

Minutes
Watertown Board of Education
Governance & Community Engagement Committee Meeting
Monday February 24, 2020 – 6:15 p.m.
Watertown High School
Lecture Hall

Members Present: Rob Makowski, Committee Chair
Cathie Rinaldi, Committee Member
Leslie Crotty, Committee Member

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Josephine Rosa, Board of Education
Diane Bristol, Board of Education
Tom Lambert, Board of Education
Jason Malagutti, Board of Education
Janelle Wilk, Board of Education
Dr. Rydell Harrison, Superintendent of Schools

1. Convene Meeting

Mr. Makowski convened the meeting at 6:15 p.m. and turned the meeting over to Dr. Harrison

2. Review of the State’s Family Engagement Definition and Framework

Dr. Harrison – Good evening everyone. I want to begin by taking a step back and talking about our families. As we were developing the framework for the strategic plan we looked in three different areas; #watertownlearns, #watertowncares, #watertownleads. And under #watertownleads, we broke that into community partnerships and families. We really wanted to talk about family engagement in a different way. Traditionally it may have been parents volunteering, running copies; but when we talk about authentic family engagement, it really is built on this idea of bringing families and school personnel together as equal partners in improving outcomes for their student and for all students. So as part of the district plan, I really wanted to define what family engagement was and unpack that for our district. I started some of the preliminary work with the Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Council and they helped define what our current project looks like and then the next steps with them was going to be the defining work around family engagement. I was then invited by CAPS to be on a focus group for family engagement. That was where I was introduced to this framework; where they really have done all of work for us. I don’t want to re-invent the wheel and it would be good to start with

this. I came back with this and we worked through it with our principals at our admin meetings and I want to walk you through the pieces we lifted out and how it relates to our survey data. This is not new to Connecticut; there is a lot of research in connecting family engagement to benefitting our students and then connecting that to federal and state guidelines. The piece that I thought was very powerful was the definition of clear consensus. There was a group brought together from all of the state to define family engagement. It is defined as a full, equal and equitable partnership among families, educators and community partners to promote children's learning and development from birth to college and career. Traditionally, we have parent volunteers, as mentioned, and also we bring parents in and tell them what they should be doing at home. It always is one way; and what I liked about this definition was that it leads to partnership. It is not just the district telling parents to do things, but us learning from parents to see what their needs are or the trends they see happening with their children. With the principals we unpacked the definition and discussed what it means when we have full, equal, equitable and partner. The principals also reviewed these guiding principles. There are seven guiding principles that I thought would be really impactful for guiding our work. They are; building collaborative relationships focused on learning, listening to what families say about their children's interest and challenges, modeling high quality learning practices, sharing information frequently with families about how their children are doing, talking with students about how they want teachers and families to support their learning, co-developing cultural competence among staff and families, and supporting parents to become effective leaders and advocates for their children. Those principals gave us the framework to look at the goals we already laid out in our success plans in relation to family engagement.

We now talk about moving from vision to practice. What does high impact family engagement look like in early childhood programs? We used these charts as rubrics to go back and refine their goals for the year to make sure the work we laid out related to family engagement and moving from lower impact to high impact strategies. One thing that ties these charts together is measuring the impact on student learning. To what extent are our initiatives and strategies impacting student learning by better engaging our families.

If you look back at the guiding principles and what we have been focusing on historically as a district, I would say we have been intentional in our effort to build collaborative, trusting relationships focused on learning, that we have put practices in place to model high quality learning practices, and we are sharing information frequently with families about how their children are doing. When I went back and looked at our data regarding these seven principles, those were the ones that most of our questions were geared to. Areas where we need to collect more information is listening to what families have to say about their children's interests and challenges. Sometimes we do a really great job of that and a good example is the vaping workshop that was done last year. We are working towards doing it in a more frequent and consistent way in gathering that input and I think the Y survey is a good example of that. We are also turning the corner on how we gather info from students and that is a big shift as a district, especially with the Student's Advisory Council; Swift also now has a council there; and just this past week, Dr. Parlato had students doing instructional rounds and giving feedback. All things that lay a foundation for getting information on how we can support kids in learning. Kids want

their learning connected to their interests, they want to see the relevance to what they are working on and then they want their feedback considered. Small, but powerful things. Themes around student input are what we are getting from students and they are articulating the need to be heard. Both 6 & 7 also reflect on what are the next steps for us. This is a great step for us to say this is where we are and how do we build these pieces into our ultimate goal of developing a family resource center. What tools do we want there? What can we have to help families advocate for their children? This will guide our thinking moving forward. I think some big steps related to this is to have our social workers help build these resources and continue to build our application of this definition to the district. We are at the early stages of that. And then we need to connect this piece to the family data.

3. Review of the District's Family Survey Data

Dr. Harrison – I took our family survey results from the 2019/2020 and compiled some of the results. Each school does its own survey for students, staff and families. And these results are aggregate for us as a district. I pulled out the questions that were mostly closely related to those three guiding principals. The first one is building collaborative/trusting relationships focused on learning and the key word for me here are collaborative/trusting and safety is about trust which is why these questions are about being safe at school and also collaborate relationships, how are our parent volunteers feeling in relationship to appreciation. If we look at “my child feels safe at school” we have 85% that agree or strongly agree and 4% that disagree or strongly disagree. For the purposes of comparison, I pulled out the strongly agree and agree and strongly disagree and disagree. As a note, these represent 532 responses. Next we have adequate supervision at 79% agree and 7.5% disagree. Parent volunteers are made to feel appreciated is 57% agree with the rest neutral or not knowing. These results will help principals dig deeper and put strategies in where they will take these and dig deeper to get more information. As a district for me, I can look for opportunities to get more strategies and thoughts in place.

Looking at the second page and modeling high quality learning practices; our three prompts related to this are the school meets the academic needs of the students; the school meets the social needs of the students and the school has an excellent learning environment. I feel these three will help if we are going to successfully model practices we want parents to use at home, we would want to know do they think that we are doing a good job academically, socially, or overall with the learning environment. With the schools meeting the academic needs of the students, we have 74% agreed or strongly agreed and 13% disagree or strongly disagree; the school meets the social needs of students is 73% agreed or strongly agreed and 10% and the last is the school has an excellent learning environment 72% and 11%. One slice of the pie that I want to address in all three of these is that 12/14/15% is neutral. If I am answering neutrally, would I be because I don't have enough information to either agree or disagree? I think for these there is another opportunity for us as a school...are we communicating effectively and tying it to how we are doing with these things?

The last round for the survey is the questions regarding sharing information frequently with families about how their children are doing. The first, I am informed about my child's progress;

81% agree or strongly agree and 10% that didn't. I know what my child's teacher expects, 79% and 9% and then I know how well my child is progressing in school and that is at 87% and 5%.

4. **Adjournment**

Mr. Makowski adjourned the meeting at 7:16 p.m.

He then called for a motion to adjourn.

Subject: Motion to Adjourn

Motion Presented by: Ms. Rinaldi

Motion Seconded by: Ms. Wilk

Motion Passed

Respectfully submitted by,

Mindi Davidson

Recording Secretary