Concord School District
Board of Education
Instructional Committee

Date: January 24, 2018

Committee members present: Maureen Redmond-Scura, Chair; Clint Cogswell; Liza Poinier

Other Board members present: Jennifer Patterson, Tom Croteau

District staff present: Superintendent Terri Forsten; Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley; Safe Schools/Healthy Students Project Manager Stacey Lazzar; Safe Schools/Healthy Students Early Childhood Coordinator Laurie Hart

Committee Chair Maureen Redmond-Scura called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. The agenda included a presentation on early childhood education by Stacey Lazzar and Laurie Hart, and the student services enrollment report by Superintendent Forsten.

Early Childhood Presentation

Ms. Lazzar and Ms. Hart shared a presentation entitled ‘Children, the Bedrock of the Granite State,’ which was developed by Spark NH, the state’s governor-appointed Early Childhood Advisory Council. This presentation was being shared with a variety of state and local leaders across New Hampshire. The presentation was followed by an update on Safe Schools/Healthy Students project activities focused on early childhood education.

The Spark NH presentation focused on the impact of early development on later outcomes for children. It featured three short videos from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, one on the basic architecture of the brain, another focusing on the importance of ‘serve and return’ relationships between young children and caregivers, and a third describing the negative effects of toxic stress. The presentation stressed the importance of systems that support strong foundations for healthy early development, noting that targeting the earliest years of children’s development reaps economic benefits for the community.

Ms. Lazzar and Ms. Hart described the activities associated with the Safe Schools/Healthy Children project that focus on early childhood. Over 300 families in Concord have been served at the District’s four family center sites. More than 500 children have been screened, resulting in over 90 home visits and 41 referrals to community agencies. Families have enjoyed 13 community field trips. To increase access to services, the Family Centers have offered over 90 interpretations and 68 transportation events. District staff work closely with community agencies, including Community Bridges, Riverbend, Ascentria Care Alliance, Child and Family Services and Community Bridges, to connect families with appropriate services. Some parents and other caregivers attending the
Family Centers become advocates and ambassadors, building strong connections within the elementary schools.

Spark NH has provided funding for families in Concord to access VROOM, a resource that provides parents and other caregivers with online and printed materials that provide information and tips to support healthy development, birth-5. The project has disseminated information about VROOM across the community, including at daycare and preschool centers, the hospital and at the District’s Family Centers.

Ms. Hart noted that the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant has also allowed the District to invest in the community’s early childhood workforce. The project has provided access for 300 area childcare and preschool providers to workshop series on a variety of topics, including social/emotional development, trauma, mindfulness in the classroom, culture and diversity, and positive strategies for supporting children with behavior concerns. They are seeking additional grants to support the work going forward. Concord, along with five other districts, was selected to be part of Project Grow, a four-year initiative to support the development of trauma-sensitive environments in the schools.

Safe Schools/Healthy Students resources have also been used to support a variety of family training and workshops on parenting skills, helping with homework, supporting the development of early literacy and math skills, and others. Psychologist Cassie Yackley will present a program for families on February 7 on building healthy brains. The project also supports family visitation, a strong evidence-based intervention.

Ms. Lazzar briefly described the other aspects of the Safe Schools/Healthy Student project beyond the early childhood area. The project provides mental health clinicians from Riverbend in the schools. In addition, substance abuse prevention counselors are funded at Rundlett Middle School and Concord High School. Another area of focus is on developing a positive culture and climate in the school, working to implement multi-tiered structures in each school.

Student Services Enrollment Report

Superintendent Forsten provided enrollment information related to student services, noting that the number of students receiving special education services has declined in the last five years, consistent with the overall decline in enrollment. Currently just under 700 students were being served, representing approximately 15% of the school population overall. This is consistent with the percentage of students with educational disabilities in New Hampshire. The elementary level has the lowest percentage (13%), Concord High School serves 15% of the population, and 18% of the students at Rundlett Middle School receive services.

Superintendent Forsten noted several current areas of focus for special education programs, including an ongoing conversation about social/emotional/behavioral challenges, successful experiences with inclusionary programs, transitions from out-of-district placements to district placements, the use of technology to support students, and specialized training for educational assistants to be certified as behavior technicians. She noted that federal and state funds for special education continue to be limited.
Over the last five years the District has seen some growth in numbers of students served through programs for English Language Learners (ELL). In 2013, 300 students were receiving ELL services; in 2017 this number rose to 360. Overall, 8% of Concord’s students were receiving services through the ELL program; 10% of elementary students; 6% of RMS students; and 8% of CHS students. Mill Brook and Broken Ground Schools continue to have the highest percentage of ELL learners.

Success stories related to Concord’s ELL students have been shared over the years. The programs are inclusionary. Federal funds for this area have been waning in the last few years.

Superintendent Forsten solicited additional questions or topics from Committee members about student services programming that could be answered during the upcoming budget meetings. Committee members asked for additional information about the supports and services that are provided to meet the needs of students returning from out-of-district placements; Bill White’s contract; the use of educational assistants; data and other information that would speak to the success of the programs in place; and other considerations for programs that might be more effective than those in place.

The Committee voted 3-0 to adjourn (motioned by Mr. Cogswell, seconded by Ms. Poinier).

The meeting adjourned at 6:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Redmond-Scura, Chair
Donna Palley, Recorder