

**TOWN OF SIMSBURY
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Record of Proceedings

Regular Meeting

October 22, 2024

Mr. Jeff Tindall called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Henry James Memorial School Library Media Center.

Roll Call:

Members present: Mmes. Jen Batchelar, Lydia Tedone, Tara Willerup, Sharon Thomas and Jessica Parise. Messrs. Jeff Tindall, Brian Watson and Josh Falco.

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

RECOGNITIONS

Mr. Curtis introduced Bryan Forman, Tech Ed teacher at HJMS and SeaPerch advisor. Mr. Forman stated the SeaPerch team has been competing for the past 10 years at the state level, national level and international level. He described the SeaPerch underwater robot and the types of obstacle courses used in competition. He noted that these types of robots are used by NOAA to replant coral in the ocean.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Patti Gonzalez, advocated for security cameras in every classroom. She urged board members to watch The Social Dilemma that addresses the impact of social media.

Lori Boyko, 15 Oakhurst Road, read excerpts from The Kite Runner, an assigned reading in English class at SHS. She expressed concern that the novel is dark and demoralizing and has no place in the classroom with minors. Ms. Boyko questioned why parents weren't notified or sent a permission slip giving their consent for their child to read the book. She stated that if a student opts out of reading a book they are given another assignment which excludes them from the rest of the class. Ms. Boyko noted that freshman read Speak which also has concerning themes. She questioned how the Encouraging Words campaign will help students when they are reading these books.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOE COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Rosadio reported on community events at the elementary schools. She stated that at SHS the Social Studies Honor Society students are hosting haunted tours at the Historical Society, the Earth's Advocates Club cleaned school grounds, auditions for the musical begin next week and the fall athletic season is coming to a close.

Ms. Thomas stated that the Policy Committee is scheduled to meet next week. Ms. Tedone reported on CREC's presentation about resource groups, the teacher residency program, and their focus on legislation concerning funding magnets. She noted that the CABE/CAPS convention is November 15-16 with 80 workshops being presented.

Ms. Willerup reported that the Equity Council met last week and introduced some

Public Audience

Communications

new members. The council planned what topics they will cover this year.

Mr. Sullivan noted that election polling will take place at 4 of our schools. Ms. Lemke stated that November 5 we hold a full day of professional development. She noted that a capstone student will be providing breakfast and the key note speaker is Deacon Art Miller. Teachers will be given time to work on their evaluation action plans and those with a common interest will meet together.

Mr. Tindall stated that the board appreciates and welcomes public audience, but the public must be respectful and adhere to the rules.

Mr. Curtis spoke about the passing of a middle school student and thanked Mr. Baker and Ms. Petrella for their leadership during a difficult time. He stated that the celebration of life was inspirational which is how she lived her life.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

A. Approval of Minutes of October 1, 2024 Workshop

Ms. Parise: MOVE to approve the minutes of the October 1,2024 workshop.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved. Ms. Tedone abstained.

B. Approval of Minutes of October 8, 2024 Meeting

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to approve the minutes of the October 8, 2024 meeting.

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

C. Personnel

Mr. Sullivan stated that no action is needed. He reviewed the hiring of three new educators.

D. Acceptance of Gift to Cultural Enrichment Committee

Ms. Batchelar: MOVE that that the proposed gift of funds from all the elementary school parent-teacher organizations to provide cultural programming to elementary school students be accepted.

Ms. Willerup: Seconded. So moved.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS

A. HJMS Academic Report

Scott Baker, HJMS Principal, provided highlights of the 2023-24 school year. These include the work of the SEL Committee, extracurricular activities, parent workshops, SpongeBob The Musical, festivals, awards and the One School One Book program.

Mr. Baker addressed the SBA ELA scores for grades 7 and 8. In 7th grade 73% of students met or exceeded goal on the SBA. This is a 1% decline from the previous

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Minutes of
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Personnel

Gift to Cultural
Enrichment
Committee

HJMS Academic
Report

year's grade 7 scores. There was no decline from 6th to 7th grade for this cohort. In 8th grade 72% of students met or exceeded goal on the SBA which was a 3% decline for this cohort from 7th grade. Mr. Baker pointed out that the scores are still within 5% of the top in DRG B. He stated that teachers are looking at the ELA data and which areas students are having trouble. There will be a focus on specific standards and collaboration with the World Language department on literacy skills.

Mr. Baker addressed the SBA Science scores in grade 8 where 75% of students met or exceeded goal. This is a 1% decrease from last year, but still in the top of DRG B. There will be a focus on the NGSS standards in the curriculum and preparing students to think critically and respond to phenomena. Mr. Baker noted that the school is giving a grade 7 in-house practice test to prepare those students for the assessment in grade 8.

Mr. Baker addressed SBA Math scores for grades 7 and 8. He noted that in the previous year there was an increase in scores, but last year we seem to have regressed. In 7th grade 59% of students met or exceeded goal on the SBA. This was an 8% cohort decline and a 4% grade level decline. In 8th grade 60% of students met or exceeded goal. This was a 6% cohort decline and a 5% grade level decline. Many students who demonstrated growth the previous year and regressed to just below goal.

Mr. Baker reflected on the math data stating that the strong gains the previous year did not translate into growth last year. He noted that there were staffing challenges that disrupted classroom instruction and PLCs. Mr. Baker stated that mid-year STAR data indicated that students were making adequate progress. He noted that the focus on students setting goals for their STAR results may have unintentionally placed a stronger emphasis on STAR than SBA. He pointed out that math is the last assessment given and students are in a rush to get out of school early.

Mr. Baker discussed the new intervention platform, IXL, which gives fine grain information on student skills to determine what skills a student needs. This year student goal setting will be done with SBA and IXL scores. The order of test taking will be revised so math is not the last assessment. Data focused PLCs and a math curriculum review will occur, as well as using data to inform teacher goals in the new evaluation plan.

In response to Ms. Thomas, Mr. Baker stated that the math interventionist is back in place and the substitute is a certified math teacher. In response to Mr. Watson, Mr. Baker stated that the assessment is taken on Chromebooks. Ms. Petrella pointed out that the wording on this assessment is different than the wording on our internal tests so they are working on incorporating the SBA wording into our testing. Mr. Tindall asked if we have a fundamental teacher issue. Mr. Baker responded that there was an issue in one of the classrooms last year, but that is no longer the case.

Ms. Parise noted that tests aren't as important to students in middle school. Ms. Lemke stated that the CSDE is allowing us to talk with students, based on their SBA performance, prior to the end of the school year before scores are sent out. She noted that data focused PLCs will look at the assessments and how to address through the teach. Ms. Lemke stated that the use of IXL will allow us to group students by skill who need further instruction.

Ms. Parise asked if IXL is only being used in grades 7 and 8. Ms. Lemke stated that it is being used for some English classes at SHS and for all students with IEPs, grades 2-12. She stated that if we find IXL to be beneficial the district will expand its use. Mr. Falco asked for a data breakdown of grade 7 versus pre-algebra for those students in the accelerated program who then drop down a level. He questioned when we know that those students who took a step back are on the correct trajectory. Mr. Baker stated that IXL give real time diagnostics and we know week to week and month to month how students are doing. He noted that a Math Homework Club was started this year. Ms. Batchelar suggested that a math lab, run by SHS students, may be beneficial as SHS students always need volunteer hours.

Jacqueline Petrella, HJMS Assistant Principal, addressed the climate survey results. Student survey trends demonstrate an increase in overall safety and culture/belonging which have been two focus areas for the administration. Staff survey trends demonstrate a considerable increase in a feeling of belonging, as well feeling that HJMS is a good fit, and they are pleased with more choice in professional development. Family survey results were similar to that of students with an increase in a feeling of overall safety and culture/belonging. Ms. Willerup asked how many students responded to the survey. Ms. Petrella responded that the survey was given during class so all students responded. She noted ongoing and new programs in place at HJMS relative to school culture.

Mr. Baker addressed areas of focus for the coming year. He noted the implementation of the Encouraging Words campaign, continuation of the PTC Family Learning Series and the addition of mid-year teacher conferences in January. The IXL program will be used to target skills and customize practices in math and ELA. Specific plans will be put in place related to math SBA improvement, as well as collaboration across departments on priority math and literacy skills. Students will have the opportunity to reflect on their SBA data.

Mr. Baker stated that a curriculum review of math, wellness and the library media center will be performed this year. There will be a continuation of study skills integration with the elementary schools. Mr. Baker noted that the new teacher evaluation and goal setting plan is more action oriented and focused on teachers doing their own learning.

Ms. Parise asked how study skills are being implemented. Ms. Petrella responded that these includes how to use PowerSchool wisely, how to use an agenda, study for tests, writing email with their new school based Gmail account, and how to use resources wisely. Mr. Falco asked if students are being taught how to write longer papers and how to use AI. Mr. Baker responded in 8th grade there are interdisciplinary assignments where students write longer form pieces and gain experience in how to research. He stated that as a district work is being done on AI policies and procedures

Mr. Baker addressed needed strategic investments noting that Title I staffing for study skills needs to be brought into the operating budget, increased support and professional development for new teachers would be beneficial, there may be an increase in expenses related to increased enrollment, and there will be turnover in the Tech Ed department at the end of the year.

Ms. Batchelar asked if 7th graders come to school before the start of the school year.

Ms. Petrella responded that 6th graders come in the spring for a tour of the school and the students spend the first day just in their Connections class.

B. Quarterly Budget Analysis

Ms. Meriwether reported that a decrease of \$116,001 in the Open Choice Attendance Grant is due to a decrease of 10 Open Choice students. She stated that we will have a better idea of our Excess Cost Grant reimbursement in December, noting that the district is talking with another vendor to provide special education transportation. Ms. Meriwether stated that there is an increase in the operation of plant line item due to increased electricity costs. She noted the shift in food services due to the shift of the Director's salary to the operating budget which she plans to offset with equivalent costs being paid out of the food services budget.

Ms. Thomas stated that the Open Choice numbers are down regionally. She asked if we have the ability to change electric vendors. Ms. Meriwether responded that an energy consultant is utilized each year to negotiate all of the town and Board of Education utility contracts

Mr. Tindall asked if we are concerned with out of district tuition costs. Ms. Meriwether stated that the account is in good shape so far, but we're keeping our eye on two students currently in state care.

C. Policy Second Reading

Mr. Sullivan stated this is the second step in the three step process. The policy changes are related to federal changes to Title IX and have been recommended by Shipman & Goodwin. The policies will be on the board's November 12 agenda for approval.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m.

Ms. Parise: Seconded. So moved.

Sharon Thomas
Secretary

Katie Wilde
Recording Secretary

Quarterly
Budget Analysis

Policy Second
Reading

Public Audience

Adjournment