

Newtown Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut
Education and Instruction Subcommittee

Minutes from the Board of Education Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee held on Tuesday, March 9, 2021.

M. Ku A. Uberti E. Holst-Grubbe C. Crooke
J. Vouros K. Longobucco S. George

Also present Board of Education member Deborra Zukowski.

J. Vouros called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m.
J. Vouros moved to approve the minutes from 2/23/2021.
M. Ku seconded the motion.

Public Participation: None

Presentation of Applied Robotics Technology – S. George, E. Holst-Grubbe, K. Longobucco

S. George shared that Applied Robotics was developed out of the Power Tech II course. Students wanted to take Power Tech II for the Robotics portion. Robotics then began as a club, meeting once a week for an hour. After entering the first robotics competition, it became clear that more time was needed to be successful. And so the decision was made to develop a robotics class that would provide the needed time.

The course consists of three units: Interconnection of Machines, Controlling Machines and Designing Machines to Solve Problems. Students can take the course more than one time in order to compete in the robotics competitions. The work for those students builds on the knowledge from the first three units and is represented by a fourth unit, Evolution of Machinery, that is ongoing throughout the course.

E. Holst-Grubbe described the first competition as a learning experience. The team was not as prepared as the other schools. However, it was still a good experience because they learned what they need to do for the next one. The students are motivated to work towards the next competition.

M. Ku asked whether students taking the class the first time are taking the same class as students who are repeating. S. George answered yes. There are tables set up for first year students and those students are also supported and learn from the repeating students.

J. Vouros what does your course load look like? E. Holst-Grubbe shared that the numbers were low this year and they only ran one section. He is hopeful to increase the numbers next year. The school newspaper is running an article about the robotics class that he hopes will increase awareness and interest.

J. Vouros suggested that it also be introduced to the eighth graders during the high school presentation. E. Holst-Grubbe stated that there is a slide presentation that will be shown to the middle school students.

Presentation of Accounting 1 – C. Crooke, K. Longobucco

Prior to Chelsea joining the staff at NHS, accounting had not been running. As advisor of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), she felt redesigning and updating the Accounting curriculum to make it more engaging was important. It is a business elective course that covers the entire accounting reporting cycle, introduces students to various careers in the accounting field and prepares students for Accounting II. There are four units: Understanding Accounts and Process of Journalizing; Ledgers, Cash Control Systems and Worksheets; Financial Statements and Closing Accounts; Exploring the Accounting Career Field.

M. Ku asked what is Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA)? C. Crooke responded that it is a national business club that offers an annual state competition based on different aspects of business. J. Vouros asked about “Personal Finance”. C. Crooke explained that personal finance is a graduation requirement that gets into managing finances on a personal level. That covers topics like filing taxes, IRA, checking accounts, and credit. It is very different from accounting.

K. Longobucco noted that C. Crooke has single-handedly grown the accounting program to the point where 2 sections of Accounting I and II are now running.

Newtown Middle School New Course Update – A. Uberti

T. Einhorn and J. Ross have collaborated with A. Uberti and F. Purcaro to develop 5 worthy and appealing options to present to our incoming 7 and 8 graders for next year’s new electives. A survey will go out to our current grade 6 and grade 7 students in the next few weeks to get feedback from the students and will include music and world language selections.

The choices that will be presented to students are Kitchen Science, Project Adventure and Beyond, Pathways to Success, Democracy in Action, and Money, Sports, Games & Mathematics.

Once the survey is finalized the selection will be made so that we can look at the appropriate certifications to teach the courses and then create postings for the positions. These will likely be internal postings to offset some of the reductions to staff at the middle school.

J. Vouros thanked A. Uberti and the team for offering these courses. Is there a way to present this to the grade 6 students in person to explain to the students what these courses are?

A. Uberti stated that was a good suggestion and she would speak with M. Correia and T. Einhorn to include that in the presentation with music choices and world language.

J. Vouros stated students could take the survey right after the presentation.

M. Ku inquired whether students would have the opportunity to take Project Adventure if they did not elect to take it.

A. Uberti explained that all students would participate in the two courses that are chosen. They are not true electives.

Review Changes to Advanced Math Placement – A. Uberti

Changes will need to be made to the placement criteria for advanced math. This impacts Reed to a greater degree than the middle school. Some of that data that had been used previously is not available due to the impact of the closure last spring; some of it is not reliable due to inconsistent testing environment. In addition, the incoming fourth grades are currently participating in three different math programs that have different levels of rigor and different assessments making it difficult to use those as a point of comparison. Reed will use the spring NWEA score as well as look at trend data over time, the non-verbal OLSAT score from 2019, and the results of a performance task that will be given to fourth graders in the spring. Fourth grade students will be recommended to take a curriculum-based assessment based on a qualifying composite score from those data points. However, parents may request that their child participate in the test if they disagree with our recommendation. The curriculum-based assessment will test mastery of fourth grade standards and select fifth grade standards. Parents will receive a letter notifying them of their child's status throughout the process. Then the determination will be made on that result.

Placement criteria for 6th, 7th and 8th grade placements will also be tweaked as there are fewer NWEA scores to consider and no Smarter Balanced from last year. A. Uberti will be meeting with Reed and NMS math leaders and administrators to finalize.

M. Ku asked if the OLSAT will continue to be used.

A. Uberti explained that they will be used for determining placement for this year's incoming 5th grade. Only the non-verbal score is used because it is considered an indicator of math aptitude. However this year's OLSAT scores were significantly off from typical years. There are plans for retesting and these scores will likely be used.

Assistant Superintendent Update – A. Uberti

A. Uberti plans to move C & I meetings back to in person after April break.

Anne Uberti answered questions presented by BoE member Deb Zukowski.

How are electives at NHS determined?

Electives were originally designed to offer students courses other than requirements to allow them to explore special interests, some talents that they might have or something they might want to pursue in college.

Over time, electives change. There is not a "master plan" behind electives. They change based on current events, popular culture, a club, teacher-proposed courses, or student-proposed new courses, for example. All electives are offered every year but they only run if there is enough interest and interest also determines how many sections run.

When a revised curriculum is brought to C & I and the BoE, what has changed?

Much of the curriculum coming through now is, to a certain degree, reflective of catching up on curriculum that may have been written or partially written but never reviewed or put through the approval process. Some are rewrites from an older format into the concept-based format. In those cases, the curriculum may have already been implemented. Some courses, such as the two presented today, are new courses. So it varies as to what impact a new curriculum is having on instruction in the present time.

Public Participation: None

J. Vouros adjourned the meeting at 12:09 p.m.

M. Ku seconded the motion

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Norling

THESE ARE DRAFT MINUTES AND ARE SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE