

## **Curriculum and Instruction: Grades PreK-5**

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Board of Education Report – December 2015

### **Literacy Language Arts Update:**

All teachers have implemented Reading Workshop with enthusiasm as they continue to receive support through monthly curriculum meetings and Literacy Lab demonstration lessons. The curriculum and all materials are accessible to teachers via Google Drive and the websites their Literacy Specialists – Dr. Duffy, Mrs. Gilman, and Ms. McGovern - have created.

Teachers in Kindergarten, First, & Second Grade report greater facility with the management of materials and the execution of complex lessons in Foundations as they enter their second year with this program. Third, Fourth, & Fifth Grade teachers have begun their second year of teaching Benchmark Word Study. The program closely connects with the vocabulary of our science and social studies curriculum. Teachers at these grade levels report that students are excited about the vocabulary knowledge they are learning and the crossover connections they are recognizing. Both programs lay the groundwork for literacy development by improving student vocabulary and the ability to determine the meaning of new words.

Literacy Lab demonstration lessons are provided at each grade level and in each building; teachers rotate as host classrooms and have the opportunity to observe and confer with the Literacy Specialists about the lessons they present. Teachers gather together within their grade level teams to observe and practice literacy strategies in this supported environment. Reflection time is provided immediately following the lesson to enrich the professional dialogue regarding best practices. This structure has been a crucial piece as we look to increase fidelity and the understanding of the Workshop philosophy.

The Writers' Workshop pilot is proving to be a benefit beyond the initial expectations of the teachers in terms of student progress and the lessons themselves. The selection of a single teacher at each grade level for the pilot affords closer collaboration and a stronger curricular feedback loop. Weekly visits and demonstration lessons allow more time for conferring and fine tuning of the Units of Study. Pilot teachers are seeing essential skill connections between Readers' and Writers' Workshop Units of Study. They are also observing increased confidence in their students. These youngsters are viewing themselves as authors and are using the scholarly language of writers.

Initial PARCC results show Woodbury students in Grade 3 (current fourth graders) met the State average in Literacy. This is significant because these are the students who have had the most exposure to our ELA curricular changes and the Common Core. If this is not a one-year aberration but rather a harbinger of things to come, this is incredibly positive news. Time will tell, but we should be encouraged with the results so far and continue to closely monitor for emerging trends.

## **Mathematics Update:**

Over the past few years massive changes have occurred in education due to not only the implementation of the Common Core and the PARCC but also due to research about math education. In response, the District took a positive first step by adopting the *Go Math* textbook series which was one of the first to be written to the Common Core. This past summer, multiple teachers at various grade levels and our Academic Coach for Mathematics, Mrs. Realley helped Woodbury take an important next step.

Striving to provide a more engaging yet thought provoking curriculum that placed the cognitive burden of learning squarely on the students' shoulders, this hard-working group codified a number of emerging best practices with the structural backbone of the Common Core Standards to forge a new curriculum. Teaching strategies such as Number Talks and Three-Act Lessons are embedded throughout the new curriculum to ensure students are thinking critically and practicing complex problem solving. A stronger emphasis is being placed on the eight mathematical practices accompanying the Common Core along with the standards. Three-Act Lessons, for instance, take the process of mathematical modeling and turn it into a narrative. First, an intriguing question is translated into mathematical symbols; then, those symbols are manipulated to produce some result. Finally, the results are used to help us better understand our world. Students are drawn into the problem in a visceral way and are eager to solve them.

At the elementary level, we are taking a cautious, slow approach to the roll out of this curriculum. If they so desire, all teachers can use the curriculum this year. From full-implementation to itinerant dabbling, teachers can do what is comfortable for them; however, they are not required to do anything new. Next year, one teacher from each grade level and at each of the schools, will be asked to formally pilot this approach. Working closely with Mrs. Realley, they will examine each piece of the curriculum, discuss strategies that work in their classrooms, adapt techniques when necessary, and provide crucial feedback to have the best possible curriculum.

Early feedback from teachers has been overwhelmingly positive. They report particular satisfaction with the degree to which students transfer skills from one activity to another. Students are starting to think mathematically rather than simply regurgitating a numerical fact or process. Next year's formal pilot will be quite interesting.

One additional new development in mathematics this year is the supplemental resource *ST Math*. *ST Math* is game-based instructional software designed to boost math comprehension and proficiency through visual learning. Learning math without words, students move through Common Core aligned curriculum at their own individualized pace. Students who heretofore have not liked the subject are excited enough about mathematics to want to work on the program at home! Participating teachers devote 60 – 90 minutes a week for students to interact with the software. Again, we will closely monitor student achievement results for future recommendations.

### **Technology Update:**

Over the summer, teachers were able to partake in a number of technology related professional development sessions led by our Academic Coach for Technology, Sarah Campbell. Blended Learning, 'Appy' Hour, Google Sites, and Genius Hour were topical choices offered to interested educators. These learning opportunities have continued for two of these strands into this school year – Blended Learning and Genius Hour.

Two small cohorts of three to four teachers are piloting these approaches to education. Blended Learning seeks to maximize the leverage our 1-to-1 Chromebook initiative can bring to bear on the differentiation and personalization of our instruction. This cohort of teachers recently visited an elementary school in Newark, New Jersey that has been recognized by the State for their progressive work in this area. Mrs. Campbell reports that these teachers came back brimming with ideas that they could use in their classrooms. Genius Hour is a passion-based learning approach that is based upon Google's corporate idea of 20% time. Essentially, Google provides its employees with one day a week to pursue projects that are of particular interest to them; famous products such as Gmail came out of this work. Different schools across the country have retrofitted the idea for educational purposes. Here in Woodbury, a few pilot teachers are giving their students time to read, research, create, tinker, and think about a big idea that excites them. Students come up with the ideas, figure out ways to possibly address the problem, and then present their ideas to their teacher. Needless to say, student enthusiasm for Genius Hour is incredibly high.

### **ESL Update:**

The elementary schools have benefitted from the expansion of the ESL program. Teachers are now consistently working with Preschool students every week (about 3 days per week for 40 minutes). In addition, ESL teacher-student contact time has increased to 40 minutes for each student every day. Teachers are even able to push into some classrooms; this is particularly beneficial for more advanced ELLs who might need guidance in their regular classroom or for ELLs in self-contained rooms who might be uncomfortable leaving their safe environment for a pull-out model. Tertiary benefits of the change also include the ability to provide interpreting services for secretaries, teachers, and parents more often. This was helpful in transitioning our youngest students to school and easing parental concerns. A process of document translation of important school forms was begun because of the change as well.

At Woodbury Junior-Senior High School, the ESL teacher has been able to maintain her traditional schedule of ESL classes in first and second periods, but she can now push in to Geometry, Algebra I, History and Biology classes during periods three thru five. Students have higher averages in classwork, homework, and other assessments. Consultation with teachers has increased in frequency and quality. Finally, with the addition of Chromebooks (1-to-1), every ESL student has already increased their computer literacy beyond what it has been in the past, and it's only November!

### **Professional Development Update:**

Woodbury staff members have been afforded professional development in a number of diverse areas so far this year: Readers' Workshop, Writers' Workshop, new math curriculum, Teaching Strategies Gold, Foundations, Handwriting Without Tears, Standards-Based Report Cards on Powerschool, and ST Math. Moreover, a large piece of our professional development pie is the concept of Herd Hours. These differentiated opportunities for staff allow them to pick and choose topics that most interest them. Staff design the workshops, present the information, and decide where and when to watch/present them. Since topics are developed from the ground up, they are more focused and timely. This approach is widely appreciated and valued. The trainings so far this year included:

10/1/2015	Training for EpiPen Delegates @ West End
10/1/2015	Training for EpiPen Delegates @ Walnut
10/1/2015	Training for EpiPen Delegates @ Evergreen
10/1/2015	Discovery Education
10/1/2015	Storia School Edition
10/8/2015	SmartBoards
10/15/2015	Becoming a Google Master
10/15/2015	Discussing Updated Math Curriculum
10/26/2015	Benchmark Universe Website
10/26/2015	Introducing/ Reviewing How to Use PowerSchool Gradebook
11/9/2015	ST Math in the Classroom
11/12/2015	PowerSchool and Standards Based Report Cards
11/12/2015	Working With ESL Students in Your Classroom
11/12/2015	Diabetes
11/12/2015	AVID: Critical Thinking
11/19/2015	Math Assessment Writing
12/3/2015	Google Classroom
12/3/2015	Working With Paraprofessionals in Your Classroom
12/3/2015	Reviewing Report Cards on PowerSchool
12/7/2015	Becoming a Google Master – Part 2

\*Peer to Peer observation program is also being utilized as Herd Hour opportunity.

Finally, a "Do It Yourself" component to our professional development menu has been added for teachers who need more specific instruction. These teachers propose a learning opportunity as a replacement for district sponsored ones that would be more meaningful for their specific role. Following the training, they submit a reflection summary detailing their experiences.

### **Parent University Update:**

This year's Parent University meeting was held on November 17 in the library at West End for parents of students in grades K-5 district-wide. Coaches, Literacy Specialists, and I presented topics that spanned our entire curriculum. We were able to answer questions that parents had and glean suggestions for areas of renewed emphasis.

### **Mentoring Update:**

Mentors and mentees have met both formally and informally. Both groups have been introduced to the mentoring process and were given copies of the district plan. Any concerns were discussed and suggestions were given to improve these relationships. Each group will complete a monthly log that details the time and topic of their discussions.

The pairings this year are as follows:

#### **New Staff / Mentor**

Chandni Bhatia / Diane Denny

Marilyn Davidson / Wendy Romano

Gina Garrison / Kylie Pringle

Gabriella Gentilello / Maria Gassner

Ashley Jentsch / Susan Kudless

Brandi Kinmouth / Jake Lessman

Rachel Martin / Trinna Savage

Dana Nattress / Dana Frazier

Maria Phillips / Linda Brewer

Elisa Zaccone / Lauren Stankiewicz

Jessica Parto / Mark Grundel (completing mentoring that began last year @ HS level)

Angelena Pellegrino / Noelle Baskinger (completing mentoring that began last year)

Kristina Giles / Susan Kudless (completing mentoring that began last year)