

# District Highlights

Newtown Public Schools

Curriculum is the framework to teaching and learning in any school district. It outlines for staff what students should be learning in a given subject area or class, and helps keep consistency both vertically and horizontally across school buildings and grade levels. The process of developing and maintaining curriculum is one of the most important jobs in the district and approving it is one of a Board members most important tasks.

In this newsletter, we begin with Dr. Rodrigue giving us a high level look at curriculum in the Newtown Public Schools. Then we look at assessments, how curriculum is developed and the resources available to staff to implement curriculum after it has been created or revised. Then we wrap up with two Closer Looks with Anne Uberti and Frank Purcaro who are in charge of curriculum in our district.

Daniel Cruson Jr.  
BoE Communications Subcommittee

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## **Board of Education Communications Sub-Committee**

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*At Our Core*

## **Building A Dynamic and Responsive Curriculum**

By Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue

Building a strong foundation for teaching and learning starts with developing and making investments and improvements in district curriculum. Ken Robinson, a renowned speaker and author on education, noted “School systems should base their curriculum not on the idea of separate subjects, but on the much more fertile idea of disciplines...and making possible a fluid and dynamic curriculum.” Newtown staff and leaders have embraced a concept-based model that is driven largely by “big ideas,” giving students opportunities to transfer their knowledge, sharpen their skills, and deepen their understanding across a variety of contexts. Over the last several years, we have made positive strides in creating curriculum documents that are relevant, culturally-responsive, and help students make meaningful connections to the world in which they live.

Today’s students have greater and more immediate access to facts and information from a range of topics. Our students expect educational content to reflect current events, life experiences, and cultural language to use as frames of reference for personal meaning-making. Lynn H. Erikson, leading theorist of concept-based learning, stated: “Curriculum that is relevant to issues surrounding the human condition and our world challenges the intellect and engages the spirit.” Newtown educators have always understood

curriculum as a fundamental guide that supports classroom instruction - fostering students' appreciation for diverse perspectives, inspiring critical thinking, and nurturing respectful dialogue and healthy debate in order to build better relationships.

Cultivating a rich array of relevant and culturally-responsive learning experiences is not new. As a language arts teacher in Newtown early in my career, I went through a rigorous certification process through National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). One priority throughout this year-long portfolio evaluation was to ensure classroom instruction met the academic and cultural needs of my students. This included the deliberate decisions I made around selection of texts and resources so that students would be exposed to a variety of ideas to enhance their understanding and widen their world view. Small and large group discourse did not focus on the necessity of a "right or wrong" answer but on the authentic exchange of ideas from a diverse group of student perspectives. That was back in 1996.

Now with the advent of technology, where students are able to call upon primary sources and facts with greater ease, our curriculum reflects teachers' efforts to complement, contemporize, and conceptualize learning activities. Making improvements to our curriculum means working collaboratively to reflect on what is relevant, what is valued, and what voices we want to integrate into students' learning. Whether it is selecting texts in language arts at the high school level, or finding primary resources for use in elementary social studies, the ongoing revision of curriculum across grade levels and subject areas is a critical aspect of enhancing the academic journey for our students.

Our internal review process begins with staff through a formal committee review, and curriculum products are then presented to members of the Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) subcommittee of the Board of Education. In a December newsletter, Assistant Superintendent Anne Uberti recognized the importance of curriculum revision in providing the "...foundation for what should be taught, how it should be taught, the materials and resources to be used, and how learning should be assessed." Since 2019, the Board has reviewed and approved more than 25 different curricula K-12. Examples include Reading and Writing, grades 1 and 5, Project Adventure, grades 5 and 6, Western Studies, Pre-Calculus, Applied Robotics and Health I and II. As part of our proposed 2022-23 budget, funding for additional curriculum projects include Social Studies, grades 1 and 2, Science, grades 7 and 8, Linear Algebra, Travel and Tourism, and Theater Design, among others.

Curriculum in any subject should help students establish meaning from challenging content and transfer their understanding. For example, a science student should learn how the concept of "patterns" is important in their understanding of content in other subject areas, while a student learning Spanish brings a deeper, contextualized understanding of the language by studying Spanish culture across geographic settings. Even experiences we bring to students outside of the traditional classroom become part of a broader curriculum. Developed by staff members of our PEAC Partnership committee, students across the district will be given an opportunity to explore cultures during a month-long storytelling experience through literature, music, and the arts. The activities, resources, and assessments that make up a curriculum have a profound impact on our students long after they leave the classroom. While the curriculum development and revision process is often an arduous task for educators, it has the power to shape relevant, meaningful, and rich experiences for our students.

# Assessments

By Deborra Zukowski

To ensure that Newtown students are prepared for the next stage of their lives after graduation, the Newtown Public Schools has established a district-wide assessment program to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum along with classroom teaching and student learning. District wide assessments can be divided into two major categories: summative and diagnostic. These assessments, taken as a whole, provide information on current learning level and growth across time for a specific student, comparative learning across classrooms within a grade level, and alignment of learning from one grade to the next.

The goals for summative assessments are to measure how well students have learned once teaching the material has completed. Information gathered from summative assessments can be used for a number of purposes, including identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement in the curriculum and its delivery, targeting professional development for certain schools or grade levels, tracking student growth over time, making decisions about resource allocation, and measuring student performance against similar schools and districts. There are three main state-required summative assessments used by the district to track student progress towards achieving learning goals. The Smarter Balanced Summative provides assessments to gauge learning and skills in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics for grades 3-8. It is administered in the late spring. The district uses the PSAT and SAT, administered to high school sophomores and juniors, to provide information about ELA and Mathematics academic growth after the Smarter Balanced Summative. The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), developed in 2015 by a cross-state consortium, assesses the quality of the district's science curriculum and classroom instruction. It is administered near the end of the school year. (More information about the NGSS standards can be found on page 2 of our [April 2020 Newsletter](#).) These assessments provide "point-in-time" information about student learning as relative to expected standards. By comparing the data year-to-year and grade to grade within a given year, the district can better understand the effectiveness of its overall academic programs. The district can also gather information about continuity of learning as the students progress from one grade to the next.

The goals for diagnostic assessments are similar to summative but since the district's diagnostic testing is done three times a year, before, during and after learning takes place, they also provide more complete information on the effectiveness of the delivery of instruction, e.g., by tracking student growth as the lessons in a subject progress. In the aggregate, they help identify relative strengths and opportunities for improvement among classes teaching the same curriculum and can also shed light on the impact a new curriculum has on overall learning. The district uses i-Ready to gather diagnostic data in both ELA and Mathematics for students in grades 2-8, and some in grade 9 math. For more information regarding i-Ready, see slides 14-32 of this year's Student Performance Presentation to the Board of Education found in the [Student Performance Overview 2021 BOE Report](#). Data gathered from i-Ready can be used to identify students who may be in need of interventions and to group those with similar needs who might benefit from the same additional instruction. i-Ready also offers digital instruction that teachers can use, if desired, to augment class-wide instruction or to challenge those in need of enrichment. The i-Ready assessments take about 45 minutes per session and are administered in the fall, winter, and spring. There are other diagnostic assessments used for literacy instruction including DIBELS that offers, e.g., assessment of phonemic fluency and oral reading. Other assessments, such as the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessments contain some diagnostic elements as well as qualitative elements that take student motivation and interest into account in understanding students' overall reading comprehension and level.

While the summative and diagnostic assessments focus on collecting quantitative data, classroom

observations provide a means to gather data of a more qualitative nature. Once a month, per school, a team of three consisting of the School Principal, Assistant Superintendent, and Director of Teaching and Learning visit five to six classrooms to observe both teaching practices and the student learning environment. During the visits, the team looks for student engagement, collaboration, perseverance, and other skills crucial to learning. Some of the goals for this effort are to identify best practices that could be of use to other teachers, ensure consistency of instruction across schools, and ensure that the curriculum is being implemented in an effective manner. The “A Closer Look” with Frank Purcaro, below, provides even more detail into this important assessment.

There are other assessments that are more narrowly focused. For example, the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT) is administered in third grade and is used to screen for gifted and talented students. The LAS Links Placement tests are used to identify and place English language learners. And, special education has its own suite of assessments, tailored to the needs of the special education community. The assessments provide staff with the information needed to ensure that students get the help they need to learn and families with information about how well their students are learning. In aggregate and across time, the assessments inform efforts to continuously improve the curriculum and its implementation. In doing so, the district can keep up with an ever-changing world to ensure that its graduates are equipped with the tools needed to succeed.

*Thank you to Dr. Frank Purcaro for his help with this article. Our conversation was animated, enjoyable, and fully saturated with useful information about assessments and how they help our district’s teaching and learning efforts. And, the suggested edits were very much appreciated.*

## **The Curriculum Development Process**

By Dan Cruson Jr

Curriculum development and revision is a complex, multi-layered process that is tailored to match the unique needs of each district. In Newtown, we have a Curriculum Development Council comprised of teachers and administrators who are highly experienced in the process of working with curricula and are deeply involved in all aspects of the process. But how does exactly does a curriculum come into being, and how is it kept current and relevant?

New curricula primarily come from ideas that are brought forward by students, teachers or leaders in the district through the use of a new course request form. Once approved by the Board, all curricula are monitored as part of a revision cycle to ensure that they don’t become outdated. A specific curriculum will be reviewed approximately every five years unless an external factor causes it to need revision before that point. These external factors can include: a change in state or national standards, a review of outcomes from the teaching of the curriculum, current events, or recent scientific discoveries.

A curriculum development project, whether it is a new curriculum or a revision to an existing curriculum, starts with a request to the building principal. That principal then works with the Assistant Superintendent to prioritize the project for inclusion in an upcoming budget. Curriculum development is typically then undertaken by the teacher or teachers who teach the course. If it is just one teacher teaching the course, they will usually be paired with someone else in their department who is working on a similar project. There will also be a curriculum coach, who is someone with a deep understanding of the Concept-based Curriculum and Instructional model who can advise the team throughout the process to ensure the resulting curriculum document is in alignment with the expectations of the model. All of these individuals undertake their work outside of their normal workday and teaching duties, typically during the first two weeks following the end of the school year.

Once the team finishes their work, they communicate this to the Assistant Superintendent who schedules it for various reviews. The review process begins with the related district subject committee and then moves on to the Curriculum Development Council. Both of these groups provide written feedback to the curriculum development team for their consideration. The team takes the feedback and updates the curriculum documents before they move on to the Board of Education's Curriculum and Instruction subcommittee. At this point the subcommittee, made up of 2-3 members of the Board of Education along with the Assistant Superintendent, reviews the curriculum documents with the team. These subcommittee meetings are public and public input is welcomed during this review. When the subcommittee feels the documents are ready, they recommend the curriculum to the full Board of Education for review and approval. Usually, a curriculum will be on the agenda for the full Board for two meetings, the first has a formal presentation to present the curriculum and the scope of the work done while the second is a chance for deliberation and ultimately a vote on the curriculum's approval.

Curriculum development and revision is considered one of the most important jobs of the school district and the Board of Education. The above is a broad description of the process that is followed in Newtown, but the actual process is far more complex and ever changing than can easily be captured here. Just this year, the Curriculum Development Council has discussed changes to the existing process, including:

- A formalized rollout and training for new/revised curriculum
- Incorporating a pilot year for all new/revised curricula
- Use of surveys to collect specific feedback on first year curriculum implementation
- Development of tools and teacher training to ensure curriculum is culturally responsive

In the next article we will discuss the process of professional development and the part it plays in the implementation of a newly developed or revised curriculum.

## **Professional Development**

By Daniel Cruson Jr.

Professional development is a regular part of every educator's job. Throughout a school year there are many opportunities offered to the staff of Newtown Public Schools for professional development in a variety of areas. Some of these opportunities revolve around the implementation of curriculum that is new or recently revised.

If all teachers that will be implementing a curriculum are involved in the development process, then there isn't much more professional development needed after the curriculum is approved. However, in cases where there will be staff that aren't involved in the development process implementing a curriculum, more formal training is required. During the development process, prior to the approval of a curriculum by the Board of Education, the staff take part in discussions regarding the work in progress. Through those discussions staff have an opportunity to share what type of training would be beneficial to effectively implement the curriculum and the sessions can then be planned appropriately to ensure that everyone is comfortable and ready to work with the curriculum once it is approved.

The district has identified the process of professional development for new and revised curriculum as being an area that needs some improvement. This need has informed some of the recent work of the underway within the Curriculum Development Council (as discussed in the previous article). One possible solution that is supported by the Assistant Superintendent is the creation of a pilot period for new curriculum. During this period, staff can implement new curriculum while receiving ongoing training.

This pilot period would also allow for the collection of specific and formal feedback from the implementors of the curriculum, which could be used to inform revisions prior to formal approval of the curriculum by the Board of Education. Once that is done, further professional development can be considered and budgeted for prior to implementation of the approved curriculum.

Outside of professional development for the rollout of new curriculum, opportunities take a variety of forms. In some cases, staff will attend workshops or conferences on topics of specific interest that are relevant to the subject area or grade level they teach. One current example in the district is a cohort of K-4 teachers who are currently attending workshops pertaining to the “Science of Reading”. This is in preparation for anticipated changes being brought forward by the Connecticut State Department of Education. Attending the workshops was requested by the group of teachers and the district approved it.

In other instances, there is required professional development for entire grade levels or content departments. These are used in cases where it is important for all teachers to experience the professional learning necessary to successfully implement a new resource or program, such as with the recently introduced Bridges Math resource in grades K-5.

Finally, each month the school calendar allows for embedded professional development opportunities for teachers during three-hour professional learning community days. Often these days are used for teacher-led professional development sessions on topics related to curriculum, instruction, and assessments. There are also two full day professional development sessions per year, one in November and one in April. These days have been used to ensure the full K-12 staff engages in a shared professional development experience pertaining to a district-wide priority area.

As you can see, professional development takes a variety of forms throughout the district. It is not only an important part of the curriculum process, but also important to help staff keep up to date and ready to teach students on a daily basis.

*I would like to thank Anne Uberti and Frank Purcaro for taking the time to answer my questions about both the curriculum development process and professional development.*



# A Closer Look

with Anne Uberti, Assistant Superintendent

By Deborra Zukowski



## **Please give a brief history of your time with the Newtown Public School District.**

I joined the District in July of 2013 as the principal of Reed Intermediate School where I served for 6 years. During that time, I worked closely with our support staff to facilitate the transition of our most impacted students and families into Reed. I was also able to collaborate with our staff to develop a new schedule, something that had been a point of controversy prior to my arrival. Under my guidance, our leadership team brought much needed alignment and coherence to instruction. In July, 2019, I was honored to have been selected as the new Assistant Superintendent of Schools.

## **Since taking the lead in curriculum development and review, what programs have been initiated, modified, or expanded and why?**

One of the first things I did after becoming assistant superintendent was to revitalize the Curriculum Development Council. This group of dedicated teachers and administrators is committed to the development of quality curricula. The group then updated and revised the Curriculum Development Guide in order to help teachers and leaders have a better understanding of the curriculum writing process. I also worked to improve communication, training and support for teachers who write curriculum. During my first two years in this position, I was able to move 25 curricula to Board approval, despite the disruption of the pandemic. The majority of these projects were revisions of outdated curricula and represented almost every major subject area. In addition, several new courses have been developed including Project Adventure & Beyond for grades 5 through 8, Cooking with Science in grades 7 and 8 and Foundational Algebra I, II and III.

## **What programs have been retired and why?**

With the recent retirement of the teacher of Family and Consumer Sciences, the middle school team felt like it was a good time to update and enhance our program offering. A number of other courses were proposed to students and after voting, they selected “Kitchen Science”, a hands-on course that integrates cooking with grade level science concepts.

## **How are new curriculum initiatives identified?**

New curriculum initiatives come about in a variety of ways. Sometimes a change in state or national standards will dictate a revision. We also look at outcomes and make modifications based on need. Other times, ideas for new courses come from students, teachers or leaders. Anyone can propose a new course by completing a new course request form. Typically, a presentation is then made to the Curriculum and Instruction Sub-committee of the Board followed by a presentation to the full Board for approval.

## **How do we know that the current and new curriculum initiatives are working as designed? What are the mechanisms for staff and parent feedback?**

The first step in evaluating the effectiveness of a curriculum is for principals to monitor that it is being implemented as it was intended. That is typically done through classroom observations, teacher discussions, and data collection and reviews. In addition, Frank Purcaro, Director of Teaching and Learning, and I also lead walkthroughs with building leaders around sets of identified “look-fors” that can provide further insight. Recently, we have implemented a new curriculum feedback form that allows

teachers to provide anonymous feedback during a first year implementation of curriculum. Other avenues for feedback include conversations with students during walkthroughs, district data analysis, and district curriculum committee meetings. Parents are always encouraged to reach out to their child's teacher or principal with questions or concerns regarding the curriculum. Parents may view any of our formal curriculum on our website and they are also encouraged to attend Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee meetings that are open to members of the public.

**To date, is there a change you have made that you are particularly proud of?**

I would have to say that I am incredibly proud of the Return to School Instructional Plan that Frank Purcaro and I, along with our incredible technology team, developed in the summer of 2020 that allowed our teachers to return to their classrooms with everything they needed in place to teach our students. And I am even more proud of our teachers for meeting the challenge of teaching in a whole new way. While certainly not perfect or desired, I believe that our plan enabled instruction to continue and thereby mitigated even more learning loss. I am also extremely proud that we had a team of teachers willing to go forward with the K-5 math pilot during the 2020-2021 school year. Because of them, we were able to bring in a much improved program for all students this year. And lastly, I am very proud of redefining Project Adventure (along with a very talented team of teachers and paraprofessionals) as the foundation for social and emotional learning for our 5-8 students.

**How can parents learn more about the curriculum taught to their children?**

All of Newtown Public School's curriculum documents are available on our website and can be accessed using this link. We are currently working on updating our curriculum page to include other related and useful information.

**What responsibilities, other than curriculum, do you also hold?**

There are very few things in a school system that do not connect to curriculum and instruction. Because of this, there are many, many routine responsibilities. In addition to managing the entire curriculum writing and approval process, I also co-facilitate all of the K-12 District Committees, which include English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Digital Literacy and Technology, and Curriculum Development Council. I manage the planning of all professional development and training for administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals. I oversee the teacher evaluation process and I am responsible for evaluating some of our administrators. I provide oversight to our Teacher Education And Mentoring (TEAM) program, as well as our New Staff weeklong summer orientation. I am responsible for the secure administration of all district assessments including state-mandated assessments and many other required state reports related to instruction. I also serve as the District's Title IX, VI, VII, ADA and 504 Coordinator which requires me to investigate complaints related to those acts/laws. I am a regular attendee at our local Regional Educational Service Center's monthly meeting of area assistant superintendents which allows me to remain informed on happenings in neighboring districts. I work closely as a mentor and advisor to our leadership team. I collaborate with Superintendent Rodrigue and other key central office staff on a variety of projects including development of our budget. It's also crucial for me to find time for my own professional growth and development so that I can remain informed on best practices in curriculum, instruction and assessment.

In any given year, there is invariably a new project that demands time and attention. This past year, I co-facilitated the hiring process of our new Coordinator of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Currently, I am deeply invested in training our school leadership teams in the use of a new data management platform called EduClimber. I am also supporting several first year pilots and/or curriculum implementations - a new district assessment platform called i-Ready, a new 5th and 6th grade social studies curriculum and Bridges Math K-5.



# A Closer Look

with Frank Purcaro, Director of Teaching and Learning

By Deborra Zukowski

## **Please give a brief history of your background and time with the Newtown Public School District.**

This is my twenty-third year in public education and through that time period I served in a variety of roles with a host of experiences that I draw from while performing my duties here in Newtown as the Director of Teaching and Learning. This includes over ten years as a classroom teacher and high school department chair, assistant principal, time spent as a Director of Curriculum and Professional Development, Director of Teaching and Learning, and as an Assistant Superintendent. I am now in my third year as the Director of Teaching and Learning for Newtown and I am thrilled to be part of such a



supportive learning community. Although improving and enhancing teaching and learning in the district has been the consistent goal, each of my three years has been distinctly different thus far. Year one was filled with those tasks needed to become deeply acquainted with the district such as reviewing data, identifying areas of strength and opportunities for growth, setting short and long term learning goals, and observing instructional practices. In year two, the primary responsibilities shifted to ensure that students and teachers engaged in high quality teaching and learning during the hybrid and remote environments brought on by the global pandemic. This year, as we move back into in-person instruction, the focus is on identifying and addressing any unfinished student learning while also moving forward with long and short term district improvement goals. Throughout this process, I am grateful to work alongside a dedicated and collaborative Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, team of building principals, as well as an extremely talented and committed group of teachers.

## **At a high level, how do Teaching & Learning goals differ from Curriculum? Does your work apply during Curriculum pilots?**

Teaching and learning goals do differ from those associated solely with curriculum. Curriculum on its own commonly refers to the written documents that stand as a framework for the content, concepts, and skills students experience as part of the learning process in a specific grade level. Ensuring that those written documents are undergoing scheduled revisions and that they reflect the most current standards is one of the goals of this position. However, teaching and learning is much more nuanced than that. Once the curriculum is adopted, the goal of teaching and learning is to make certain that the content and skills outlined in the documents are reflected in the classroom. One of the primary ways to make this determination is by frequently visiting classrooms throughout the district, observing instruction, and collecting evidence. Observing classroom instruction and gathering feedback is part of an ongoing process that occurs whether the curriculum is in a pilot phase or has been officially adopted by the Board. In conjunction with these instructional objectives, this position also has goals that are connected directly to student learning. Under this lens, the focus turns to the students' response to what is being taught. Evidence of student learning can be collected through classroom observations as well, but even more so by analyzing student performance on school based and district wide assessment results linked to grade level standards. Ultimately, having goals related to the examination of both teaching and learning helps to inform district improvement needs, such as making any future changes to the written curriculum, providing teachers professional development on instructional practices, or supporting students with updated digital or print resources.

**How do you realize these goals?**

This role is very unique in that it has a connection to the three primary layers of the school system that have an impact on teaching and learning. Having responsibilities at the district, school, and classroom levels helps with the realization of the teaching and learning goals associated with the position. For example, at the broadest level I work closely with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent on programs and initiatives spanning grades K-12. This includes planning for curriculum revision, designing district wide professional development, reviewing district data, and supporting the implementation of district wide resources and assessments. At the school level, I work closely with the building principals on teaching and learning projects, such as the implementation of walkthrough protocols for classroom visits, the review of school based data to identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth, and the implementation of resources to support instruction. At the classroom level, I work closely with teachers to provide targeted professional development, review classroom level data, and assist with the identification of student level goals and objectives. A combination of the work at the district, school, and classroom levels makes the achievement of the teaching and learning goals a reality.

**What is one of the aspects of your work that you find most satisfying?**

The most satisfying aspect of my work comes from making improvements in teaching and learning that have a lasting and positive impact on students. One example is the recent implementation of Bridges Math in grades K-5. The process for identifying and planning for the new math resource actually started two years earlier when information from state assessment data, feedback from staff and parents, and observations from classroom walkthroughs indicated the need for updated math resources in grades K-5. A team of math teachers and specialists was assembled to vet potential resources and in the end two were selected to pilot last year. The pilot resources were monitored throughout the year, as teachers were frequently consulted, feedback was gathered at various points, assessment data was reviewed, and students were observed interacting with the new instructional materials. Bridges Math emerged as the final selection and this year full implementation is underway in grades K-5. The early indications from teachers and students have been extremely positive regarding Bridges Math. After the two years of planning and piloting, it's very satisfying to walk through math classrooms and see students using the new resources engaged and excited about math. The adoption of the new math program will have a long term, positive impact on math instruction in the district for many years to come.

**What are the tools you use to gather data about Teaching & Learning within our schools? How do you use that data to identify areas that can be improved within a classroom or grade and how is that improvement achieved?**

There are a variety of tools I use to gather data about teaching and learning within our schools. In terms of quantitative data review, data from state and district assessments provide a picture of student performance in subjects such as English, Math and Science. For example, statewide Smarter Balanced Assessments provide an end-of-year review of student achievement in English and Math in grades 3-8. Similarly data from statewide science assessments provide a data point for student achievement in regard to the Next Generation Science Standards at grades 5, 8 and 11. Data reviewed from PSAT and SAT provide an indication of student performance in English and Math in grades 10 and 11. District assessment data formerly from NWEA MAP and most recently from i-Ready, provide a snapshot of student achievement in ELA and math throughout the year, as these assessments are administered in the fall, winter and spring. Data from i-Ready assessments help inform instructional practices and groupings and can be used to track student growth over the school year. From a qualitative standpoint, observable evidence of teaching and learning is collected during classroom walkthroughs that are conducted

regularly in the schools throughout the year. Collectively the quantitative and qualitative data gathered are used to identify a number of different areas for growth and improvement. These include, potential gaps in curriculum at certain grade levels, instructional strengths within a school, classroom or grade, the need for professional development at a school or grade, and the ability to evaluate the impact of a new instructional strategy or resource that has been implemented.

**Do you interact with special education students and if so, how?**

Teaching and learning pertains to all students. I do my best to make sure that I have the opportunity to visit with special education students and classrooms that support special education students whenever possible. I am frequently in discussions with the special education supervisors and pupil service director, especially when considering the impact a new program or resource may have on special education students and staff. Whenever there is an opportunity to provide support, both the Assistant Superintendent and I are committed to ensuring the teaching and learning needs of special education students and staff are met.

**What is your favorite experience, thus far, relating to identifying and implementing Teaching & Learning improvements?**

I have had a number of favorite experiences related to identifying and implementing teaching and learning improvements over the last three years. Seeing the positive impact on students with the implementation of Bridges Math in grades K-5 has been a highpoint, especially considering we were able to pilot the resource during the pandemic. That is a testament to the dedication and commitment of our teaching staff here in Newtown who did an outstanding adapting and persevering through a series of unforeseen challenges. I appreciate being part of the process to identify and implement the new district wide assessment tool, i-Ready. After many years of usage, this year we made the choice to move away from NWEA MAP to pilot i-Ready. Teacher feedback has been extremely positive regarding i-Ready, as they have found the new data tool especially useful for instructional planning and grouping. Overall, working with the Assistant Superintendent and the building principals on collecting and analyzing data to make informed decisions has also been a great experience thus far. This includes Implementing a walkthrough protocol for collecting observable evidence, engaging in frequent discussion about quality instruction and identifying strengths and opportunities for growth within the schools

**Can you share an example of when an improvement was indicated?**

Many of the teaching and learning changes we made are in the initial phases of implementation, making it premature to draw definitive conclusions about sustained improvement. However, we are closely monitoring data from the students using Bridges Math and will continue to do so to track growth overtime. A review of district assessment data during last year's pilot revealed that students piloting Bridges Math experienced more academic growth over the year than students using the other pilot resource or the district's previous one. Observable evidence from classroom walkthroughs and feedback from teachers this year all indicate that students are more engaged, experiencing greater rigor, and are more excited about math than in years past. The analysis of district data associated with the implementation of Foundations Reading in grades K-2 is encouraging, as the skills emphasized by the program are our strongest data points from our fall i-Ready assessment. We will monitor this data and look for continued positive trends over time. Reviewing and analyzing data to evaluate the effectiveness of program and resource implementation will continue to be a regular part of our practice and it will help to inform our improvement process now and in the years to come.

**Is there anything else that you feel should be included in this conversation?**

I would like to thank the Newtown Community, including the members of the Board of Education, Dr. Rodrigue, and Anne Uberti for their partnership and continued support. I am looking forward to new and exciting teaching and learning improvements that are being planned or that are currently in progress. This includes the expansion of new math resources to grades 6-8 and beyond, the integration of a new data warehouse called EduClimber, ongoing collaborative work with the new Coordinator of DEI, planned curriculum revisions in science and social studies, and the foundational work on the development of the Portrait of a Newtown Graduate to name a few.



**NEXT ISSUE**

Our next issue will be our annual budget overview. We will be reviewing the budget that has been approved by the Board of Education for the 2022-2023 school year.