Concord School District
Ad Hoc Committee Minutes

Date: September 21, 2015

Committee members present: Clint Cogswell, Chair, Kass Ardinger, Rusty Cofrin, Alana Kimball

Other Board members present: Tom Croteau, Jennifer Patterson

Others present: Terri Forsten, Superintendent; Donna Palley, Assistant Superintendent; Stacey Lazzar, Project Manager and Laurie Hart, Early Childhood Coordinator, Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative; Susan Farrelly, Program Director, 21st Century Community Learning Centers

The committee heard presentations about two multi-year grant-funded projects in the district.

1. Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative

Stacey Lazzar and Laurie Hart presented information about this initiative. The mission of Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) is to support school and community partnerships in an effort to develop and coordinate integrated systems that create safe, drug-free, and respectful environments for learning and to promote the behavioral health of children and youth. Concord is one of three districts in the state that have been funded for this work, receiving $2.1 million over four years. Our first year was a planning year; we are beginning our second year of implementation.

There are five key expectations of the grant:

- An increase in the number of children and youth who have access to behavioral health services
- A decrease in the number of students who abuse substances
- An increase in supports for early childhood development
- Improvements in school climate
- A reduction in the number of students who are exposed to violence

The grant project is focused on five elements:

1: Promoting early childhood social and emotional learning
2: Promoting mental, emotional and behavioral health
3: Connecting families, schools and communities
4: Preventing behavioral health problems, including substance abuse
5: Creating safe and violence-free schools
The Concord community has been open and responsive to working together on behalf of the goals of the grant. Strong partnerships have been established with a large number of community entities, including Riverbend Community Mental Health, Ascentria Care Alliance (supporting our new Americans), Child and Family Services, Community Bridges, Concord Police, Boys and Girls Club, Division of Children, Youth and Families, Department of Juvenile Justice Services, and others.

A school and community needs assessment and environmental scan were completed early in the grant process. This work helped set the grant’s focus and goals. A Community Management Team made up of staff from partner organizations, the school district, and community members, meets regularly and supports the implementation of the grant.

Ms. Lazzar and Ms. Hart described some of the highlights from the first year of implementation within each of the element areas.

Element 1: Early Childhood

Three Family Resource Centers have been established in Concord: at Mill Brook School, at the Heights Community Center (formerly Dame School) and at the Jennings Drive housing complex. In-kind support has been offered by the city and the Housing Authority to support this work. Each Center is open one morning a week. Families are connected with needed resources, and children participate in activities. The goals are to decrease isolation and increase support for our young families, and to offer children opportunities to develop their social and emotional readiness for kindergarten. The Family Resource Centers welcomed over 50 families last year.

The grant also supports social/emotional screening for preschoolers. 172 children were screened last year. If concerns are noted from the screening, services can be offered, and connections can be made with partner organizations for additional support. Parents have reported that they appreciate this opportunity to provide information about their children to the schools and to receive support. Interpreters are brought in as needed to support this effort.

There is a committed group of preschool and child care providers in Concord who are interested in improving their own skills in working with students and families who come to them with a variety of needs. The grant has offered a series of workshops to this group in the evenings and on weekends. The response has been very strong: 105 early childhood partners were trained in eight events last year.

Through the grant, district families have access to specialists in infant mental health who support parents and children on specialized issues including attachment concerns and trauma exposure.
Element 2: Behavioral Health

This project has significantly strengthened the district’s partnership with Riverbend, our community mental health agency. We now have Riverbend clinicians at four elementary schools (two schools had clinicians last year) and the middle school. These individuals are integrated into school-based teams, provide consultation and training for staff, individual and group counseling for students, and support for families with the referral process for mental health services. In some cases, Riverbend counselors and school specialists are co-leading therapeutic groups. For example, a specialized anxiety intervention, called Coping Cat, is being implemented by guidance, a school psychologist and a Riverbend counselor. Since October 2014, the clinicians have been involved with 40 staff consultations and 49 student groups. They have made 10 facilitated referrals to Riverbend, and participated in 26 PBIS team meetings.

Element 3: Connecting Families, Schools and Communities

Ascentria Care Alliance, formerly Lutheran Social Services, is an important partner in the SS/HS work. They work closely with district staff on behalf of our new American students and their families. The grant has paid for the services of an elementary educational liaison, Bijoux Behati, MSW, who is contracted for 30 hours per week from Ascentria. She works to build connections between families of Concord children birth through grade 5, and school staff.

The grant is also bringing training in cultural and linguistic competence to the district, and supporting efforts to provide more outreach and break down barriers by providing interpretation and transportation services to families.

Between January and August, 2015, Ms. Behati made 136 home visits, worked with 66 students in groups, provided interpretation services 200 times, and arranged transportation to school events for 20 families.

The former Dame School was more accessible for some of our families than is Mill Brook. Participation in family events at Mill Brook can be problematic for families without transportation. Over the last few years, transportation for family events has been paid through funds from the SS/HS and Title 1 grants as well as the PTA.

Element 4: Substance Abuse Prevention

Grant funds have provided for a full-time Student Assistance Program Counselor. Erika Miller splits her time between Concord High School and Rundlett Middle School, and is implementing an evidence-based prevention program called Project Success. In addition, a LADAC (Licensed Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor) is available for school-based drug and alcohol assessment and targeted intervention. Erika also is responsible to support the administration of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Last school year, Erika completed 636 student consultations, 215 individual student sessions, 119 group sessions with 45 students, and 40 environmental initiatives in the schools, including awareness and prevention activities.
Kass Ardinger noted that she will be interested to see new data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, and compare that to previous administrations of the survey.

Grant services are not currently being provided in this area to elementary school students, although drug and alcohol prevention is part of the health curriculum.

Element 5: Creating Safe and Violence-Free Schools

The grant is supporting the implementation of multi-tiered systems of support (PBIS) in the schools. Funds from the grant pay for expert PBIS facilitators who are working in six of the seven schools. (Mill Brook School is implementing Responsive Classroom, an approach to building positive behavior that is compatible with PBIS.) A district-level leadership team has been put in place to oversee this work. A new intervention called Check In/Check Out is being implemented in two of the elementary schools.

Ms. Lazzar and Ms. Hart described next steps for the grant during the 2015-2016 school year, including:

- Continuing to offer a variety of professional development opportunities related to emotional and behavioral health
- Adding a Family Resource Center for the Beaver Meadow School neighborhood
- Expanding family training: connecting families with grant partner organizations who offer this, and also adding more within the district
- Expanding the universal social/emotional screening. The tool will be used at Child Check Clinics run by the district’s preschool program. A Child and Family Services specialist will also offer screenings at local preschools.
- Offering Early Childhood Mental Health credentialing: specialized training will be available to district staff as well as staff from community partner organizations. This is an application process, with a year-long commitment to receive the credential in this area.
- Continuing multi-tiered work (PBIS) – bullying prevention may be addressed through this aspect of the grant work
- Expanding Bijoux Behati’s position
- Providing mental health clinicians in two additional schools
- Increasing social media/website presence for the initiative, including housing resource information for families as well as district and partner agency staff
- Forming a Youth Leadership Council at Concord High School. This is a peer-to-peer mentoring program focused on substance misuse.
- Increasing PBIS capacity in our community preschools and child care programs by providing training and support to these providers
- Continuing to improve communication with families: increasing access for those who don’t speak English, connecting with families that have not been comfortable
coming to school. Educational liaisons, mental health providers and other partners will have increased presence in the neighborhoods.

- Continuing to identify and implement ways to remove barriers to family participation (transportation to and childcare at events, for example)

Clint Cogswell asked how the district can sustain these types of activities after the grant is complete. Ms. Lazzar and Ms. Hart discussed the development of partnerships and relationships that are being built that will continue after the grant has ended.

Ms. Ardinger noted that the wrap-around services that have been described are addressing the needs of many of our children and families and that the grant funds are critical for us. She suggested that the Board will want to think carefully about the best use of tax dollars, and noted that no learning takes place unless children have healthy minds and bodies.

2. 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Sue Farrelly, Program Director, described the work of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers at four schools: Mill Brook, Broken Ground, Rundlett Middle and Concord High. The programs each provide 15 hours per week of activities, some before school and some after school. The goals of the 21st Century program are to improve academic achievement, support social and emotional well-being and to promote the role of families in their students’ success. The work is done in partnership with a number of other organizations in Concord, including Ascentria Care Alliance, NHTI, Concord Police Department, Second Start, Girls On the Run, Girls Inc., St. Paul’s School, and the Friend’s Program. Our partnership with the Greater Concord Boys and Girls Club at Mill Brook and Broken Ground Schools has been significant and positive.

Students participate in a variety of programming, including daily homework help and a myriad of physical, academic enrichment and leadership activities. Healthy snacks, access to computer labs and transportation are provided to students. Ms. Farrelly described afterschool activities including rocketry, computer coding, art, newspaper club, snowshoeing, Frisbee, drumming, chess, German and more. These programs are staffed by Concord teachers, assistants and tutors, as well as others hired from the community. Concord High School students are hired as program assistants, working at Rundlett and the elementary schools. 1150 students were enrolled in the 21st Century program during the 2014-2015 school year. The 21st Century initiative also provides programs for families in partnership with the schools, including English classes for new Americans.

Ms. Farrelly reported that Concord High’s program has been recognized by the US Department of Education as a demonstration site for career- and college-readiness programming. It was also selected by the NH Department of Education for a best practice site visit by a team from the US Department of Education.
The 21st Century programs are funded through the grant for five years. Concord High and Rundlett are in their fourth year of operation; the elementary programs are in their second. Ms. Farrelly provided information about funding over the five years:

At Concord High and Rundlett:

Years 1-3: $125,000 per year
Year 4: $93,750
Year 5: $81,250

At Broken Ground/Mill Brook Elementary Schools:

Years 1-3: $220,000 per year
Year 4: $165,000
Year 5: $143,000

The district can apply for another five-year grant, but, if funds are awarded, the annual amount will not exceed the year five funding level from the first grant cycle.

21st Century grant funds will be used this year to hire an AmeriCorps Vista worker, who will assist with community outreach, volunteer recruitment, grant-writing and a major fundraising event. For the first time, students at Rundlett are paying a small annual fee ($25) for the program.

Respectfully submitted,

Clint Cogswell, Chair
Donna Palley, Recorder