

Tolland Board of Education

Curriculum Committee Minutes

December 2nd 2021

Members Present: Jacob Marie (Chair), Christina Plourd, Jayden Regisford

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Dr. Willett (Superintendent of Schools)

Meeting called to order at 3:35pm

1. **Monthly Report with Student Data:** Dr. Willett stated that he plans on providing quarterly reports to the Board and has begun compiling data on to a website for said reports. He noted that the data will always be available to view, even between his updates to the Board. Dr. Willett showed the committee the draft website and the Committee reviewed data for ELA, Math, and Science. He also noted that the data will be available for public viewing. Mr. Marie asked if there are other data sets for the subject areas that Dr. Willett showed the Board. Dr. Willett said that there are data sets yet to be added. Mr. Marie added that the math results are disappointing but understandable given the challenges posed by remote and hybrid learning. Ms. Plourd asked if the site was live – Dr. Willett said that it was live but is not complete. Ms. Plourd also asked if students who are unable to enroll in the Extended School Year program have other options available to them. Dr. Willett said that they do, including grant funded programs and an app (which is currently in exploratory development). Ms. Plourd asked if a parent would know if their child is in the “Red Zone”, i.e., is classified as having a very difficult time mastering a concept or class. Dr. Willett stated that parents would be made aware. Mr. Regisford asked Tolland compares to other towns with regards to academics since the beginning of the pandemic. Dr. Willett answered by saying that it is not entirely clear, but it is well established that given information shared by the state many students in Connecticut are struggling in math due to the pandemic. Mr. Regisford asked how teachers utilized the data. Dr. Willett stated that teachers use the data in a variety of ways, particularly with Progress Monitoring.
2. **Review of Political Cartoons in the Classroom:** Mr. Marie prefaced the discussion by stating that this agenda item’s purpose is to provide a general overview on why political cartoons are used and what, if any, applicable guidelines the district has regarding their use. Dr. Willett stated that political cartoons are common primary source material in history classes. They are sometimes included in pre-lesson activities to assess for comprehension so that are meant to help students build their skill set regarding determining the author’s intent. They are intended as one tool to help develop a student’s skill to critically analyze information, in other words, how to approach the material, not what to think about it. Dr. Willett added that he strongly believes that they are useful learning tools to be used in a balanced and thoughtful manner as developmentally appropriate. Mr. Marie stated that he agrees that they are useful learning tools and that he has no desire to eliminate them, nor does he believe the Board as a whole wishes to get rid of them. Mr. Marie added that he does understand concerns about political bias. He mentioned that even

if it is never stated that the cartoonist's opinion is correct, if students, particularly young students, are shown a series of cartoons all from the same political persuasion they are likely to get the impression that a certain political perspective is correct and others are wrong. Dr. Willett responded by stating he agrees, and that he does not believe teachers, are doing so, and that as part of the instructional process teachers may occasionally use an item from stock material or otherwise that upon reflection is determined to not be the optimal choice. It is part of the process of reviewing and improving instruction. Mr. Regisford asked if there is a clear difference between the intent of the cartoon and the actual objective of the lesson. Dr. Willett said that there is. Mr. Marie asked, with reference to his example about students being shown several cartoons of the same bias with no dissenting views, if that was something that teachers are advised against doing. Dr. Willett stated that presenting information in a balanced manner is part of the professional practice, helping students develop critical analysis skills and make their own determinations. Instructing or selecting materials from only one perspective is not seen as appropriate. Mr. Regisford asked how teachers are informed if a parent makes a complaint against something that they are teaching. Dr. Willett stated that teachers appreciate hearing from parents directly. After that, complaints are then heard by the principal and eventually the Superintendent.

3. Overview of Anticipated Changes to Curriculum for 2022: Dr. Willett noted a number of subject areas expected to see changes, including the continued rollout of the Bridges Math Program, Wit & Wisdom, an updating of the Social Studies curriculum to the Connecticut Frameworks (particularly in younger grades), Literacy How Successor Programs, Pathways, and the US Black/Latino History Class required by the State of Connecticut.
4. Adjournment: Mr. Regisford motioned to adjourn the meeting at 4:44pm. Mr. Marie seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 4:44pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jacob Marie