

Newtown Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut
Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee

Minutes from the Board of Education and Instruction Subcommittee held on Tuesday, December 8, 2020.

Also present Board of Education member Deborra Zukowski.

J. Vouros called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m.

J. Vouros moved to approve the minutes from the 11/24/2020 meeting.

M. Ku seconded the motion.

Public Participation: None

Presentation of Proposed New 21-22 Schedule for Newtown Middle School

T. Einhorn was joined by J. Ross and J. Pope to present a proposal for a new master schedule for Newtown Middle School which would take effect in the 2021-2022 school year. The proposal is the work of a committee that consisted of teachers, special education staff, interventionists, a paraeducator who is also a parent, and school and central office administrators. All staff was also surveyed for input. Some of the major goals of the committee were to improve the delivery of special education services, support more time math intervention, allow for students to move flexibly in and out of intervention as needed, provide the opportunity for all students participate in a world language, increase the instructional time for world language, and dedicate time for social and emotional learning to happen in the cluster. The committee also wanted to create a schedule that would allow for fluctuations in enrollment without disrupting the schedule from year to year.

T. Einhorn reviewed the staffing changes that would be required to make the new schedule work which includes additional special education teachers to provide direct support for each cluster and additional world language teachers who would become part of the cluster, making clusters 5 teachers instead of 4. These staffing changes would be mostly offset by reallocations of existing staff resulting in a net decrease of .8.

T. Einhorn shared that it is anticipated that the Family and Consumer Science teacher will be retiring at the end of this year and he plans to sunset this course. The health content will be moved to Health and he plans to offer a cooking club for those students interested in the culinary arts component of the course.

NMS is proposing two new courses which would align with similar courses at Reed and Newtown High School. One would be a STEM related course and the other would potentially be a Middle School Academy that would assist incoming 7th graders adjust to the middle school experience with emphasis on developing research and information literacy skills that would then be applied in 8th grade in an experience similar to a high school capstone. Once the courses are clearly defined, they will be brought forward to C & I for approval.

Other benefits of the proposed new schedule include academically balanced classes and balanced schedules for teachers. A special schedule would run once every 12 days that would allow for students to meet in music ensembles, Project Challenge or participate in additional art or PE. This special schedule would also provide common planning time for grade level or department meetings to take place.

M. Ku acknowledged that the schedule overhaul represents a tremendous amount of work and noted that it is a lot to take in 30 minutes. J. Vouros suggested that the presenters return to C & I again to be sure that all of their questions were answered prior to presenting the schedule to the full Board.

M. Ku asked for clarification of the additional minutes that have been added to the periods. T. Einhorn explained that Learning Lab has been eliminated and that they decided to increase passing time to a more realistic 4 minutes.

M. Ku asked if students would have a choice between STEM and Middle School Academy. T. Einhorn responded that all students would take both. They would either take both once in a 6-day cycle over the course of the year or they would take one for a semester and have it twice a cycle week and then switch. That is still being explored.

M. Ku asked about the students who currently do not take a language. T. Einhorn shared that there are about 135 students in both grades who do not take a language at all because they are in the reading class. In the new schedule, there would be an opportunity for them to engage with a language even while receiving intervention. A. Uberti added that there are also students who do not meet success in their world language course and are moved into reading as an alternative. She noted that under the proposed changes most students will complete Spanish I and II before entering the high school and that an option is needed for students who will not be able to maintain that pace without denying them access to language instruction. M. Ku asked if all students in the flexible Spanish would be in one cluster. T. Einhorn shared that every cluster will have this offering for students. M. Ku also inquired if there have been discussions with Reed and the high school regarding how these changes will impact language instruction and T. Einhorn shared that there have been and they will be ongoing.

J. Vouros asked for clarification on reduction of reading intervention positions. T. Einhorn shared that he is proposing going from three to two so that there is one at each grade level. The schedule offers greater efficiency allowing for both teachers to deliver interventions at the Tier II and Tier III level. J. Vouros expressed concerns that students in need of reading intervention would have consistency. A. Uberti shared those students needing ongoing intervention will receive what they need and that it would be based on an individualized intervention plan rather than a course curriculum.

J. Vouros inquired about whether students would be working with a teacher or using Lexia. T. Einhorn agreed that these students need one-on-one direct instruction and that Lexia would only be a part of a student's instruction if it's working for that student. J. Vouros expressed concerns about the ability to appropriately service all reading students while decreasing staffing. A. Uberti shared that in looking at the number of students who require reading intervention and the increased efficiency built into the schedule, she is confident that there will actually be a greater opportunity for students to receive the needed interventions, including math interventions. This has been an increasing need for math support that has been difficult to rectify.

M. Ku requested a copy of the presentation be sent to both her and J. Vouros. She also asked what would be the next steps. A. Uberti shared that this would be presented to the Board and because if involves staffing and course changes it probably would be voted on. She also shared that she would like to invite D. Peterson and M. Hall to C & I to share how this schedule will impact our special education students at NMS. She proposed adding a meeting before the holiday break so that they could do a brief presentation and following that there could be time to answer any remaining questions.

J. Pope shared that the many incremental changes that have occurred over the years have finally begun to impact instruction. He believes this new schedule is best for teachers, students and learning.

Assistant Superintendent Updates – Anne Uberti

A. Uberti shared that NWEA testing has concluded and that district results will be available soon. She and F. Purcaro will be reviewing the data and preparing a presentation for the Board in January.

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.