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Seymour Board of Education Curriculum and Technology Committee Minutes

November 9, 2020

Zoom

6:00 PM

BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Kristen Harmeling
Jim Garofolo
Kristen Bruno

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Vonda Tencza, Associate Superintendent

Jim Freund, SHS Principal

Jodie Roden, SMS Principal

Mary Sue Feige, BES Principal

Dave Olechna, CLS Principal

Rob Dyer, Director of Technology

Paul Lucke, SHS Assistant Principal

Kathleen Freimuth, SMS Assistant Principal

Lauren Reid, BES Assistant Principal

Kris Boyle, Director of Student Services

Derrick Martin, Network Administrator

Pat Boyle, Board Clerk

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. The meeting was called to order at 6:02 PM with the Pledge of Allegiance

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mrs. Harmeling shared that while there were public comments that do not fall under the purview of the Curriculum and Technology Subcommittee, she was willing to read them.

Members of the Curriculum and Technology Committee:

We would like to begin by commending all of Seymour's teachers, on the excellent job they are doing at this time. Each of our son's teachers is doing an amazing job, during very challenging, ever-changing circumstances. We thank them for their efforts during this difficult time.

We are, however, very disappointed that school administrators have decided to suspend the honor roll for this semester. We find it particularly disappointing that the administration chose to announce this decision on the final day of the first marking period. This was especially deflating to our son, and many of his peers. They feel that they worked hard, and their principals took truly deserved recognition away from them. These students have worked hard to earn their grades, despite the many challenges that they are facing at this time. The prospect of being on the honor roll has motivated many of these students to do their best. We are concerned that suspending the honor roll will actually have an adverse effect on students' motivation.

As we have written in previous communications to the board, we are increasingly concerned by the growing disconnect between the school administrators and the community. We fear that this decision is yet another symptom of this problem.

Yours sincerely,

Jamie and Tara Burn, 11 Amber Drive

Donald and Maggie Eng, 50 Bellevue Terrace

Dear Board of Education members;

I read with profound disappointment your email dated Nov. 6 in which you informed parents that the students who had persevered and excelled through trying circumstances would not be honored for their work and achievements.

In an unprecedented school year these students excelled, and their school leaders have failed them by deciding arbitrarily that the customary honor of being named to a school honor roll would not be bestowed.

This decision is especially galling in light of the fact that the school board recently overruled its own administration, its own legal counsel, and every health expert in the state in deciding that students who desired to play football should not have their hopes quashed. But what of the academically minded students? Does their effort and achievement not matter just as much?

It was the Board of Education that devised the current hybrid model that students are following. If that is the system we are following, and the grades issued are an accurate reflection of a student's academic performance, then there is no reason not to recognize the students that managed to excel.

The students earned the grades they received. They earned an honor that the school administration has decided they will not receive. If anything they deserve more recognition for excelling in trying circumstances, not less.

John Zwolinski, 133 Great Hill Road.

Hello Kristen,

I hope all is well and I hope that you and your family remain healthy and safe. I have a concern that I'd like to address. We just heard that Seymour Schools will be doing away with honor roll this semester due to the covid situation. Although I do understand that the current model of learning is challenging and difficult to adapt for many, I believe that taking away honor roll punishes the children and their families who have worked extra hard to succeed in light of the challenging circumstances. For those who do not make honor roll, it is not saying that they are poor students, but it does reward those students who thrived and who should still be recognized for their efforts.

If there is an opportunity, can you please take this concern to your fellow board members?

Best, John Zwolinski

III. INFORMATION

A. Update on hybrid and full distance learning

Mrs. Tencza reported that we currently have 307 Temporary Full Distance Learners. At this time, we average 10-12 students going from hybrid to distance learning and 3 students going from distance learning to hybrid each week. Students in K-8 have separate distance learning teachers. This is problematic for students that switch back and forth from hybrid to distance learning back to hybrid as there is a switch in the teacher. It is our primary responsibility to make the children feel safe but most districts have points for when students can reenter the hybrid model, i.e. the middle of the quarter, end of the quarter. Mr. Garofolo wanted to know if we had an informational letter that was sent to parents to find out why they switched from to the other. The administrators across district stated that they utilize the informative full distance learning packet that is provided to all and they personally reach out to the parents making the choices via phone and have a conversation with them. The overwhelming response for going to DL was health related or at the elementary daycare issues. If the middle school numbers continue to trend in this direction, we may have to explore the model that the high school uses for the middle school.

B. Capstone Update

Mr. Freund reports that the current junior class, class of 2022, is the first class to have the Capstone project as a required class. Due to the inability of the students to go out into the community for projects, he seeks committee approval to make the project optional for this class.

No committee member had any objection to making this project optional at this time.

MOTION:(Mr. Garofolo/sec., Ms. Bruno) to bring to the full board that the Capstone Class be optional for the class of 2022.

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Garofolo, Ms. Harmeling

C. Chromebook 1:1 Update

Mr. Dyer says that since September 1 his department has handled 630 regular work orders and 300 work orders for remote learners. There is currently a 10% breakage with the Chromebooks. He noted that this percentage may not be accurate for predicting future rates as students are not fully in school each day and therefore not transporting the devices as frequently. The cost for replacement parts this year has been \$5500.00. He would like to implement a "Technology Fee" as previously discussed at a prior Curriculum and Technology meeting for parents to help offset the cost of the repairs. Our current Titan program which is the point of service program for the cafeteria can integrate this fee into their program. Mr. Dyer said he felt \$30.00 per family would be reasonable and it would cover two incidents per year. The committee felt that with the current situation this was not the time to implement this plan and that the board should absorb the cost this year with the possibility of implementing it next year.

D. SEL Pilot Update

Dr. Boyle said the piloting committee was very excited about the two programs they are offering. The committee put in a lot of work last fall and resumed this year. The elementary schools are piloting "Caring Schools Community Program" which is easily integrated into the current Responsive Classroom. The lessons are 30 minutes a day on such subjects as Kindness, Social Skills and Behavior Choices. The secondary schools are piloting Suite 360. The lessons are 15 minutes long and cover Character Development, Self-awareness, Decision Making. The committee

would like more information on exactly when these lessons are conducted and by whom. It should not feel like another subject to cover. The reviews of both programs have been positive. Ms. Bruno asked what training had been offered and what activities, training, and coaching supports are offered for parents to access both during the pilot and long term. Dr. Boyle said that professional development was offered in August as well as at faculty meetings, and the School Counselors, School Psychologists and Social Workers are providing additional support. Ms. Harmeling wanted to make sure it was not just another class for students to take. The committee would like to see student and parent feedback on the program pilots as well as teacher input on how it is going and how it is used, so it is not just something that is checked off or done electronically and not a genuine connection with the teacher. Committee would like to see actual examples at the board meeting and a possible parent presentation.

E. Middle School Schedule Committee Update

The middle school has formed a scheduling review committee made up of Mrs. Roden, Mrs. Freimuth and 5 teachers. The committee would like to see the students meeting with teachers everyday with no dropped classes. This year they also have a Response Class where each student's MAP scores are analyzed and the student works on the areas that they need the most help with. They would like to monitor the success of this and possibly continue it next year.

MOTION by Kristen Harmeling to adjust the order to go to the Chairman's report at this time as she has to exit the meeting. All were in favor.

V. REPORTS

A. Chairman's Report

Ms. Harmeling would like the Policy Committee to look at policy 6161- which deals with text book approval and reconsider the language as a lot of courses don't offer textbooks any longer. She would like to insure students are learning and are motivated to learn. We all know about the NWEA and Smarter Balance Assessment but this committee would like to see examples of assessments that teachers are giving at a future meeting. Ms. Harmeling left the meeting at 7:33 PM and turned the meeting over to Ms. Bruno.

IV. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

A. Discussion-Program of Studies 2021-2022 New Course Offerings

Mr. Lucke presented 2 new courses for a Medical Career Pathway that would be paid for pending the receipt of the Perkins Grant. These two classes are Introduction to Allied Health Professions and Human Physiology in Health and Disease. These classes would offer UCONN credit. The Allied Health class would be a semester course and there is no textbook but students would receive 3 UCONN credits. Human Physiology is a 1 credit class and a 3 Credit UCONN course. We would be the only high school offering this class. The textbook would be the same textbook used at UCONN. When paired with the current EMT class students would be able to receive 7 UCONN credits. The high school is very excited about these classes as they offer students a chance at a job with a high wage, high credentials and high employment rate. The other class that the high school would like added is Biochemistry, an advanced semester Chemistry class. This class would not be paid for with the Perkins Grant.

MOTION:(Mr. Garofolo/sec., Ms. Bruno) to recommend to the full board approval of Introduction to Allied Health Professions and Human Physiology in Health and Disease pending receipt of the Perkins Grant.

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Garofolo

MOTION:(Mr. Garofolo/sec., Ms. Bruno) to recommend to the full board for approval of Biochemistry not subject to the Perkins Grant.

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Garofolo

B. Discussion-Middle School Course offerings

Mrs. Freimuth stated that the middle school is investigating a different UA model where 6th Grade would take many UA Exploratory classes and then 7th and 8th Graders would choose their preference. The middle school would like to eliminate Journeys and Journalism. Also, the numbers of students interested in French may require its elimination as they have been averaging 9 students. This could possibly be replaced with a World Culture class.

Ms. Bruno asked how many students are taking French in the high school and what is the requirement for World Language. Mr. Freund said French I has 17 students which is very positive as none of these students took French at SMS. French II has 12 and French III has 12. One credit is required for World Language to graduate.

C. Course Revision-Foundations of Civilizations

The high school wanted the committee to be aware that this is an existing course and there will be revisions made to the curriculum. The administration at the high school will provide this committee with areas and standards needing revision at a future meeting.

V. REPORTS

B. Superintendent's Report

Mrs. Tencza wanted the committee to know that the administrative team and teachers appreciate the extra time the BoE allocated on Wednesdays. She said the administrative team cares very deeply about the students and are working nights and weekends to support their teachers. Mr. Wilson and she are popping into classrooms virtually and in person to see a lot of the wonderful things going on, and teachers are very appreciative as evidenced by thank you emails that they receive. Mrs. Tencza stated that based on Mr. Garofolo and Mrs. Harmeling's requests, she will coordinate and collect some current assessments that are being used for the next Curriculum and Technology meeting to review. The Math Pilot committee is back up assessing resources for next year. The Library Media Curriculum committee is meeting virtually with the expectation of recommending the addition to the 2021-2022 budget a full time Library Media Specialist for next year to be split with the high school and middle school. The state is still planning on doing SBAC, NGSS and PE assessments in the spring. Ms. Bruno wanted everyone to know that staff and building leadership is appreciated by the committee.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Good evening Board of Education Members.

My name is David Tomasheski, a parent of a seventh and tenth grade students. This letter is in response to the decision made to temporarily suspend the honor roll at the Seymour High School (SHS) and Seymour Middle School (SMS). This is a decision that deeply saddens and frustrates me. Both of my children are very good students and have worked very hard this semester. They have been utilizing the hybrid model of education. It is extremely unfair to remove the honor roll at this time in the semester. This decision was poorly thought out and will affect numerous students. My children use the honor roll as a motivating force to excel in school. Without a factor such as this, they may lose interest easier and not strive to do the best job possible. Parents and grandparents take pride in watching their children succeed, and the district should take the same pride as it is your educators that allow the students to succeed and make the honor roll. Without a means of acknowledgement, the district should just use a pass/fail system of grading.

These times have been difficult enough with what the students are facing, but the decision that they made as to which model of education that they have selected should have no bearing on whether or not an honor roll is in place. Students need something to strive for, and while this clearly does not affect all students, it should not be taken away from those who take great pride in their studies.

I would implore the Board to re-evaluate this decision and take into consideration the reinstatement of the honor roll system.

Thank you.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

David Tomasheski

VII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION:(Mr. Garofolo/sec.,Ms. Bruno) to adjourn meeting at 8:20 PM.

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Garofolo