

**Bernards Township Board of Education
Wellness Committee Meeting Minutes
March 27, 2024**

Administrators in Attendance: Kristin Fox, Karen Hudock, Russ Lazovick, Nick Markarian, Stephanie Smith

Board Members in Attendance: Janice Corrado, Csilla Csipak, Timothy Salmon, Jennifer White

I. Review of February 28th “Winter Reboot” Wellness Day

Ms. Stephanie Smith shared feedback from the final Wellness Day of the 2023-24 school year. Guest speaker John Mopper met with students during the first half of the school day on the topic “The Effects of Social Media.” A recording of his presentation will be shared with parents and made available on the district website, and the administration is making plans for a follow up parent information session in the spring, with more details to come.

In the afternoon, all K-12 staff attended Mr. Mopper’s keynote address, “Being an Educator in Today’s World.” Staff then selected two 40-minute sessions on a variety of related topics ([Brochure](#)). Of the 500 attendees, 301 provided the following feedback:

- 82% found the keynote address to be relevant or very relevant, and 89% felt the keynote was engaging or very engaging
- 93% felt the day was well organized
- Nearly 75% found the breakout sessions to be helpful or very helpful.
- Nearly 80% found the breakout sessions to be enjoyable or really enjoyable

Many teachers commented that they wanted more time to learn about their selected topics in depth. They requested that several topics be offered through the district’s Staff College. District administrators are compiling a list and will work on scheduling and staffing the most requested courses.

II. Spring BT Connect Meeting

The Committee agreed it is important to bring the community together to discuss the topic of harassment, intimidation, and bullying, in particular with respect to racist language being used at the middle school. While the school district collects data based on disciplinary and HIB reports from teachers and administrators, the Committee would also like to gather input from the community on this issue and collaborate on ways to work together to solve it. All members recognized that it is essential to partner with parents in this effort and to share information and resources in order to most effectively address the issue.

Mrs. Hudock commented that as a parent, she recognizes how hard it is to keep up with the variety and speed of new social media challenges. She noted that teachers are more likely to become aware of these challenges before parents since students typically attempt them with groups of friends.

While Ridge has reported fewer HIB incidents than William Annin, the Committee discussed the difficulty in pinpointing the exact reasons for this. Is it because high school students are more mature, and more tolerant of differences? Or is it that students have better resources, as a result of character education lessons at William Annin, to handle incidents independently, without involving teachers? Mr. Markarian emphasized that the district policy is not to tolerate any type of harassment, intimidation, or bullying, and that the goal is to eliminate all such incidents at every school in the district.

Administrators and staff will plan and schedule a BT Connect session on this topic for later this Spring. Board members suggested considering the following when planning:

- Provide more specific information from middle school administrators regarding the issue;
- Have Ridge students share their experiences with current William Annin students, as younger students will find that information more impactful;

- Possibly invite Bernards Township Police Sergeant Tracy Baldassare to offer a brief update about internet safety and apps, similar to previous presentations she has provided which were very well received by parents;
- Consider including a member of Bernards Township leadership to request parents' help in educating middle schoolers about the effects their social media choices have on our community;
- Possibly add a brief message on this topic to Back to School Night agendas in September as a way to communicate to most parents.

Information regarding the date and location of the BT Connect session will be widely communicated.

III. Spring TEA Time/BREW Panel

Dr. Russ Lazovick has begun reaching out to a diverse group of Ridge students who will work with staff to plan for a BREW on topics of importance to the student body. The committee brainstormed ideas to involve students in reflecting on their experiences as William Annin students and to share their suggestions for improving peer relationships during the middle school years. All students will have the opportunity to share in these conversations during an open lunch TEA Time session in April or May.

The entire Bernards Township community will be invited to attend a Spring BREW Panel: A Night of Student Voices, where a panel of Ridge students will discuss their TEA Time conversations and experiences. Last year's BREW Panel on the topic of Managing Student Stress was extremely well attended and well received, and the Committee is hopeful that William Annin students and their families, as well as the wider community, will find the panel discussion enlightening.

IV. Professional Development

Ms. Kristin Fox continues to work with Mr. Sean Siet and the district professional development team in identifying resources to provide teachers with strategies and language to effectively address bias incidents in a proactive rather than reactive way. The Curriculum Committee will discuss these resources in more detail during their April 5th meeting.

V. Post-Secondary Report, Part II

Ms. Smith shared information regarding Bernards Township's SAT and ACT scores and college matriculation for 2023. The PowerPoint presentation is linked [here](#) and in this evening's Board agenda.

Some highlights from the presentation:

- More students took the SAT nationwide in 2023 than in 2022, 1.9 million as compared with 1.7 million the previous year. Students in 2024 are taking a digital version of the SAT, which will provide a much quicker turnaround of results.
- The number of students taking the ACT fell to the lowest level in 30 years. The average ACT score fell from 19.8 in 2022 to 19.5 in 2023.
- The test optional alternative continues to be very popular, with over 1,800 colleges participating, according to FairTest.org. However, some schools, including Dartmouth and Yale, are reinstating testing requirements.
- Participation in the ACT and SAT tests and various benchmark data is included in the presentation

With regard to post-secondary plans, of the 402 Ridge graduates in 2023:

- 90% planned to attend four-year colleges
- 5% planned to attend two-year schools
- 2% planned employment
- 2% plans were undecided
- 1% planned to take a gap year

The list of college matriculations for the Class of 2023 is posted on the Ridge High School Department of School Counseling website on the College/Career Planning page, under the Ridge High School 2023-24 School Profile. Please refer to the website for more detailed information.

The Wellness Committee is scheduled to meet again on Wednesday, April 24th.

Respectfully submitted,
Janice Corrado