

Tolland Board of Education

Curriculum Committee Minutes

April 1st 2021

Members Present: Jacob Marie (Co-Chair), Madhu Renduchintala (Co-Chair)

Members Absent: Christine Griffin

Others Present: Dr. Willett (Superintendent of Schools)

Meeting called to order at 3:35pm

1. Pandemic Update:

- a. Adjustments for 5-days in-person learning: Mr. Marie asked Dr. Willett how the first week of 5-day in person learning was going. Dr. Willett said that the week was going well. He also commented that the number of remote learners was currently at 243 and that the number was falling. The district has received some communications from community members expressing concern over recent news reports showing global cases on the rise, and Dr. Willett has approached these concerns by providing reassurance of the relatively good position of the Tolland Public School (TPS) system and by promoting efforts to increase the vaccination rate. Mr. Marie also asked when it might be possible to return to full day in-person instruction. Dr. Willett stated that he believes that half-days on Wednesday will remain in place for the remainder of the school year to assist with remote instruction. He believes that there is a 1/3 chance that we may need to reduce in-person instruction (particularly if rates increase over spring break), a 1/3 chance that the current mode of instruction stays in place for the remainder of the year, and a 1/3 chance that the district will be able to increase time spent in the classroom before the end of the school year. Mr. Renduchintala asked if the district has a way of tracking vaccinations for staff and students. Dr. Willett said that the district does not have a way of doing this but stated that he is working on a survey to provide some information on TPS vaccination rates. Mr. Renduchintala asked about who is notified when a covid positive individual is identified. Dr. Willett stated that all staff who work with the individual are contacted, and information is gathered on student, staff, transportation, and community close contacts, then close contacts and parent/guardians of close contacts are notified. Dr. Willett commented that he has now automated notifying parents and guardians but provides parents and guardians options to contact him with questions after receiving the automated message. Additionally, Dr. Willett commented that the biggest challenge is when parents of covid-positive students decide not to inform the district that their children are covid-positive and continue to send them to school. Dr. Willett reiterates that nearly all covid-cases originate outside of school and that TPS's quarantine rates remain low compared to other districts. Mr. Renduchintala asks if the district can send out a note to the community urging people to avoid close contact over spring break. Dr. Willett wanted to be careful that such a

communication be carefully worded as to avoid frustrating people, and that he is working on a data-based document to send out.

- b. Remote learners: Mr. Marie asked what the state is planning with regards to remote learning in the fall. Dr. Willett said that the state will extend remote learning into the fall but that there may be some stipulations. As of April 1st 2021, there are no stipulations required for remote learning. Mr. Marie asked about the Remote Learner Assistant Educators (RLAEs) that were recently hired. Dr. Willett stated that he has hired one RLAE per school to assist with the remote learning population. RLAEs are not teachers – they are individually contracted employees. Mr. Marie inquired about the RLAE job description. Dr. Willett explained that RLAEs work with teachers to ensure adequate 1-1 and small group instruction, and reach out with students who haven't been in recent contact with TPS. Mr. Marie asked what the district can do to entice remote learners to return to in person instruction in the fall; he qualified this question by saying he understands that some students must remain remote due to a health issue and is focusing on those who may choose to stay remote because they are scared. Dr. Willett responded by saying that he will focus on personal outreach to remote learners and will continue to ensure that the district is taking appropriate mitigation steps to avoid outbreaks of Covid-19.
2. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): Dr. Willett said that he hopes to bring SEL to the next level in the near future. Currently, administrators and some additional staff are reading *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, an authoritative book on the subject. Dr. Willett will also send certain administrators and school-based teams to online webinars on emotional intelligence relating to the implementation or management of an SEL program. Mr. Marie asked if SEL is based on a new body of research or if it is a fairly old concept; he said that he is concerned about some educational psychology programs because some have been gimmicky and not well founded. Dr. Willett said that the SEL concept emerged in the business community circa 2009, and has since been backed up by research in academia. He understood Mr. Marie's concern, and said that although there are some gimmicky SEL programs, there are also some high quality, research-based programs and that he has sought the latter. Dr. Willett mentioned that the program used in TPS, RULER, is a high quality program developed by Yale. Mr. Marie asked how SEL is assessed. Dr. Willett said that the district does have behavioral metrics that will work with the program. Dr. Willett pointed out that some considerations like the number of discipline referrals are not a comprehensive picture of behavior for the student body at-large.
3. Update on the SBAC Letter: Dr. Willett said that the state uses an accountability matrix to compare districts and that the SBAC test is not officially used for district-to-district comparison. Dr. Willett shared the latest index data from 2018-2019, and commented that overall TPS does very well compared to the rest of the state. Dr. Willett showed the committee an outline of the arguments he may include in a letter suggesting alternatives to the SBAC test. Mr. Renduchintala asked what the state's response to the letter might be. Dr. Willett was not sure but said that he believes a persuasive letter would ask the state to reutilize funds appropriated for the SBAC to programs to measures that can provide useful progress monitoring information to improve educational outcomes.
 - a. Review and Approval: A draft of the letter was still a work-in-progress, so this item was tabled.

4. Future:

- a. Update on Full Board Presentation for Pathways Program: A presentation will be a topic of discussion for the April Board of Education leadership meeting.
- b. Math Presentation: A committee-level presentation may be possible in May or June, but might need to be pushed into the fall.
- c. Science Presentation: It might make sense to move the committee-level science presentation to May or June and do the Math presentation later due to staff availability.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:05pm

Respectfully submitted,

Jacob Marie