

Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District

Donna M. Scanlon, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent
dscanlon@hwrso.org



621 Main Street
Wilbraham, MA 01095
Phone: (413) 596-6045
FAX: (413) 599-1572

To: Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee
From: Donna Scanlon, Assistant Superintendent
Date: June 4, 2008
Re: System-wide Curriculum Review
Cc: Administrative Council, Curriculum Planning Council, Citizens Curriculum Advisory Council

This report highlights issues and plans in curriculum and instruction that have been identified through the Curriculum Planning Council, Administrative Council, Citizens Curriculum Advisory Council, and district-wide grade and department level meetings that have been held over the course of the school year.

I hope the report makes clear that the theme of differentiated instruction is at the center of our curriculum and professional development planning efforts. As you know, this endeavor relates to Chapter 71: Section 38Q1/2 regarding our curriculum accommodation plan. The law states:

A school district shall adopt and implement a curriculum accommodation plan to assist principals in ensuring that all efforts have been made to meet students' needs in regular education. The plan shall be designed to assist the regular classroom teacher in analyzing and accommodating diverse learning styles of all children in the regular classroom and in providing appropriate services and support within the regular education program including, but not limited to, direct and systematic instruction in reading and provision of services to address the needs of children whose behavior may interfere with learning, or who do not qualify for special education services under chapter 71B. The curriculum accommodation plan shall include provisions encouraging teacher mentoring and collaboration and parental involvement.

A copy of the newly revised HWRSD Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) will be distributed at the June 10, 2008 School Committee meeting.

Differentiated Instruction: The Responsive Classroom

Based upon what you have been hearing during the "Road Show" School Committee meetings, I am sure you understand the impact that the Responsive Classroom framework is making upon the social and academic curriculum of our schools. By the end of this summer, over eighty elementary teachers will have voluntarily participated in-depth training in this program, giving up five days during the summer or on weekends. From those, approximately thirty dedicated teachers will have achieved an advanced level of training, having attended two week long summer institutes. Among those trained, are

all of our elementary principals. Additionally, Noel Pixley and Sue Fitts have investigated the middle school version of RC, which is called Developmental Designs for Learning. This will become important as we think about transitioning students from Green Meadows to TWB. The efforts of all of our professional staff members are much appreciated.

The following information is excerpted from the Responsive Classroom website.

Seven principles guide the Responsive Classroom approach:

- 1. The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.*
- 2. How children learn is as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand.*
- 3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.*
- 4. To be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.*
- 5. Knowing the children we teach-individually, culturally, and developmentally-is as important as knowing the content we teach.*
- 6. Knowing the families of the children we teach and working with them as partners is essential to children's education.*
- 7. How the adults at school work together is as important as their individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community.*

At the heart of the Responsive Classroom approach are ten classroom practices:

- 1. Morning Meeting - gathering as a whole class each morning to greet one another, share news, and warm up for the day ahead*
- 2. Rule Creation - helping students create classroom rules to ensure an environment that allows all class members to meet their learning goals*
- 3. Interactive Modeling - teaching children to notice and internalize expected behaviors through a unique modeling technique*
- 4. Positive Teacher Language - using words and tone as a tool to promote children's active learning, sense of community, and self-discipline*
- 5. Logical Consequences - responding to misbehavior in a way that allows children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity*
- 6. Guided Discovery - introducing classroom materials using a format that encourages independence, creativity, and responsibility*
- 7. Academic Choice - increasing student learning by allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work*
- 8. Classroom Organization - setting up the physical room in ways that encourage students' independence, cooperation, and productivity*
- 9. Working with Families - creating avenues for hearing parents' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches*
- 10. Collaborative Problem Solving - using conferencing, role playing, and other strategies to resolve problems with students*

Schools implementing the Responsive Classroom approach schoolwide typically adopt the following practices:

- Aligning policies and procedures with Responsive Classroom philosophy - making sure everything from the lunch routine to the discipline policy enhances the self-management skills that children are learning through the Responsive Classroom approach;*
- Allocating resources to support Responsive Classroom implementation - using time, money, space, and personnel to support staff in learning and using the Responsive Classroom approach;*

- *Planning all-school activities to build a sense of community - giving all of the school's children and staff opportunities to learn about and from each other through activities such as all-school meetings, cross-age recess or lunch, buddy classrooms, and cross-age book clubs;*
- *Welcoming families and the community as partners - involving family and community members in the children's education by maintaining two-way communication, inviting parents and others to visit and volunteer, and offering family activities;*
- *Organizing the physical environment to set a tone of learning - making sure, for example, that schoolwide rules are posted prominently, displays emphasize student work, and all school spaces are welcoming, clean, and orderly.*

These practices are supported by all and benefit all the layers of our organization, including most importantly, our learners.

Differentiated Instruction: English Language Arts

As you know, the ELA committee chose the Macmillan McGraw-Hill (2009) *Treasures* program for adoption by the District. The decision was unanimous and made after many weeks of hard work and analysis on the part of committee members and their respective school teams. Every school, grade, and program was represented on the selection committee. There are many reasons for the selection of *Treasures*, but below are a few features that stood out for the reviewers.

1. Though all of the programs reviewed are research-based and aligned with state standards, the members believed *Treasures* to be the most supportive of our efforts in differentiated instruction and inclusion, with differentiation built into everything including practice books. All the pieces fit together especially well in comparison to other programs. The leveled readers have the same theme, the same vocabulary, and the same comprehension skills for the approaching, on, below grade level students. The differentiation looks invisible to the students, but it was easy for the teacher to see what was for whole group and what was for small group, and how it all worked together. *Triumphs*, the intervention component for those students who need intensive, specialized instruction stays connected to the core program in the classroom, allowing for easy flow between classroom and pullout instruction. The English language learner component aligns with sheltered immersion practices.
2. The student anthology represents a wide array of genre and a generous amount of non-fiction.
3. Test preparation strategies, research, and computer skills are integrated into the program.
4. Assessment options are varied and should merge well with current practices.
5. The writing, grammar, and spelling components are strong, and we expect a good fit with Collins Writing.
6. The technology components and on-line resources are well-designed and user-friendly.
7. Teachers and students will receive CDs with everything that they could possibly need on them. There are also excellent web based activities.

One after-school general overview on the program was provided on June 4, 2008. All elementary teachers of reading participated in the session. The October 10th Inservice Day will be dedicated to the training all staff on the materials. The fact that by then they will have had a month to become thoroughly acquainted with the components will help ensure that they get maximum benefit from the October training.

Differentiated Instruction: Assessment

By all accounts, the course on *Assessment in a Differentiated Instruction Environment* resulted in significant growth and deepening of understanding of the purposes of assessment of learning,

identifying the characteristics and elements of sound assessment strategies and programs, exploring a range of assessment tools, and using assessment data to improve teaching and learning. Teachers came to understand how to balance data gathering and analysis with data sharing with student, family, colleagues, district and the public. Twenty-five special and regular educators took the course, and were enthusiastic about its impact on their ideas. This content is important as it addresses our difficulties with grading diverse learners. We plan to offer a similar course for additional staff next year.

Differentiated Instruction: Gifted and Talented Education through Schoolwide Enrichment

This year we expanded the knowledge base among key staff on methods of identifying, understanding, and meeting the needs of advanced/gifted students by taking an online college level course through the University of Connecticut Center for Gifted and Talented Education. Participants learned about and experimented with implementing a classroom-based or school-based enrichment and talent development program. This effort was supported by a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and was sought in response to our needs related to our ambitious district wide goal promoting the concept and practice of differentiated instruction within the entire comprehensive education program. Participants and other stakeholders such as parents formed a planning committee to make recommendations for policy and for moving forward in our efforts during the 2008-9 school year. Below are some highlights of outcomes and learning from the project:

1. On our first day back next year (August 25th) Dr. Joseph Renzulli, a widely known researcher in gifted education will speak to us about gifted and talented pedagogy as effective pedagogy for all learners. I believe that his talk will help everyone understand that a school focused upon talent development results in total school improvement.
2. The elementary school schedule next year has the potential to allow for the related arts teachers to plan and experiment with some enrichment activities.
3. Through state funding we should begin the process of supporting teachers with access to The Renzulli Learning Differentiation EngineTM, which puts students in touch with engaging, individualized resources specially chosen for their interest areas and learning styles. These efforts might begin with science and information specialists at the elementary level.
4. The best identification practices allow for flexibility and student interests and involve ability, task commitment, and creativity.

Differentiated Instruction: Mathematics

As part of a response to intervention framework, we plan to build access to the *FASTT Math* intervention program, which uses the research-validated FASTT system (Fluency and Automaticity through Systematic Teaching with Technology) to help math delayed students develop fluency with basic math facts. The technology component of *FASTT Math* automatically differentiates instruction based on each student's individual fluency levels in customized, 10-minute daily sessions. The *FASTT Math* approach has been validated over several years of research with both non-struggling and struggling students. In the study, math delayed students who used the *FASTT Math* approach increased their fluency by more than 70%. We are anxious to benefit from the instantaneous progress monitoring, comprehensive reports, and a simple implementation model. Special Educators and others will be trained in the system next year.

Student/Teacher Assistance Team Training

A refined and improved vision for a comprehensive approach to early intervention continues to be built 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 trainings, tune-ups and on-site consultations emphasize system and procedural development, referral and action planning, expansion of assistance activities and strategies, and evaluation. Implementation of the model formalizes an easily accessible, visible helping system within each school that promotes success for all students. Next year, I expect that this model will continue to be refined.

Elementary Related Arts Schedule

Historically we have had challenges related to providing collaborative planning time, structuring for enrichment/support services, and responding to a variety of other issues. I am extremely pleased to announce that after a collaborative process where goals, issues, and options were respectfully discussed, elementary principals, related arts teachers, and lead teachers, achieved consensus to adopt a related arts schedule that allows for daily common grade level and related arts planning time as well as an enrichment block, with possibilities for smoother band, chorus, and other activities. The process allowed us to collect and respond to many great ideas from the most knowledgeable people, and the long-awaited result will be an excellent solution for many of our efforts to support collegiality and professional learning communities. Within the new schedule, there is even the potential to allow for Schoolwide Enrichment Model and Talent Pool activities to emerge. Though staffing resources remain similar in this new schedule, the main difference is the use of the elementary science specialist position to meet with students twice a week rather than once. This improvement is particularly timely since so many teachers will be implementing a new reading and language arts program. The opportunity to collaborate and share with one another will be a wonderful support for quality implementation.

Statewide Poster Contest Winner

After reading this lengthy report, it seems that a visually aesthetic reward is in order for the reader. I am most pleased to conclude this report by sharing with you Zoe Theocles' (Grade 5, Memorial School) entry to the Arbor Day Foundation. She won first prize for Massachusetts in the National Arbor Day Poster Contest. Her thoughtfulness and creativity are apparent in this submission. I like how she referenced "possibilities." I am sure there are many exciting possibilities in her future. Congratulations to Zoe and her art teacher, Mrs. Pederzani.

