

**DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
Wilmette Public Schools**

INFORMATION ITEM

Date: February 27, 2017

To: Members, Board of Education

From: Building Principals
Grade Level Administrators
Assistant Principals
Gail Buscemi, Business Manager
Romy DeCristofaro, Ph.D., Assistant Director of Special Services
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Assistant Superintendent and Administrator for Student & Special Services

Subject: School Climate: Creating a Culture of Empathy

BACKGROUND

On September 26, 2016, the Board of Education approved the implementation of the 2016-2017 District 39 Strategic Plan. The district initiatives were divided into three sections: New Strategic Initiatives, Continuing Strategic Initiatives, and Annual Business. The yearly planning cycle includes Strategic Plan mid-year updates in January and February. Last month's report focused on the Continuing Strategic Initiatives and Annual Business. This month's reports will focus on updates of the New Strategic Initiatives.

New Strategic Initiatives Updates

New Strategic Initiatives are initiatives in the early stages of development. These are new areas of focus for District 39. The administration identified four new focus areas: School Climate, Student School Day, School Attendance, and Student Growth. However, District 39 has presented ongoing updates and information about the Student Growth initiative each month. Therefore, the board is currently up to date with our efforts in regards to Student Growth.

School Climate

District 39 takes cases of bullying seriously and investigates all reports. Currently, debates regarding the difference between social conflicts and bullying are occurring among people in and out of the educational setting. Potentially, some situations defined as "bullying" could actually

be incidences of typical age-appropriate social conflicts. District 39 has focused on taking proactive measures by engaging stakeholders in learning about diversity, equity, and inclusiveness. We believe these efforts will develop empathy, instill respect, and promote acceptance of responsibility while building positive school climates within each school community.

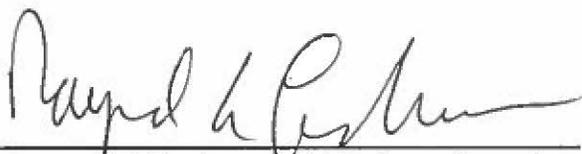
1. On August 23rd's Teacher Institute Day, Pat Savage-Williams, New Trier High School staff member, provided a keynote presentation on the culture of diversity and inclusiveness in schools. She is involved locally and nationally in this important issue.
2. On October 31st, WJHS students took part in activities designed to further promote the theme of "Building a Connected Community." The WJHS PTO/iGNITE sponsored Victor Pacini to speak to students about being kind to others. Victor Pacini is a motivational speaker who specializes in working with students on goal setting, learning about the importance of kindness, and preventing bullying behaviors through building confidence and self-esteem. Following the presentations, students attended breakout sessions where they discussed empathy, diversity and inclusivity.
3. At Highcrest Middle School, students learned about the importance of community and the value of small acts of kindness from Greg Siegman, founder of the 11-10-02 Foundation and recipient of the Jefferson Award for Public Service. Following the HMS PTO iGNITE sponsored presentation, students brainstormed ways to conduct small acts of kindness throughout the school. Students filled squares with ideas and images of kindness and sent Kindness Quilts to various elementary classrooms.
4. McKenzie School also promoted and recognized random acts of kindness done by students. Around Thanksgiving, parents representing PASS39, created a bulletin board in the lobby filled with ideas. A portion of the board soon became filled with smiley-faced stickers as a visual of how these acts were spreading throughout McKenzie School's community. In addition, Random Acts of Kindness week (Feb. 14-18) reinforced the message of how the positive effects of kindness are experienced in our brains and bodies.
5. On the evening of December 6th, District 39 hosted a panel discussion and parent forum entitled, "Building a Climate of Empathy." The panel included distinguished guests and scholars from various areas of diversity (gender, race, socioeconomic, invisible & visible disabilities, and religion) to talk about the process of continuing to build our District 39 community. Executive director of Family Service Center, Renee Dominquez, Ph.D. attended the parent forum and offered to assist in developing a meaningful follow-up. The district will explore the possibility of another event in the spring.
6. District 39's Community Review Committee (CRC) has selected "diversity and inclusion" as its 2016-2017 focus. Many administrators and teachers are active members of the two subcommittees: Interpersonal Relationships and Safety. Each subcommittee is reviewing current D39 practices and preparing to gather information from parents as well as learn from other districts' practices. CRC representatives will present a full report to the Board of Education in May.
7. Six staff members from HMS and WJHS participated in the Beyond Diversity Seminar hosted at New Trier. This was a two-day workshop aimed at giving participants the opportunity to enter into courageous conversations about race, as well as relationships within the school community.

8. Second Step's Bullying Prevention curriculum, developed based on current social emotional learning research, is used throughout the district to teach students lessons such as:
 - a. Understanding class rules
 - b. Recognizing bullying
 - c. Listening with empathy and respect
 - d. Taking other's perspectives and accepting differences
 - e. Disagreeing respectfully and responding with compassion
 - f. Empowering bystanders to take action
9. Principals, psychologists, and/or social workers inserviced teachers on District 39's bullying policy (7:180) and the difference between social conflict and bullying. Through the use of scenarios, the staff engaged in applying their knowledge to identify incidences of bullying as opposed to social conflict. Principals have also attended workshops addressing bullying and social conflict as well as restorative practices.
10. Harper School's iGNITE provided teacher yoga training by Lisa Weber of Northwestern University Athletics/Heaven and Earth Yoga in Evanston. She served as an Artist in Residence for 1st grade classes and taught students how to be mindful, kind, empathic, patient, and introspective using techniques to help them calm their minds. The 1st grade teachers are working on incorporating aspects of yoga/mindfulness into the classroom.
11. D39 schools have worked collaboratively to establish a consistent practice of behavior tracking. The data collecting efforts may reveal patterns useful in promoting positive behaviors. Next year, eduCLIMBER, a data warehouse, will provide a common approach to tracking behavior district wide. In addition, the data reports are geared to graphically show trends within a school and/or across the district.
12. Romona and Central staff member book clubs are engaged in learning by reading *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* by Claude M. Steele and *Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed* by Emily Pearson respectively. Highcrest Middle School and Wilmette Junior High School staff will participate in discussions addressing topics of empathy, diversity, inclusion, mindfulness, resilience and stress during Grades 5-8 April professional development day. Books and supplemental materials will support each discussion. These opportunities bring people together to discuss, learn, and share as they build capacity to address issues.

CONCLUSION

District 39 Administrators and staff have worked diligently toward achieving the goals and/or outcomes of the 2016-2017 Strategic Plan. This month's report focused on mid-year updates of the New Strategic Initiatives. Our work will continue and the Board may expect a full Strategic Plan review in June.

Recommended for presentation to the Board of Education,



Raymond E. Lechner, Ph.D., Superintendent