

**TOWN OF SIMSBURY
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Record of Proceedings

Regular Meeting

June 23, 2020

Ms. Susan Salina called the virtual meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

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: Superintendent Matt Curtis, Assistant Superintendent Erin Murray, Assistant Superintendent Sue Homrok-Lemke, Director of Personnel Neil Sullivan, Director of Finance Amy Meriwether, and Recording Secretary Katie Wilde.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None

Public Audience

BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Tedone reported that she recently finished up board meetings with CREC and CABA and both organizations have initiatives to address equity. NSBA is also involved in the discussion on dismantling racism at the national level.

Communications

Ms. Willerup reported that graduation was amazing and expressed her appreciation for the efforts made by the administration to go the extra mile.

Ms. Murray reported on this year's Kathleen Magowan scholarship recipients. In Kathleen Magowan's honor, five SHS scholarships were awarded to students who completed 6th grade at each of our 5 elementary schools, and who will be pursuing a career in education. The recipients were Talia Alibrio, Marissa Cestone, Abigail Fabian, Kylie Doran, and Phillip Shenkman.

Ms. Murray reported on the Reopen SPS Teaching & Learning Team. Last week a secondary Tier 2 meeting was held, tomorrow elementary and secondary Tier 2 and Tier 3 meetings will be held. Additional meetings are scheduled the first two weeks of July. Ms. Murray stated that next week she, Matt and Neil will hold a virtual meeting with PTO leaders to update them on the district's work preparing for the fall.

Ms. Meriwether reported that to date the district has spent \$210,000 on COVID related expenditures. These expenses include signage, laptops, PPE and desks. There is a \$55,000 deficit in nutrition services and a \$110,000 deficit in the Pay for Play account. With savings due to the school closure, net savings to date are \$180,000 without use of the non-lapsing account.

Ms. Lemke reported that 75 students will participate with in-person learning for their Extended School Year (ESY) program. These students are unable to access the distance learning format. The remaining students in the program will receive distance learning. Ms. Lemke thanked Kristina Nordell for her work as ESY Coordinator, and the families for their patience as the program gets up and running.

Mr. Sullivan reported on the work of the RSS Task Force, noting that on Thursday it is expected that the Governor will release guidance for K-12 public school reopening. He stated that a lot of work has been done at the elementary level to provide a

capacity analyses and how we would fit all K-6 students into their schools. The middle school and high school are looking at schedules, such that students move between classrooms less frequently. An update will be provided to parents at the end of the week, after guidelines are released by the state, and a full communication will be sent on July 1.

Ms. Salina asked if we have confidence that the guidelines won't change after they are released. Mr. Curtis responded that indications are that all K-12 students will return to school. He stated that we expect guidance on things such as cohort size, social distancing and transportation. He expressed a level of confidence that the plan will go forward.

Mr. Curtis stated that there was a lot of positive energy at graduation and all of the logistics worked out

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

A. Approval of Minutes of June 9, 2020 Meeting

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2020 meeting.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

B. Approval of Minutes of June 16, 2020 Special Meeting

Mr. Tindall: MOVE to approve the minutes of the June 16, 2020 special meeting.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

C. Personnel

Mr. Watson: MOVE that the Board of Education accept the resignations of Nicole Levesque and Allison Woodruff effective June 30, 2020.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS

A. Equity Council Update

Mr. Curtis noted the importance of creating a common language and understanding, in order to link the work of the Equity Council and their recommendations with our strategic planning. The first step is an agreed upon definition, a set of core beliefs and a stance. One of the main goals of the Equity Council this year was to get these produced and provide a recommendation to the board.

Ms. Lemke related the district's equity work to the strategic plan, BOE Goal 2 – Compassionate and Connected School Culture. She stated that the purpose of the Equity Council has been to assess the Simsbury Public Schools' organization issues that impact equitable access, experiences, and outcomes for SPS students, in order to make recommendations to the BOE that will guide the strategic planning efforts of the district.

Ms. Lemke reviewed the process for development of the district equity statement.

Approval of
Minutes of June
9, 2020 Meeting

Approval of
Minutes of June
16, 2020
Meeting

Personnel

Equity Council
Update

The Equity Council began meeting last September and discussed having a foundational document in October. During monthly meetings members would break into small groups to discuss a component of the statement and then share with the full group what the small group thought was a good draft of element of the statement. A subcommittee of the group would then identify common themes of reflection and feedback and draft a component of the statement that was representative of all voices. This would be brought back to the next meeting for large group review utilizing predetermined protocol.

Ms. Lemke stated that there are 3 components to the equity statement. (1) Definition: What do we mean by equity in the Simsbury Public Schools? (2) Core Beliefs: What are the important ideas/beliefs that we hold? (3) Stance: What specific actions are we committing, to based upon our beliefs, that will make our definition and core beliefs come alive in policy and practice.

Ms. Lemke shared each of the components in the draft statement. Definition: In the Simsbury Public Schools, an equitable system ensures that all members of our community can reach their full potential. Ms. Lemke stated that for us, equity is the dismantling of racism and all forms of marginalization that impede growth and harm our community. Core Beliefs: Growth toward the achievement of equity. Expectations matter because we can rise to our own beliefs and the beliefs of others around us; Stories matter because they provide insight and understanding into who we are; Healthy connections matter because they promote safety, support and positive relationships; silence supports the oppressors and prevents positive change; and Accountability matters. While growth is a journey, all adults have the responsibility to actively implement and maintain equitable practices to ensure students' and adults' positive experience.

Ms. Lemke stated that when shared with Administrative Council they were excited by how this has transformed through the process. They commented on the core beliefs and what matters to the Simsbury Public Schools. Ms. Lemke stated that we wanted to elaborate on the importance of growth, both personal and collective. When we know better, we do better. She noted the need for high expectations, the importance of having healthy relationships with students and each other, and accountability to each other, as equity matters. When we see inequity, we stop and we speak up. We need to listen to the many voices that should be heard around equity

Ms. Salina noted the importance of addressing silence. Ms. Lemke stated that some of the administrators thought that bullet should be moved to number two in the list because silence supports oppression and we have to speak up. Mr. Curtis stated that during the public hearing, after last year's incident, this was an area where we received a lot of feedback particularly from students. Ms. Salina noted that accountability applies to adults, not just students. Ms. Willerup stated that included in the action items is supporting people having a voice, and knowing that your voice will be heard, so that you are afraid to have a voice. She agreed that the silence bullet move up. Ms. Thomas concurred, and noted that accountability is also important. She stated that students should feel comfortable speaking to an adult, and the adult must be accountable for listening and doing something about it.

Mr. Burrick asked where equity in the curriculum is addressed in the core beliefs. Ms. Lemke responded that equity in the curriculum is included in stories matter and also the accountability piece. Ms. Murray stated that this falls into all 4 categories of

our strategic plan. In the academic plan we have a statement that we ensure the K-12 curriculum and courses are diverse and culturally responsive. We keep equity and rigorous content at the forefront of all decisions on how and what we teach all students. Mr. Burrick stated that because we do this, it would be nice to affirm that in one of these statements. Ms. Thomas stated that if everything we do is done through an equity lens, then we're covered.

Ms. Lemke stated that the stance is around actions and what we are committing to around our core beliefs. Stance - In our relentless pursuit of equity: (1) We will recognize and address the biases and inequities that exist within our school system. (2) We will hold ourselves accountable to examine data, create policies, and provide frequent training to adults and students. (3) We will provide opportunities that guarantee access for all students to meet and exceed academic, social and civic expectations.

Ms. Lemke stated that these actions are not mutually exclusive. She noted that bias and inequities will be measured through accountability. Accountability measures will be looked at though data specific to Simsbury and this will be ongoing work. When we address policy this must be looked at through an equity lens. A big piece of this is what kind of professional development we are offering to address these issues in Simsbury as educators. Another factor is how we guarantee access to opportunities for all of our students. Mr. Curtis stated that the three points in the stance are interwoven. The data analysis is crucial to determining access opportunities for kids and where kids sit relative to course opportunities for example. That data point will talk to us about bias.

Ms. Lemke stated that the purpose of the Equity Council is to make a recommendation to the board which is the Statement of Equity, inclusive of core beliefs and stance. Mr. Curtis stated that if there are any tweaks or changes, please communicate them to the administration so that the document can be brought before the board for approval this summer.

Ms. Lemke addressed next steps for the Equity Council. The council will continue to meet over the summer to look at data. An equity section will be added to the district website. Further discussion will take place on how to disseminate the statement and process. Planning additional professional development and community opportunities. The Equity Council has been working in conjunction with the town's Spirit Council.

Ms. Salina asked who is responsible for these actionable items. How will we handle accountability and making this a workable stance? Mr. Curtis stated that the first piece is creating a common language; the second piece is tying it to our continuous improvement plans which are a format with specific goals and action items. That is where we can come back to demonstrate these actionable links. This is the structure we use to measure against our goals. Ms. Lemke noted that equity is woven through all of the board goals. Ms. Salina thanked everyone on the Equity Council for their hard work.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None

ADJOURNMENT

Public Audience

Adjournment

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to adjourn the meeting at 7:28 p.m.

Ms. Tedone: Seconded. So moved.

Jen Batchelar
Secretary

Katie Wilde
Recording Secretary