

Bernards Township School District
Board of Education Committee Meeting: Wellness
January 25, 2024

Minutes

In Attendance: Janice Corrado, Csilla Csipak, Michael Fackelman, Kristin Fox, Russ Lazovick, Mike Mancino, Nick Markarian, Jean O'Connell, Tim Salmon, Sean Siet, Stephanie Smith, Jen White

Sports and Extracurricular Teams Support:

- In response to a question from a Board of Education member regarding the proposed later start time at Ridge High School, the committee discussed what plans are in place for sports and extracurricular activities should the high school day end around 3:00 p.m. instead of the current time of 2:25. One Board member stated that without a commitment to end practices and rehearsals earlier, students would not benefit from the change as homework and other requirements would simply be pushed back later at night.
- Mr. Fackelman, Supervisor of Fine and Practical Arts, noted that at the high school the only activity that might be affected would be the Ridge Marching Band whose schedules are aligned with sports. Mr. Fackelman feels that pushing the practice start time back by 30 to 40 minutes would not present a problem. He shared that the general expectation is that all after school clubs end by 9:00 p.m. However, some clubs spend a greater amount of time in rehearsal the week before a performance. In these situations, conversations occur in advance and students and families are informed of the increased rehearsal time so they can plan accordingly. Mr. Fackelman noted that unlike the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association, there is no agency that regulates performance-related rehearsal times and that these decisions are left to local districts. Mr. Fackelman did point out that if the elementary school schedule were to change to an earlier start time, before-school music and choir rehearsals would be impacted and would need to be adjusted.
- Regarding the impact of a later school start time on high school sports, Mr. Mancino, Director of Athletics, stated that teams should be following the NJSIAA recommendations regarding practice time limits. Mr. Mancino is encouraging coaches to limit practice time to 90 minutes per session. He agreed with Mr. Fackelman that a 30- to 40-minute delay should not present a problem for teams. Mr. Mancino pointed out that in general, sports teams spend less time in practice once they reach the midseason, so practice time naturally scales back as the season progresses. He believes that shorter practice times may reduce the increasing number of soft-tissue injuries among student athletes.

HIB Updates:

- Mr. Markarian shared that Bernards Township Schools have reported a total of 62 HIB incidents for the current school year from July 1, 2023 to January 25, 2024. Of these, 12 reported incidents, or 20%, were related to race or ethnicity. Ten of those 12 incidents occurred at William Annin Middle School, and 9 of those proceeded to HIB investigation; 5 incidents were determined to be founded, and 4 were unfounded as they did not meet the criteria to be considered HIB incidents. Mr. Markarian emphasized to the committee that the district's goal is to have as few HIB incidents as possible and that the administration is committed to more effectively addressing the situation.
- It was noted that new software being employed, HIBster does help better track incidents and their nature. Other data sources include the DEI Audit report from 2022, the PRIDE survey, school climate surveys, and data collected for NJDOE reporting periods.
- The district currently has several programs in place to address HIB and bias-related incidents. Schools bring in outside speakers for whole-school assemblies. Language Arts, Social Studies/History, and Health curriculum address aspects related to the CASEL social-emotional learning indicators. Elementary and middle schools conduct dedicated lessons each month to increase student awareness. Grade level meetings and individual lessons and discipline measures are employed. Despite these efforts, the number of incidents are rising rather than lessening. Administrators feel strongly that the district needs to consider more measures to address the current trend and that employing third party expertise is something to consider.
- Mr. Siet has done some preliminary research into what other New Jersey school districts are doing with regard to this issue. He pointed out that this is a problem all districts are facing and that Bernards Township is not unique in this regard. He shared that Princeton public schools are currently working with a third-party consultant to provide professional development for teachers as well as lessons for students. Kristin Fox, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, noted that teachers and staff are increasingly requesting professional training from the district so that they can be better prepared to respond to issues before they escalate to disciplinary or HIB incidents.
- One board member felt that it is mostly the responsibility of the family to participate in teaching children the proper treatment of others, and that the school district should seek help from the families in order to succeed. This board member questioned the cost of hiring an outside consultant and suggested considering alternative in-house solutions, such as inviting parents to a dedicated "back to school night" type of event where staff could share this information with parents. Some committee members pointed out that attendance at recent Parent Academy sessions has been quite low, and that it would be difficult to ensure that all parents would participate in order to hear this important information. The board member stated that low parental attendance will not be solved by having third-party presentations such as the presentations by Effective School Solutions. This board member suggested that there might be wider success with sending out notifications about these important reach-out meetings using the automated

phone calling and/or texting system, which would be low in cost and most effective since it is the system used for snow day and delayed start time announcements.

- Mr. Markarian reminded the committee that direct communication with parents has happened to seek their support. We will continue to do that but the data suggests our efforts in aggregate do not seem to be stopping inappropriate student interactions.
- Mr. Siet and Ms. Fox will research programs available to New Jersey public schools from third-party consultants and will identify the associated costs. Business Administrator Jim Rollo will look into possible sources of funding and whether such a contract would be required to go through the bidding process or whether it might be funded through grant money. Discussion regarding HIB consultants will be added to the agenda for the next Wellness Committee meeting scheduled for Wednesday, February 21st.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice Corrado