

## West Hartford Public School District

**Agenda Item:** Behavioral Intervention Programming

**Meeting Date:** April 17, 2018

**From:** Dr. Gretchen Nelson, Director of Pupil Services  
Paul Vicinus, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction

**Through:** Tom Moore, Superintendent

### Background

The importance of the classroom environment and the overall school climate is underscored within our Board of Education Goals, which charge all educators to “nurture the intellectual, physical and emotional well-being of students and create a safe and respectful learning community where all students are held to high expectations” (WHPS 2017). In fact, behavioral supports and interventions are recognized to hold such importance that they surface in various forms within any number of legislative requirements and best educational practices. Within *Connecticut’s Framework for [Response to Intervention] RTI*, the State Department of Education declares the universal nature of behavioral supports stating that they “are not premised on a particular label, program or place, but rather are provided based on students’ needs” (CSDE 2008). Legislation over the last several years has sought to curb the number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions heightening the need for districts to have a well-defined and effective behavioral intervention program that seeks to provide personalized and proactive supports to students with challenging behaviors.

### School-based Programs and Supports

Our historical approach to behavioral programming has largely been school-based with direct instruction embedded within civic and character education programs. *Second Step* and *Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports (PBIS)* are two common programs subscribed to by many of our elementary and middle schools. The *Second Step* program is best described as a packaged curriculum and we have adopted different elements of its Bullying Prevention units into our Health and PE curriculum. *PBIS* is a rewards-based intervention program funded by the US Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs. As an early front-runner in behavioral intervention programming, *PBIS* has attracted a strong core following nationally, and many of our schools have adopted a whole-school *PBIS* approach. Behavioral intervention, alongside reading and mathematics, is a component of the state’s SRBI framework. Schools are required to have structures to identify and intervene when behaviors of concern surface within the schools setting.

Despite the many benefits of these programs and their utilization across the district, challenging student behavior has risen as one of the preeminent concerns across the district over the last two years. In response, we have taken a number of steps to address this development. This includes supporting Intensive Behavior programs for students who qualify for specialized instruction through IDEA within Braeburn and Morley, King Philip and Sedgwick Middle Schools, and STRIVE/STEPS. To back these programs and the school-based teams, support staff, including two additional Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) have been hired. Further, we have adopted Ross Greene’s *Collaborative Proactive Solutions (CPS)* as a formal approach to behavioral interventions. Of these, *CPS* provides the most far-reaching and comprehensive approach to supporting our Board goal of nurturing the social/emotional well-being of students within a respectful learning environment that holds students to high expectations.

## **Tenets of the CPS Model**

Dr. Greene's work is based on the premise that all students will do well if they can. In his text, *Lost at School*, Dr. Greene outlines his premise that "kids with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges lack important thinking skills" (Greene 2014). The existence of a lagging skill manifests as challenging behavior when the demands being placed on a child exceed his or her capacity to respond adaptively (Green 2014). All too frequently, these disruptions are interpreted as willful and the child is characterized as attention seeking, manipulative, unmotivated, or having a bad attitude. Parents are often swept into this blame labeling with assumptions made about their ability to discipline, the amount of time spent with children, or worse.

The CPS model avoids these misconceptions by focusing on the observable behaviors (unsolved problems) in light of lagging skills. Common lagging skills among challenging students include difficulty with transitions, difficulty handling unpredictability or lack of structure, difficulty shifting from an initial idea or plan, and many more. Based on his research, Dr. Greene predicts that a very significant number of behavioral problems can be traced back to frustration borne out of lagging academic skills (often language based). His approach engages students proactively (outside of the heat of the moment) in collaborative problem solving around the unsolved problem (vs the behavior). Students are asked to share in defining what causes them difficulty and what steps might be taken to alleviate the issue. The subtle shift in approach involves moving both adult and student away from conversations about compliance of behavior toward a focus on the antecedents in an effort to solve issues before they provoke challenging behavior. The power behind the approach lies within the engagement of the student in the development and implementation of a plan that focusses on lagging skills (vs consequences).

A more detailed description of the CPS approach can be found in Ross Greene's *Lost at School*. A copy of this text is provided to each member of the Board of Education.

## **Implementing CPS**

The CPS approach represents a fairly significant departure from the philosophical underpinnings of historical approaches to behavioral intervention, most of which sought to categorize behaviors and manage consequences of infractions. Based on these differences and the need to commit to a new framework for thinking about challenging behavior, Dr. Greene recommends a "go slow to go fast" approach. Whole school or blanket district-wide implementation is not recommended. Instead, Greene recommends a core-team approach that begins with 1-2 students and grows naturally at pace with the team, the students, and the building. As a district, we have identified a core planning team with participants from Webster Hill Elementary, Morley Elementary, and King Philip Middle schools. Each of these three schools has identified a core implementation team with 8-10 teachers, special educators, and building administrators. After turn-keying training on the fundamentals of the CPS model, these school teams have begun the work of supporting students through the CPS structure. School teams have been provided ongoing support from the *Lives in the Balance* staff who oversee professional development related to CPS. The planning team has engaged the district Principals group in ongoing professional development in the CPS model in the form of a book study of Ross Greene's *Lost & Found*, an implementation guide to CPS. Additional schools will add core teams over the course of the next 2-3 years allowing this new approach to take root. Once ingrained into the school culture, the CPS model will expand naturally within schools. The district will continue to support teacher training working in partnership with *Lives in the Balance* and seeking out train-the-trainer opportunities.

## Summary

The CPS model represents a district approach to behavioral intervention that provides alignment to a common philosophy and strengthens our SRBI process. Implementation of CPS structures (assessment of lagging skills, collaborative problem-solving around antecedents to behavioral issues, etc.) will fill the gap we currently see in our SRBI process. Teachers are skilled at maintaining a positive learning environment and can address minor behavioral issues within the classroom (Tier I). Our trained specialists (counselors, social workers, psychologists, and BCBAs) are adept at providing diagnostics and specific and comprehensive interventions for students with significant behavioral challenges (Tier III and IV). CPS provides both structures and strategies to bridge the gap between classroom and more intense interventions (Tier II). More importantly, CPS is not a program but an approach that engages students as responsible partners in conversations surrounding behavioral challenges. CPS moves us from a consequence-based approach (to include rewards-based approaches) to a proactive solutions-based approach that addresses the lagging skills causing challenging behaviors.

## Resources and Works Cited

Connecticut State Department of Education. “*Connecticut’s Framework for RTI.*” Bureau of School and District Improvement, August 2008.

Greene, Ross. “*Lost at School.*” Scribner, 2014.

Greene, Ross. “*Lost & Found.*” Jossey-Bass, 2016.

*Lives in the Balance* website [www.livesinthebalance.org](http://www.livesinthebalance.org)

Dr. Nelson, Dr. Christina Civetelli and Mr. Vicinus will be available to answer questions.