more forward with working on the issue. The superintendent said he could draw up on a road map with bullet points as a guide.

Mr. Sokolovic said decades and decades of research show start times for teenage children need to be later due to the way their bodies are biologically hardwired.

Mr. Lombard said tonight's meeting was very beneficial and well worth it.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on April 5, 2022