Concord School District
Board of Education
Instructional Committee

Date: May 16, 2016

Committee members present: Jennifer Patterson, Maureen Redmond-Scura, Alana Kimball

Board members present: Tom Croteau, Clint Cogswell, Jim Richards, Nathan Fennessy

Administration: Superintendent Terri Forsten, Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley

In the absence of Committee Chair Barbara Higgins, Jennifer Patterson called the meeting to order at 5:38 p.m. There were two agenda items: a discussion of the results from the Youth Behavior Risk Survey (YRBS), and an update on the work of the Early Childhood Steering Committee, including discussion of a proposed community and District survey.

1. Superintendent Forsten presented the results of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). This survey, which was administered last spring to students at Concord High School, was created in 1991 by the Centers for Disease Control. The survey is used to assess trends in youth health risk behaviors, promote understanding of health risk behaviors, evaluate impact of intervention programs, including the District’s Safe Schools grant, develop programs and policies to reduce risk, and monitor youth health behaviors over time. The survey is administered every other year. In this 2015 administration, 1,057 students participated. Survey questions cover six areas related to health risk: physical activity; diet; alcohol and drug use; tobacco use; injury and violence; and sex, helplessness and injury.

Superintendent Forsten summarized the results of the survey. A majority (66%) of the responses of Concord students were positive compared to both region and state; and 75% of the responses showed an improvement in risk behaviors since the previous survey in 2013. Overall, a decrease was seen in the numbers of students endorsing the use of alcohol, marijuana and tobacco. Superintendent Forsten and Board members highlighted areas that suggested a need for support or programming, including safe, violence-free dating relationships, bullying including online bullying, physical activity, use of smokeless tobacco, and engaging in unprotected sexual activity. Also of concern were the numbers of students who attempted suicide or reporting feeling sad or hopeless for an extended period of time. A large number of student indicated that they would not talk to their parents about negative emotions or the dangers of substance misuse. The large majority of students responding to the survey endorsed the ease of access to alcohol, marijuana and tobacco in our community, although many fewer endorsed using these substances.
The Safe Schools grant has brought additional supports and services to the District, including mental health counselors and a substance misuse prevention professional. One of the Safe Schools sub-committees is focused on issues surveyed in the YRBS and is charged with helping to develop strategies and interventions for students and the community. The results have been shared with District administrators, who are beginning to develop ideas for programs and ways to communicate with parents, teachers and students about these issues. A similar survey will be given to middle school students later this spring.

2. Donna Palley described the work of a sub-committee of the Early Childhood Education Steering Committee (ECESC) to develop a survey seeking input on early childhood programming in Concord from district staff and the broader community. A draft of the survey was reviewed. Several Board members indicated concerns about the survey, noting that it is difficult to develop an unbiased survey without professional/technical expertise in this area. Board members stated that they welcome feedback from the community through opportunities at each Board meeting. Nathan Fennessy noted that members of the committee worked hard on this task; that perhaps it should go out so that more community input could be received; and that a relatively small group of people have spoken to the Board up until now. Clint Cogswell and other members expressed concerns about how the survey would be distributed and whether it would reach a wide range of community members, rather than just those with children in the schools. Instead, an open forum would potentially attract a broader range of individuals.

Board members agreed that they want to communicate much more information to the public about early childhood education and any recommendations that may be made relative to changes in programming, and that they want to receive input and feedback from the community on this topic. The survey will not be sent out at this time. Strategies for communication and feedback will be discussed as the Board goes forward with its review of the findings of the ECESC.

The ECESC will present a summary of its findings to the Instructional Committee at its next meeting on June 22. The findings will highlight information to answer the guiding question that was presented to the Committee: What are the best practices in kindergarten programming and how do these practices connect with early childhood programs in our school community? The Instructional Committee will consider these and ultimately make a plan for moving forward. Instructional Committee members noted that these discussions should happen early in the fall to allow for community feedback and input. Board members expressed their appreciation for those who are serving on the ECESC. Superintendent Forsten will update the ECESC on the Instructional Committee’s conversation at its next meeting on June 2.

The Committee voted 3-0 to adjourn (motioned by Maureen Redmond-Scura, seconded by Alana Kimball).

The meeting adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

Donna Palley, Recorder