

District Highlights

Newtown Public Schools

April 2020



Superintendent Update

Dr. Rodrigue is available both by email and phone for any questions or concerns regarding the district, budget or otherwise.

Phone:
203-426-7600

Email:
rodrigue@newtown.k12.ct.us

You can also follow her on
twitter:
[@RodrigueLorrie](https://twitter.com/RodrigueLorrie)

Welcome to a new year and a new look. The Board of Education Communications Sub-Committee is looking forward to bringing the community new quarterly newsletters that highlight various programs and initiatives that the district is bringing to the students of the Newtown Public Schools. The idea is that each newsletter will bring articles and spotlights that follow a theme for that quarter.

For our first newsletter we want to bring you overall highlights from our district as we move through the annual budget process for the 2020-2021 school year. We realize that this season has become a bit chaotic and the budget process has been turned on it's head, but these are still highlights that we want to share with you and hope you will take the time to read about.

- The NBoE Communications Sub-Committee

Technology

As of the 2020 – 2021 school year, the implementation of a “One Device per Student” policy is well underway. This policy was motivated due to the on-going integration of computer technology throughout all facets of our lives including arts and entertainment, manufacturing, and business/medical/financial services. As such, the district believes that computer literacy is a core part of education and a key component to the success of our students after they graduate. The emphasis, though, is that computing devices are tools that supplement learning, not replacements for it.

The “One Device per Student” policy calls for age-appropriate implementation across our schools. In our elementary schools, grades 2 through 4 have devices available to students on Chromebook carts that are movable and, therefore, can follow the students outside the classroom when specials and other instruction benefit from the use of the devices. Our intermediate and middle schools provide devices to students within the school setting for individual use. In high school, freshmen will be provided with a dedicated Chromebook that they will use throughout the school day and take home with them afterwards. These dedicated devices will be used by the students until they graduate. As of the 2023-2024 school year, every high school student will have a dedicated device.

Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) Program

In the 2015-2016 school year we introduced Spanish language into the Kindergarten classrooms in all four public elementary schools as a pilot program. From the outset the plan was to expand the program one grade at a time as the students moved through the elementary and intermediate schools. Currently, Spanish is being taught in all four public elementary schools in grades K-4.

Led by Marianne Grenier, the Spanish teachers join the classroom for 30 minutes per week and teach the students in their most familiar learning environment. Our curriculum was adopted from a similar program developed by Southington Public Schools so that we could benefit from their experience.

In 2020-2021 the Newtown School District will be extending the program to both 5th and 6th graders at Reed Intermediate School. This addition will mean that the district will now offer a foreign language program in all grades, connecting to the existing 7-12 program. The 5th grade curriculum will be a natural extension of the existing K-4 program for those students who started with the FLES program in 2015. In 6th grade, students will be given an exploratory course that will introduce them to a sampling of both Spanish and French language and culture, providing them with a foundation that they can use when selecting a language to pursue through middle and high school. For K-4 students, a new schedule at the elementary schools will be implemented and Spanish will be given it's own devoted time slot like other specials.

Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)

In 2015, the Connecticut State Board of Education adopted a new set of standards for science education called the [Next Generation Science Standards](#) (NGSS), developed by a cross-state consortium that included experts in science, engineering, and cognitive science as well as experts in K-12 educational instruction. The effort was initiated, in part, because current understanding of both science and how students learn science has evolved over the last 15 years, when the prior standards for K-12 science education were developed. The new standards are not intended to dictate curriculum. Rather, they are intended to help guide school districts in the development of their own robust science curriculum. All Connecticut public school districts are expected to prepare and provide such curriculum, in preparation for the changeover of the State science tests that began in 2019.

The emphasis of the standards is for districts to develop curriculum that directs students to explore the natural phenomena that occurs in the world around them as opposed to having educators explain science simply as a set of facts and relationships for students to memorize. Students are encouraged to learn to reason both individually (critical thought) and collaboratively (communication skills), more in line with how scientists in the field work. In addition, the science curriculum is encouraged to be more tightly integrated with both Mathematics and English Language Arts education than previously taught.

Over the last three years, teachers from all grade levels have attended workshops offered by the State of Connecticut to deepen their knowledge of NGSS and the instructional shift associated with it. Ongoing revisions of the district's K-12 science curriculum to align with the standards are underway. For example, teachers in grades 5 through 8 are piloting NGSS-related resources. In addition, a district-wide team of teachers participated in professional development offered last summer through the Connecticut Science Center and the district is continuing its relationship with the center to provide training for high school teachers on instructional strategies that best support the implementation and instruction of the revised curriculum. The district is also reviewing the schedule at elementary schools to ensure that there is ample time for science instruction across all grade levels.

Supportive Alternative Individualized Learning (SAIL) Program

The Supportive Alternative Individualized Learning (SAIL) program provides a supportive learning environment that is safe and respectful so that students are able to engage academically, build relationships, and achieve personal success. The program was started at Newtown High School in 2017 to support students who have not been successful in traditional school settings due to social, emotional and behavioral needs or who need enhanced academic support in a setting with a smaller student to teacher ratio. Students experiencing these problems often avoid attending classes or refuse to attend school altogether.

At the Board of Education meeting held on January 28th, 2020, Dr. Rodrigue informed the board that there were similar concerns occurring among some students in Newtown Middle School, especially related to class and school avoidance. While there had been talks about creating a similar program on a regional level administered by EdAdvance (Western Connecticut's Regional Educational Service Center) to address these needs, that plan has fallen through at this time. After discussing what would be required to expand the program to the Middle School, the board unanimously approved the expansion of the program. In addition to extending the SAIL program to the middle school, the board approved adding a health and wellness component to the program at both the high school and middle school levels.

This program allows students the chance to get a complete education within the program when necessary, without the need for outplacement that will take them away from their classmates and familiar staff. However, students are encouraged to participate in traditional classes when they feel comfortable enough to do so. The end goal of the program is to provide pathway back into a traditional learning environment when a student reaches that level of comfort.



Contact the Newtown Board of Education by email: newtownboe@newtown.k12.ct.us

Check the town meeting calendar: <https://tinyurl.com/yaryeaj6>

View town board meeting videos: <https://tinyurl.com/y99wats2>

Look over the Superintendent's 2020-2021 Budget Presentation: <https://tinyurl.com/wrca8u7>

Review the Board of Education Adopted Budget for 2020-2021: <https://tinyurl.com/u2hu8ng>

Access BOE Agenda and Minutes: <https://tinyurl.com/r5uw2cz>

Find BOE Budget Information including the Budget Calendar: <https://tinyurl.com/wrheslj>

Teaching and Learning Website: <http://tinyurl.com/y4v33fn2>