

Student Achievement Committee
November 17, 2020
Meeting Minutes

Laura Errington
John Kilcoyne
Colleen Duggan
Linda Dansa

Focus: Student Engagement / Participation in Instruction

Guests: Amy Brodfuehrer (FHS - SPED teacher and Standards Leader), Jackie Gow (Big Tree Reading Specialist and Standards Leader) , Danielle Kalinski (FMS Assistant Principal), Mary Frances Snyder (FHS SPED Teacher, Standards Leader)

Colleen opened the meeting by reinforcing the social-emotional health focus for our fall meetings. Today's meeting will specifically address student engagement. She noted the power of connections and relationships with students. Jackie Gow emphasized the relationship between social emotional health and academic success.

Colleen stated her concern with students who have become disconnected with the switch between hybrid and full remote instruction. She prompted the committee to share their thoughts with regard to how our district may support students and families who are not connecting. She added that stressors on families may include finances, health concerns, and isolation. She noted how school may not be the top priority for families in light of stressors they may be experiencing, but we must do our best as a district to support them.

Colleen and Laura shared the possibility of using National Honor Society (NHS) students to make connections with elementary students. Amy shared how Student Government students recently shared that they would like to work with other students who may benefit from connections. She also spoke of a recent home visit she conducted, and stated that grades cannot be our only concern. The student she visited stated that she is overwhelmed and cannot keep up and doesn't bother to log in anymore.

Mary Frances added her commitment to be a "distraction" to students in a positive sense. She added that our families are dealing with a lot right now, and in being a distraction, we can their support social-emotional health. Colleen reinforced how adults

may feel the same way. Without a support system at home, students may struggle and fall through the cracks. The COVID pandemic has undoubtedly intensified our numbers from the standpoint of students who are struggling.

Jackie spoke of students at the elementary level, specifically some students who may not have the best tools and coping strategies available to support their emotional health. She noted how some students may just “shut down” when overwhelmed. How can we put together support for them?

Jackie also shared that Karen Pasternak has reached out to teachers to gauge interest in a mentoring initiative where students would be supported by Frontier High School National Honor Society students. Amy added that they have also linked some of their high risk students with staff members.

John noted the challenges of working parents in recognizing whether or not their children are engaging in their learning. Amy stated that there is a process at the high school for reaching out to students and parents when teachers see a pattern of disengagement developing. Danielle shared the process at the middle school, and noted that if a parent doesn't respond, they send our School Resource Officer (Officer Horrigan) to do a well check home visit. Although a parent recently expressed frustration with the home visit, Danielle shared her conversation with the parent about our concern for the well-being of the student.

Laura responded to the possibility of teachers/staff mentoring or supporting students. She added the challenge in adding something more to their plates, but agreed that it needs to be well thought out. Mary Frances agreed and noted how our student government students sometimes tend to take a lot on, and stated that we need to ensure that they don't take on more than they are able to handle. Colleen added the importance of having high school students supported by teachers from the standpoint of liability and supervision.

Jackie stated that sometimes students who struggle academically are great candidates for mentoring younger students. It gives them a sense of belonging and pride in what they are doing.

Colleen addressed the need to focus on the majority in terms of finding strategies to support disengaged students in our district. Danielle noted how kids value connections, and we should include students who don't necessarily excel academically in our support programs for other students. Danielle also mentioned the Leaders in Training program

through WNY United Against Drugs & Alcohol, Inc. She commended the program and stated that it was a wonderful experience for our Frontier students.

Colleen asked both Amy and Mary Frances what seems to promote engagement and connections at the HS level. Mary Frances stated that being together in class promotes the establishment of connections. Amy and Mary Frances stated that they take volunteer teachers each year to serve as mentors. They noted how most of the volunteers are women, but they have enlisted the support of more male teachers. Amy stated that their support program is really informal, but added how even the informal connections are good for kids.

Amy also noted the idea of linking high school and middle school students with younger students in their elementary building. The idea was met with enthusiasm.

Colleen then focused the group on attempting to gather data / numbers for students by grade level who would benefit from connections.

Mary Frances noted the high number of course failures (in the hundreds). She stated that mentorship / connections could hopefully help with this.

Laura asked whether the thought of having a mentor or two adopt a full classroom should be explored. She also stated that we would need permission from parents as to whether or not older students could reach out to students outside of school. Jackie noted the importance of involving as many students as we can. She provided ideas (virtual lunch) for what the support could look like from a mentor. Jackie noted that the building social workers could aid in the planning and implementation of pairing mentors and mentees.

Colleen expressed the significance of starting with data in order to recognize just how big the “pilot” could be. John shared that many college kids are home now and perhaps they can support high school students who may be struggling.

Danielle referenced the Middle School “nest time” from the previous year. She stated that they are not able to run their program this year, and wondered whether not including the program in our academic day this year was the best plan.

Colleen suggested keeping the social-emotional health focus for our next Student Achievement Committee meeting.

Jackie suggested pulling data from the elementary level, and noted the benefit of our MTSS models in providing social-emotional support for students. Danielle stated that now that we are at the end of the first quarter, it would be easy to identify students who may benefit from support. Mary Frances and Amy agreed that the same would be true for the high school.

Danielle added that report cards were going to be mailed home in an effort to communicate information related to grades to families. She noted how “next steps” would be added to report cards.

Colleen reinforced getting the data at the end of the marking period and focusing our ideas into an action plan. Amy noted how we shouldn’t wait until after the holidays to start. Laura agreed with Amy and stated that we should not wait until the next meeting (Dec. 15th) to start something.

Colleen asked for support in linking at-risk students with mentor students. Students involved in our sports teams, clubs, etc. should be considered as mentors. Laura added that we should be strategic in planning how to match grade levels.

[Next Meeting: December 15, 2020 @ 3:30 p.m.](#)