

BOE Social Emotional Health & Wellness Committee Minutes

Friday, May 27, 2022, 9:30am

BOE Conference Room

3 Primrose St., Newtown, CT 06470

Present: Janet Kuzma (chair), Jennifer Larkin (member), Deborra Zukowski (member), Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue (superintendent), and Anne Dalton (Health and Wellness Coordinator).

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 9:32 by Ms. Kuzma.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

GUEST: Presentation of Bounce Back Program by Hope Bray, LCSW at Reed

Ms. Bray, a social worker at Reed, introduced the Bounce Back Program as an effective intervention designed for K-5 students who experience childhood trauma. It is a specialized version of the CBITS (Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools) program that the district currently has available for middle and school students. Ms. Bray partners with the Connecticut Child Health and Development Institute for materials, training, and funding. [More information about the institute and program is available at: <https://www.chdi.org/our-work/mental-health/evidence-based-practices/c-bits/>.] She is also trainer for the institute.

Students who are identified as potentially suffering from traumatic experiences – by their teachers, parents, or others – are referred to Reed counselors and then screened by a clinician. Students who are considered candidates for the program meet once a week, in groups of 4-6, for ten weeks. During that time they learn techniques that help them gain better control over their thoughts and actions. Depending on the student, more individual attention may be provided.

The committee hopes to include presentations of both Bounce Back and CBITS to the full Board in the fall.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Update from Anne Dalton on Community Initiatives

The Health Fair was tentatively postponed to June 8. A vaping education game is planned to be added to the other activities.

Tricia Dahl, the senior Research Assistant at Yale School of Medicine and expert on adolescent vaping, presented information about vaping to NHS students. Ms. Dalton recommends that Ms. Dahl visit again in the fall in concert with a vaping cessation challenge for students.

Ms. Dalton mentioned the death of former Newtown student due to unsuspected fentanyl poisoning. She added that the speaker at the Dare to Discuss Drugs event was exceptional, though the turnout was low. She hopes to work with the Newtown Prevention Council to offer the program again, perhaps virtually, to ensure that the message reaches more Newtown families.

Matt Austin, the Education & Outreach Coordinator for the Center for Empowerment and Education (formerly the Women's Center of Greater Danbury) provides engaging programs for youths, including tech safety.

There has been interest from other communities in PEAC's Kid's Corps program. An discussion about the program program will be included in a future committee meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Discussion over Anonymous Alert App & data management

Ms. Zukowski commented that the information provided via the anonymous alert app seemed pertinent to the social emotional well being of students and asked if Ms Dalton should be a part of the effort to improve the interface and overall data collection and analysis. Ms Zukowski also expressed concerns about how one might possibly misconstrue overall results, as presented in a recent Board meeting. Dr. Rodrigue said that the PEAC DEI Committee had initiated the effort as a way to encourage students to report incidents that they might otherwise not be comfortable reporting; the app is an alternate means to notify district administrators of incidents related to bullying and harassment. Any such notifications follow the same investigation and resolution processes that prior existing methods, e.g., reports to a trusted adult, follow. The results presented to the Board were solely about the relative proportion of overall types of bullying/harassment that were reported via the app.

Ms. Larkin asked if the incidents would be included in the EduClimber system. Dr. Rodrigue answered all incidents, regardless of how they were initiated, that are deemed valid must be logged into PowerSchool. PowerSchool is capable of providing such information to EduClimber. Also, an annual report of all behavior-related incidents are sent to the State. There was also some discussion about whether such information should be reported to the Board, and if so in what manner. Ms. Zukowski added that she, as a Board member, found the information provided from the Anonymous App extremely informative from a qualitative perspective.

2. Approve minutes April 22, 2022

Ms. Zukowski moved to approve the minutes of April 22, 2022. Ms. Kuzma seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

SUPERINTENDENT UPDATE

Dr. Rodrigue said that the Connecticut State Department of Education has updated the Healthy and Balanced Living curriculum. This curriculum mirrors the CASEL core competencies used in our SEL programs including:

Self-awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

Self-management: The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations, effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

Social awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behaviors and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

Dr. Rodrigue also commented that SEL should be a part of all classes. Students interact in groups while learning, and such interaction (and hence learning) would be much more effective.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Zukowski moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:02 am, seconded by Ms. Kuzma. Motion passed unanimously.