

Newtown Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut
Education and Instruction Subcommittee

Minutes from the Board of Education Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee held on Tuesday, May 11, 2021.

M. Ku A. Uberti A. Hiruo
J. Vouros F. Purcaro C. Pierce

Also present Board of Education member Deborra Zukowski.

Math Specialists Amy Hiruo and Chrissie Pierce were also present for the K-5 Math Program Selection presentation.

J. Vouros called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

J. Vouros moved to approve the minutes from the 4/27/2021 meeting.

M. Ku seconded the motion.

Public Participation: None

Presentation: K-5 Math Program Selection – Frank Purcaro

F. Purcaro reviewed the data that was collected to make the final selection of the two K-5 math programs that were piloted. While both programs received high marks from those who piloted, overall, Bridges Math was considered to be a stronger program than Envision, particularly in content and rigor. He noted that teachers also repeatedly stated that the program was fun and highly engaging for students and that they appreciated the hands-on approach.

F. Purcaro included a special thanks to all of the teachers who agreed to participate in the pilot during one of the most challenging teaching years ever.

Mr. Purcaro will be making this same presentation to the full Board at the May 25th meeting to recommend adoption of the Bridges Math program for the 21-22 school year.

[K-5 Math Pilot Selection Slide Presentation](#)

M. Ku stated that she was impressed by the NWEA growth for the Bridges program students as compared to Envision and inquired whether the same comparison was done for Stepping Stones. Mr. Purcaro did not have that information on hand as it would not help with the determination of the new program.

M. Ku asked about how what was done at Reed School and what will be done to support the transition from 5th to 6th. F. Purcaro stated that every fifth grade teachers used either Bridges or the new Envision

program this year. None of the grade 5 classrooms were using the older version of the Envision program. Every one of the grade 5 classes experienced Bridges or Envision. Grade 6 is currently using the older version of Envision which was adopted 6 or 7 years ago. That is where the pilot program will move next.

F. Purcaro added that the planning for the grade 6-8 pilot next year is already underway. A. Uberti stated that part of what will be considered in the adoption of the new 6-8 program will be how well it aligns to Bridges.

In response to J. Vouros' question, F. Purcaro confirmed that teachers in grades 6, 7 and 8 will be piloting at least two new resources next year.

J. Vouros shared that he had personal experience with Bridges and that he could attest that the students will be moving into a more rigorous math program. It advanced the students from where they were in math. He also thanked all the teachers for taking on this kind of endeavor this year especially not having all of the students physically in the classroom.

F. Purcaro explained that there will be added supports for teachers implementing the new resource next year included extended training and the benefit of having teachers who have already had experience with the resource in the building. They will be available as informal mentors to those implementing for the first time. Math specialists will also offer support as they have had a year to familiarize themselves with the resource.

C. Pierce added that in addition to the regular instruction Bridges also incorporates a feature called Number Corner which circles back to what students have learned previously. Students are always practicing what they have already learned. She also spoke highly of the quality of the Bridges intervention program which includes both assessment and progress monitoring. Because it aligns with the regular program, intervention students are exposed to a greater degree of rigor as well.

A. Hiruo added Bridges has a strong assessment component that includes checkpoints in every unit that provide teachers with feedback on students' daily work. She spoke positively on the way Bridges introduces and connects concepts and shared that she saw students master concepts more easily than they had in the Stepping Stones program.

M. Ku asked if the math specialists were included in the survey.

F. Purcaro stated that he and A. Uberti met with the math specialists throughout the year to solicit feedback on both programs from their perspective. He and A. Uberti would then compare their own observations with that of the math specialists. In addition, all of the pilot teachers had the opportunity to observe a lesson from the opposite program as well as to meet virtually to discuss in small groups their observations and experiences with their program. The math specialists were a part of all of those meetings.

A. Uberti explained that the math specialists were not included in the survey so information could be gathered from the teachers themselves.

J. Vouros inquired how to ensure that all fourth graders leave fourth grade having finished the same amount of material.

A. Uberti answered that this has been something that has been a struggle in all grades across the four elementary schools and that it will be addressed moving forward. She and F. Purcaro meet regularly with the math specialists and this will lead to greater consistency and alignment.

April 30th Professional Development Update - A. Uberti

A. Uberti provided an update on the April 30th Professional Development for staff. Two groups sessions in the morning were facilitated by presenters from the CT Center for School Change. Both sessions were chosen and designed based on information conveyed through discussions with teachers throughout the year.

There was a session on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Classrooms which included a review of both the Board of Education Policy and the Board Resolution. This was a great opportunity to ensure that all staff were familiar with both. Facilitators led this session by having the teachers reflect on different aspects of their own practice. Many teachers commented positively that the session caused them to look at their teaching through a different lens and caused them to think about and reflect on the curriculum and materials they are currently using to teach students. Teachers were grouped in both sessions with colleagues they typically work with. Teachers appreciated this as they felt comfortable discussing these sometimes sensitive issues and could also have a practical discussion on how the session pertained to their daily work.

The other session was dedicated to helping teachers facilitate challenging conversations in the classroom. This session focused on the impact of saying nothing when students and/or colleagues bring up uncomfortable topics especially topics related to race. The session provided strategies for teachers to use when topics are raised that they may not be prepared to discuss in the moment while still acknowledging the topic.

The afternoon session was planned by each building and was dedicated to “recharge and reconnect” activities for staff. In visits to buildings, teachers were observed participating in a wide range of group activities including pasta-making, tennis, running, walking, biking, yoga and painting, to name a few. There was a very positive vibe and it was great to see staff engaged in activities that promote positive climate and culture after such a difficult year.

M. Ku and J. Vouros appreciated the update.

Assistant Superintendent Updates – A. Uberti

D. Colclough is working on developing a device collection process prior to the end of the school year. There will be a means for families to request to keep a device if needed over the summer.

A. Uberti is finalizing summer curriculum work which will include a number of projects K-12. She shared that there will likely be another curriculum or two that will be presented to C&I prior to the end of this year. These may or may not make it to the full Board before the teachers are dismissed. If they do not, they will be added to the Board agenda beginning in the fall.

A. Uberti provided an update on Educlimber, the student data collection platform that will be replacing Alpine. Recently, the data upload was completed. Training dates have been established for school-based teams prior to the end of the school year so that work can take place with principals over the summer. This will be an important tool in helping principals lead more data-focused discussions in their buildings and will also be utilized to improve the SRBI process.

J. Vouros asked for the hiring status of the new positions at the middle school. A. Uberti stated that the positions are posted internally and believes that interviews are underway and final decisions on staffing are imminent.

Public Participation: None

J. Vorous adjourned the meeting at 11:53 a.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.