

Newtown Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut
Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee

Minutes from the Board of Education Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee held on Tuesday, May 12, 2020.

M. Ku A. Uberti D. Zukowski M. Kenney
J. Vouros A. Marks K. Longobucco

J. Vouros called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

J. Vouros moved to approve the minutes from 4.28.20

M. Ku seconded the motion.

Public Participation: None

Preview New Curriculum: Journalism I

Marc Kenny, Teacher & Ms. Abigail Marks, English Department Chair

A. Marks introduced M. Kenny who has been teaching Journalism for approximately 15 years at NHS.

M. Kenney explained that some students who take the course aspire to be journalists someday and others take it to fulfill an elective.

M. Kenney presented the Journalism I curriculum and gave an overview of the goals of the course:

- Understanding the Journalistic Process
- Becoming better consumers of media by examining bias and accuracy
- Exploring the ethics of journalism – what gets covered, why and how – including appropriate use of photos
- Considering the increasing role of technology in journalism – the use of video, website and social media

M. Kenney noted that there is a high retention rate for all four years due to the relationships that are formed. He stresses a team mentality and encourages students to rise to assume leadership roles.

J. Vouros asked M. Kenney how many students go on to pursue Journalism in college. M. Kenney stated that approximately a quarter to a third of students pursue Journalism in college, either as a major or through participation in the school newspaper.

Preview Curriculum: Creative Writing

Ms. Abigail Marks, English Department Chair

A. Marks stated that 3-4 sections of Creative Writing typically run each year and provided an overview of the units of study:

- College Essay Unit: part of the senior electives and eventually will be included as the first unit of each of the other courses offered in the fall so that all students participate in this unit.
- Short Story: runs as a workshop model; teachers build a community of trust as students eventually read and edit each other's work.
- Historical Fiction: adds in the element of research, option for Science Fiction, which is derived from historical events.
- Children's Literature: students analyze children's books and discuss what makes them memorable; culminating task is to collaboratively create a children's book and apply what they know about a short story to a longer book.
- One-act Plays: students work in larger groups to write and perform a play.

A. Marks noted that although Creative Writing is only a semester course, it is very interactive and builds both writing and collaborative skills.

She also shared that the narrative writing work that begins in 9th grade and continues through the Proteus Project prepares students well for creating an effective and personal college essay. She further noted that the Writing Center provides critical support for the college essay, throughout each fall.

6th Grade Spanish Update

Prior discussion for the roll-up of Spanish included the addition of Spanish for 6th graders, even though those students were not part of elementary Spanish.

In discussion with M. Correia and L. Rodrigue, reconsidering this recommendation for a variety of reasons:

- Students will be returning from distance learning, or not, and be expected to participate in a language course that is new to them
- Challenge of writing a brand new curriculum for one year without considering the impact that curriculum would have on the language curriculum at the middle school
- The 6th grade curriculum would then need to be revised for the following year for a group of students who have had Spanish exposure since Kindergarten
- Waiting for the roll-up to occur naturally would allow time to assess the skills that students have because of their exposure
- Such an assessment would inform the development of the 6th grade curriculum
- Additionally, there is a plan in place to evaluate the progression of language between 7th and 9th grade next year so pausing at 5th would allow there to be a well-planned vertical articulation between 6th and 9th

M. Ku asked what would happen in place of Spanish for 6th graders and A. Uberti explained that those students would continue to attend library media in the library as a special. Spanish will take the place of Library Media in the 5th grade special schedule; however, 5th grade students would continue to receive Library Media instruction through a push-in model integrated with the other curricula. This represents a trend in best practice in Library Media.

J. Vourus suggested that a high school Spanish teacher create an online program for 6th graders in order to offer some type of preparation for 7th grade. A. Uberti shared that this is currently being discussed for next year but would need to include a discussion of the current world language model at the middle school. She shared that there are many factors to consider such as who takes language at the middle school, the success rate of students taking language at the middle school, and whether the fact that students had exposure to Spanish since Kindergarten will impact their choice of language in the middle school (French vs. Spanish).

M. Ku stated that 5th and 6th grade Spanish was part of the budget discussion so the change should be communicated to the Board. However, she also stated that she agrees that it would be challenging to introduce Spanish a 6th grade. A. Uberti responded that the position that had been added would become a shared position as a result of this change. The new position will be shared between Reed and the elementary schools to provide some needed relief in their new 6-day schedule.

J. Vourus emphasized that moving forward the high school language teachers should be included in the discussion of what a 6-8 model should look like.

Public Participation: None.

J. Vourus adjourned the meeting at 1:58 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.