

Tolland Board of Education

Curriculum Committee Minutes

June 3rd 2021

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

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Dr. Willett (Superintendent of Schools), Ms. Bridge (Personal Finance Teacher)

Meeting called to order at 3:34pm

1. Personal Financial Literacy in the Curriculum: Ms. Bridge provided an overview of the Personal Finance class currently offered at Tolland High School. The program has grown from only one section offered a semester to currently three sections. She noted that the class recently completed the "Budget Challenge," where Tolland students performed exceptionally well. She reviewed some post-Challenge survey data from the class, and noted that 82% of students believed that budgeting was important, and 94% felt that all students should participate in the Budget Challenge program. Ms. Bridge noted that if the class was made a requirement, it should be offered at both the College-Prep and Standard levels. She also felt that the course should remain limited to 11th and 12th graders due to the requisite maturity needed to grasp and contextualize the subject matter. Mr. Renduchintala asked if it would make sense to offer a standard level of the class to 8th graders. Ms. Bridge felt that it may not be as effective at that level because one of the main appeals of taking the course is that it prepares a student for getting a job, which is less relevant to 8th graders. Dr. Willett felt that it might be possible to incorporate some elements from a standard level Personal Finance Course into the Skills for Adolescents class which is taught in 8th grade. Ms. Bridge also noted that she believed keeping the class open to only 11th and 12th graders is important because having freshmen and seniors in the same class together often does not work well in her experience. Mr. Renduchintala asked if the course covered the importance of having good credit. Ms. Bridge said that the course does cover this topic. Mr. Marie asked Ms. Bridge to provide an overview of the reality fair, which is a field trip that Personal Finance students usually attend. Ms. Bridge provided a summary of the fair and stated that she knows the different venues that conduct them quite well and that she is happy with the one she currently utilizes. Mr. Renduchintala asked if students were ever turned away because of capacity issues. Ms. Bridge said that this doesn't occur because if enough students are interested in the course then additional sections are added. Ms. Bridge felt that another teacher would be needed to teach the course if it was made a requirement. Mr. Marie asked Dr. Willett if the Curriculum Committee could see a more detailed write-up of the various implications and things to consider should the Board decide to mandate the course. Mr. Marie also asked Ms. Bridge if there were additional things that the course could use to make it more effective. Ms. Bridge felt that the course is not in need of anything new but she did ask Committee Members to continue to support the Budget Challenge, which costs \$25 per student. Mr. Renduchintala asked if having financial advisors come in and talk to students would be beneficial. Ms. Bridge felt that it would, but due to the broad number of topics already covered,

she was not sure if she would be able to add it to the curriculum. Finally, Ms. Bridge added that she was looking into another online program called the Mint App which links students to a mock bank account and credit card. She believes that the program is free.

2. Pandemic Update:

- a. Learning Loss and Extended School Year Program: Dr. Willett provided an overview of the district's responses to learning loss. The Extended-School-Year (ESY) program has been extended from four to six weeks with free transportation for participants. ESY is available to all students who are interested and can be customized to each student. Currently, 200 are enrolled and there is a large degree of crossover between those enrolled and those in intervention programs. Dr. Willett mentioned that there is also a Social and Emotional (SEL) component to the program to keep it light and fun amid this stressful time. Dr. Willett also covered another learning loss resource; a website with educational resources for those who cannot attend ESY. The district will not recall the Chromebooks so students will have them and all of the resources on the devices over the summer. Dr. Willett discussed the different methods of evaluating learning loss for different age groups. Dr. Willett emphasized that students are invited, but cannot be forced to use summer resources to fight learning loss. For those who are unable to avail themselves of summer options, the district will offer "Power Hours" that will specifically focus on strengthening a student group's weaknesses in the fall. Mr. Marie asked how many students, among those in need of the district's resources, have availed themselves of the summer options. Dr. Willett said that he believes between 200-300 students will, which is decent. Dr. Willett discussed "Universal Screens," which are used to assess learning loss at Tolland Intermediate School. Additionally, progress monitoring has increased and Remote Learning Assistant Educators are also involved in assessing learning loss at TIS. For special education students, special form submissions have been set up for SEL. Students and Parents are encouraged to report learning loss, but school counselors will reach out in particularly worrisome cases. Dr. Willett then discussed learning loss and mathematics. He mentioned that the NWEAs have been used to track performance and that Tolland is trending the same as the nation as a whole. Students are doing fine, but not great. Specifically, students are ready to move to the next grade level as curriculum has been simplified to meet the challenges of teaching in a pandemic. Dr. Willett discussed learning loss as it relates to science curriculum. He mentioned that due to the nature of the curriculum and lack of extensive state testing, it has been difficult to quantify learning loss in this subject. At the High School level, Dr. Willett mentioned that the two primary tests, the PSAT and the SAT, returned respectable results for Tolland. Students showed noticeable improvement between the PSAT and SAT. Strategic Intervention Teams (SITs) at THS will help students most in need of academic and SEL help. Dr. Willett returned to the topic of Birch Grove, and felt that the district will probably need more staff at Birch Grove because the youngest students were most affected by the remote and hybrid learning models. Ms. Griffin asked how addressing foreign language learning loss will work. Dr. Willett said that because each course is only a semester, students will have time to retake the course if they do poorly. Mr. Marie asked if there will be any action the Board will need to take in regards to learning loss. Dr. Willett stated that the summer will be focused on gathering data which

will then be provided to the Board on a monthly basis. Mr. Marie asked if the contact tracing requirements are likely to change in the fall. Dr. Willett said that it sounds quite likely that they will be lifted for grades 6-12 but may remain in place for the younger students. Ms. Griffin felt that if the requirements remained in place the Board should consider hiring permanent remote teachers. Dr. Willett also mentioned that the state may provide a remote option for students and parents who wish to remain remote.

3. Future:

a. Pathways:

- i. Review the new engineering pathway when ready: Mr. Marie mentioned that this is something he would like the committee to do.
- ii. Accreditation for Pathways: Dr. Willett mentioned that community colleges seem to be doing away with dual credit for high school courses. This would be a good topic to cover in conjunction with accreditation. Mr. Renduchintala asked about what sort of investment would be needed to make the Pathways programs effective. Dr. Willett felt that the investment needed would not be large, but highlighted that there might be some expenses related to stipends and field trips.

- b. Discussion on basic trades courses: Mr. Renduchintala felt that it would be beneficial for Tolland Schools to offer some basic trades courses, such as in automotive maintenance. He doesn't mean to have TPS compete with technical high schools, but still believes that offering a few trade courses would improve student education. Dr. Willett said that the current education model is more geared toward STEM/STEAM, and that there are more grants available for High Schools that pursue this model rather than the traditional comprehensive high school. Mr. Marie felt that even if Tolland does not offer trades courses, it is still important that career paths in the trades are properly advertised to interested students. Dr. Willett also mentioned that the state has set it up so that high schools are not supposed to compete with technical high schools, but the Board of Education could always advocate to change this if it felt that this approach was wrong.

Mr. Renduchintala moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:23pm. Ms. Griffin seconded the motion. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 5:23pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jacob Marie