

Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District

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To: Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee
From: Donna Scanlon, Assistant Superintendent
Date: June 7, 2007
Re: System-wide Curriculum Review
Cc: Administrative Council, Curriculum Planning Council, Citizens Curriculum Advisory Council

This report, which is presented semi-annually highlights critical issues and plans in curriculum and instruction that have been identified through the Coordinated Curriculum Planning Council, Administrative Council, Citizens Curriculum Advisory Council, and district-wide grade and subject level meetings that have been held over the course of the school year.

Curriculum Renewal

District-wide grade level curriculum meetings for grades K-5, and subject based meetings for grades 6-8 have resulted in valuable dialogue, identification of task forces, and curricular refinements. Grade level curriculum guides, with all core subjects included, have been distributed at these meetings. Additional curriculum writing is planned for this summer.

Purchasing Needs

For the first time, building principals and I have worked together to centralize the process and agree upon purchases of consumable materials for consistent curriculum implementation in the district in grades PreK-8. Some room (10-20%) is still left for individual school preferences purchases, but the requisitions are now organized through my office, with very positive feedback from the schools. This will ensure that every classroom is using the same core resources to implement the curriculum.

Text and instructional materials purchasing needs have been identified. I am working with Dr. Gagliarducci and Ms. Regulbuto to find funding solutions to this area of need. The Houghton-Mifflin Invitations to Literacy program is now 10 years old, and requires a good deal of supplemental enhancement to meet the high standards now required by State frameworks, and to meet the National Reading Panel recommendations, which are based upon scientific research. A new program will ensure consistency across the district as well as provide a complete up-to-date program for effective use by new staff. This need does have budget implications. A new core program for grades 2-6 would cost approximately \$75,000. My recommendation would be to purchase for grade 6 in FY07 with an investment of \$15,000, and allocate \$60,000 for grades 2-5 in FY08.

It is also necessary to purchase mathematics textbooks at the middle school level. I plan to purchase as much as possible in FY08, beginning with grade 8 as a top priority. Prentice Hall Pre-Algebra books

were selected, with the involvement of mathematics teachers and administrators in grades 7, 8 along with Mathematics Department Chair, Ellen Muse.

Transitions

Visitations between English and Mathematics staff have exponentially increased lines of communication and understandings between teachers of grade 8 and 9. Better longitudinal alignment (grade 7-9), program refinements on both sides, and common mid year and final exams, should help make a difference. A plan for monitoring the improvements within 5 identified data elements has been developed for the transition between the grade 8 Algebra 1 Part 1 for advanced learners and the grade 9 program where they complete Part 2. How will we know if we are successful? We should see trends that show increases in our answers to each question over the next three years.

1. What percent of students score at a Proficient or higher level on Gr. 8 Math MCAS?
2. What percent of 8th graders took Algebra 1 Part 1?
3. Percent of 8th graders taking Alg 1 Part 1 who earned final grades of B or higher?
4. What percent of 9th graders complete Algebra 1 Part 2 (1st semester)?
5. What percent of those who took the course earned final grades of B or higher?

I look forward to reporting positive results over the next few years. I also look forward to supporting continued efforts to address transitions between feeding and receiving schools in the district.

Sheltered English Immersion

Training in Sheltered English Immersion, translation/interpretation services, and curriculum development based upon the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks from the Department of Education is required for all teachers with whom our English language learners are placed. The unfunded mandates are a tremendous challenge for us to implement, but we are making some progress. We have trained approximately 18 teachers in at least one category of training, and have developed forms and processes to assist us in providing the appropriate required services.

Inclusion and Least Restrictive Environment

District-wide training for licensed staff in differentiated instruction has proven to be a positive force in our restructuring of Special Education. The progress we have made in this effort is evident in many ways, one of which is the powerful presentations made by inclusion teams from various schools during the training we implemented for paraprofessionals this week. These teams, which represented regular, special, and para educators, made it obvious that this track was the right one for educating our students.

I want to express appreciation for all of the presenters, including principals, Ms. Thompson, Ms. Brosnan, and Mr. Hale, who worked so hard to ensure a quality experience for participants. These presentations will be replicated at two more two-day workshop series for additional paraprofessionals. This major enhancement of our ability to support our students was designed to transition our support system into the Educational Inclusion Paraprofessional model. The program, which has been expertly developed by Dr. Debra Tobias in collaboration with other knowledgeable staff members, includes training on the following topics:

- Roles and Responsibilities
- Confidentiality
- Civil Rights and Equal Educational Opportunity
- Special Education
- Inclusion (presented by some of our excellent HWRSD inclusion teams)
- Teaching and Learning Strategies

- Characteristics of Diverse Learners
- Behavior Management
- Tips from the specialists: Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Pathologists, Physical Therapists, Behavioral Analyst, School Nurses, School Adjustment Counselors
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Verbal De-escalation

The content they are learning through this interactive experience will be further supported by the *Paraeducator Learning Network*, which will still be available to them next year.

Student/Teacher Assistance Team Training

As I mentioned in the fall, a refined and improved vision for a comprehensive approach to early intervention is emerging from the Student/Teacher Assistance Team Training that is being provided through the Elementary Counseling grant. Developed by the Connecticut Governor's Prevention Partnership, this model is based on incorporating research, best practices and resources to build on students' strengths and intervene quickly to address concerns that can interfere with academic success. The series of four day-long trainings provided to each building-based Team include emphasis on system and procedural development, referral and action planning, expansion of assistance activities and strategies and evaluation. Implementation of the model will formalize an easily accessible, visible helping system within each school that promotes success for all students.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Mrs. Gina Kahn, Risk Prevention Services Coordinator, administered the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey this spring. Please find below an excerpt from her report.

In order to effectively build protective factors that enhance students' skills and increase the likelihood of making safe and healthy choices, it is necessary to understand the risk factors that may present obstacles or require more targeted prevention activities. The Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey is administered to students in grades 7-12 at approximately two year intervals. This voluntary and anonymous survey monitors self-reported tobacco, alcohol and other drug use, and other variables that are believed to be indicators of high-risk behaviors. While the survey alone does not provide an exact measure of student behavior, when considered with other variables such as law enforcement and school infraction data, it provides a good indicator of the areas in which prevention activities are effective, and highlights aspects in need of further attention and effort.

The YRBS was administered in the spring of 2007 to 483 high school students and 536 middle school students in grades seven and eight, and results were compared to its previous administration in 2004. Decreases were reported in all variables pertaining to tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and in violence-related behaviors among older teens. More specific results and longitudinal comparisons will be analyzed and presented to the superintendent and the administrative team for the purposes of refining our prevention efforts, including curriculum selection and implementation, staff, parent and community training, and additional resource development. (Additional information about the Youth Risk Behavior Survey can be obtained by contacting Gina S. Kahn, the district's Risk Prevention Services Coordinator.

Edline

This MRHS has piloted the Edline module for increasing teacher's communication with students and parents using the internet. One feature of this web based system will enable teachers to work from anyplace with web access on their grading software. It also allows for security access for students and parents to see their assignments and to see grading status. It was piloted by a group of teachers, with hopes for fuller implementation at Minnechaug during second semester next year. Additionally, principals are working on plans for a pilot at the middle school level.

The Self's Labyrinth: A Novel Installation

I often have the pleasure of seeing our curriculum in action through many extraordinary and engaging performances and events and products. I thought that for this report I would share with you an unusual student exhibit consisting of several metaphorical installations that happened to be built and displayed in the courtyard outside my office. Mr. Trimmer's AP 4 Literature students built them on a rainy Saturday in May.

Mr. Trimmer describes the assignment concept below:

Ralph Ellison once stated that the only theme in American Literature was identity. This semester our class studied how dozens of works of literature explored and attempted to pose answers to this question, Who am I? ,and its intellectual cousins, How do I know when I have an answer? Do I have a true self? What limits does my society place on my knowing myself and becoming my self? What role does my relationship with Nature play in this quest? How should I use my freedom? Do I have freedom? And finally, are these questions worth pursuing? During the semester of our study we noticed that several motifs reappeared in the works: caves, jails, planetariums, kitchens, huts, sewers, doorways, oasis's and they all pointed to ways characters were simultaneously, "caught and loose" - "trapped and free."

I had the chance to view their representations and must say that they did indeed "...entertain, challenge, amuse, perplex and possibly edify..." the observer, as stated on the invitation. The photographs below are a sampling intended to tempt all of you to contemplate the mystery that literature contains as well as our students' thoughtful interpretations. As one parent said, "No signs of senioritis here!" Enjoy.

