

**TOWN OF SIMSBURY
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Record of Proceedings

Regular Meeting

January 11, 2022

Ms. Susan Salina called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. in the Board of Education conference room.

Roll Call:

Members present: Mmes. Susan Salina, Tara Willerup, Lydia Tedone, Jen Batchelar and Sharon Thomas. Messrs. Todd Burrick, Jeff Tindall and Brian Watson.

Also present: Assistant Superintendent Sue Homrok-Lemke, Assistant Superintendent Neil Sullivan, Director of Finance Amy Meriwether, BOE Student Representative Alex Picoult and Recording Secretary Katie Wilde.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Elizabeth Peterson, 32 Fox Den Road, thanked the administration for engaging in conversation relative to discipline actions with students at SHS. She stated her son took a video of a violent attack at SHS. In speaking with the assistant to one of the Assistant Principals she was asked which attack. Ms. Peterson requested statistics on disciplinary actions at SHS and expressed concern that victims are being overlooked.

Public Audience

COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOE COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Picoult reported that second semester at SHS ends on Friday and midterms will be held next week. He noted that the SHS musical production of Pippin will begin on January 28 and the HJ performance of Frozen Junior this spring. Mr. Picoult reported on the 8th grade girls in the Girls in Engineering program at SHS. He noted activities occurring at the elementary schools.

Communications

Ms. Willerup stated that MLK events are being postponed to March due to COVID. Ms. Tedone reported that the Equity Symposium and Advocacy Institute are being held next week in Washington D.C. both in-person and virtually. There will also be a meeting with policy makers and Commissioner Cardona. Ms. Tedone noted that the CT legislative session will run February 9 through May 4.

Ms. Lemke reported that Friday is an early release day for professional development. At the secondary level departments will meet to discuss their goal work. K-6 will have SEL (social/emotional learning) training.

Mr. Sullivan reported that there have been significant changes to COVID contact tracing and quarantines in the schools. He stated that the district now has self-test kits and masks available at the schools. Mr. Sullivan addressed attendance, stating that during the 6 days since our return from the holiday recess, the absence rate for staff has ranged between 9% and 13%. The district can weather absences at this rate. Mr. Sullivan stated that the Latimer Lane School renovation initial design plans were shared with the Latimer Lane community with a good number of parents in attendance. In response to Ms. Thomas, Mr. Sullivan stated that the student absentee rate has been around 15% since the holidays.

Ms. Salina thanked Tariffville School for the holiday cards provided to board members. She thanked the administration for their work during this peak in COVID.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

A. Approval of Minutes of December 14, 2021 Meeting

Mr. Burrick: MOVED to approve the minutes of the December 14, 2021 meeting.

Ms. Willerup: Seconded. So moved. Ms. Thomas abstained.

B. Personnel

Ms. Tedone: MOVE that the Board of Education accept the resignations of Nicole Decker effective January 14, 2022 and Elizabeth Wojewoda effective January 28, 2022.

Mr. Tindall: Seconded. So moved.

C. Approval of Karen McHose Memorial Scholarship

Ms. Thomas: MOVE that the Board of Education approve the Karen McHose Memorial Scholarship, to be disbursed in 2022.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS

A. Special Education Program Review

Katie Krasula, Director of Pupil Services, reviewed the mission statement for the department and noted that this year's department theme is Row the Boat. She stated that Simsbury has met the state requirements around the 16 indicators that create the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). Ms. Krasula addressed reading/dyslexia stating that strategies and structures have been developed and are understood across the district.

Ms. Krasula discussed the district mental health data. 44% (312 out of 175) IEPs include social/emotional/behavioral goals and direct services. These students are seen regularly by a school psychologist or social worker. 70% (224 out of 318) 504 Plans are for students with a mental health/behavioral diagnosis. These include diagnosis such as anxiety, depression, ADHA and OCD. This has increased by more than 50% since the pandemic began. Ms. Krasula noted that there has also been an increase in reports of self-harm and suicidal ideation. When this occurs a clinical assessment is done for the student. Ms. Krasula addressed chronic absenteeism, noting that this usually connected to mental health needs. Ms. Krasula reviewed the referral to special education over the past 6 years. She reviewed the mental health support staffing districtwide.

Mr. Burrick asked what progress we have made on the achievement gap. Ms. Krasula responded that our special ed scores are close to the regular ed scores for the state. Progress has been made with our ELA scores. Mr. Burrick asked what the

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Minutes of
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Personnel

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Karen McHose
Scholarship

Special
Education
Program Review

goal is relative to the data. Ms. Lemke responded that the goal is to work out of a gap in special ed. Ms. Krasula stated that individually we work to return students to regular ed. In response to Mr. Tindall, Ms. Lemke stated that the math gap in special ed is similar to the math gap in regular ed.

Ms. Krasula described the Pathways program at SHS. The program is designed to meet student needs, provide academic support and clinical support for mental health. She stated the Pathways team is comprised of a special ed teacher, regular ed content teachers and a social worker. There are currently 14 students in the program. Ms. Krasula introduced special ed teacher Will Wesley, social worker Jovin Girard, and regular ed content teacher Shira Flowers.

Mr. Wesley stated that the Pathways program is a team effort. It is not the standard approach to students and includes vocational training. He emphasized that relationships come first in the program. The program prepares students for what comes after high school. The program provides real life skills, training in areas such as how to write a resume, get an apartment, and financial readiness. Mr. Wesley stated that they are currently looking to provide more internship opportunities for Pathways' students. Ms. Krasula noted that the Pathways program is for regular ed students who need an alternate education.

Shira Flowers, SHS English teacher, spoke about the academic model and the three principals of the program: support, excellence and access. She stated that there are 5 subject teachers involved in the Pathways program. Ms. Flowers noted the types of courses that are given and stated that there is much project based learning. She stated the goal of the program is to give students an interest in further pursuing learning.

Jovin Girard, SHS Social Worker, stated that human beings thrive with relationships. He described how Pathways students are involved in individual, group and family relationships through the program. This includes quarterly meetings with families. Mr. Wesley noted the strong family engagement that takes place through the program. He stated that the program is planning to start providing a monthly newsletter, parent seminars, training and a support group for parents. Mr. Wesley introduced Jack who has been part of the Pathways program for a few years.

Jack stated that he had a very difficult freshman year. Once he entered the Pathways program he was able to work on assignments at his own pace, meet goals, get things accomplished and obtain good grades without struggling. Jack said he has friends in and outside the program to talk to, as well as teachers. Jack discussed his goals for the future. Mr. Wesley pointed out that Jack designed the logo for the Pathways program.

Ms. Krasula addressed the staffing and support needs for 2022-23. The Special Education Department is requesting an additional 2 social workers so that there is an elementary social worker in each building. A restructure of elementary special education leadership such that there is a special education department supervisor in each of the elementary schools that would result in the addition of 2 special education department supervisors. The addition of 1 special education teacher to be split evenly between Latimer Lane School and Squadron Line School to accommodate the increase in caseloads. Ms. Krasula also noted the need for increased school psychologist and speech and language contracted services to

provide additional support to the special ed department. She reviewed the special education program costs for 2021-22.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Lori Boyko, 15 Oak Hurst Road, discussed her personal observations as a SHS parent and pointed out the disproportionate response to varying discretions.

Liz Peterson, 32 Fox Den Road, expressed concern that there is a discrepancy between teacher detentions and administrator detentions. She suggested that teachers may be going rogue when it comes to issuing detentions. Ms. Peterson stated that in speaking with Chief Boulter he said that mask wearing in Simsbury is about educating individuals on the reason for mask wearing. She suggested that the discipline at SHS seem contradictory to that premise.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Thomas: MOVE to adjourn the meeting at 8:18 p.m.

Mr. Burrick: Seconded. So moved.

Jennifer Batchelar
Secretary

Katie Wilde
Recording Secretary

Public Audience

Adjournment