

Newtown Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut
Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee

Minutes from the Board of Education and Instruction Subcommittee held on Tuesday, November 10, 2020.

Also present Board of Education member Deborra Zukowski.

J. Vouros called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m.

J. Vouros moved to approve the minutes from the 10/27/2020 meeting.

M. Ku seconded the motion.

Public Participation: None

Presentation of Women's Studies & World Lit – Kathy Swift and Kim Longobucco

Kathy Swift stated these two courses are offered typically to seniors at the CP and Honors level. The courses are designed to appeal to students' interests as well as to cultivate interest in reading, writing, viewing, speaking and listening.

Women's Studies is divided into three units blending the English skills with units focused on how culture defies the concept of woman, how race and gender identity impact the concept of womanhood and, finally, the impact of the portrayal of women in the media can impact identity. A focus on analytical reading and discussion is emphasized throughout all units.

World Literature is comprised of two units. The first unit, The Purpose of Language, focuses on the history and evolution of language over time and the second unit, Globalization and the Blending of Cultures, focuses more on the analysis of text from the early to current literature from a variety of cultures. In addition, students choose a region to conduct research on Postcolonial and contemporary literature. They are encouraged to pursue literature related to their own interests.

M. Ku asked if the selection of texts had been reviewed to ensure that they were inclusive in terms of subject matter and author diversity. A. Uberti shared that these courses were developed last June and represented just two half year electives. Women's Studies incorporate diverse perspectives related to both race and gender. K. Swift pointed out that the research that is done in World Literature is based on student choice and therefore allows for diverse perspectives to be brought into the course through discussion. K. Longobucco shared that following the Election Day PD, her departments, especially social studies and English, began to discuss the selection of literature choices that are used. A. Uberti stated that all curricula should be viewed as a living document that can change as topics in society change. Selection of texts can be fluid and responsive to changes. She also noted that she would like to plan for a more comprehensive discussion of text choices K-12 in the future and she believes that should the District decide to fill the new proposed role of Diversity Compliance Officer that this would be

something that that person could assist with. J. Vouros also stated that as a former teacher he knows that what happens in the classroom is greatly influenced by the students. While teachers do follow the curriculum, they are extremely tuned in to the voice of students.

Assistant Superintendent Updates – Anne Uberti

Professional Development Day – 11.3.20

The Election Day PD for teachers went smoothly. Over 400 certified staff members were able to log on for the Keynote Address offered by Dr. Derrick Gay on the topic of Diversity and Inclusion. From there, teachers were able to transition smoothly into sessions on “How to be an Anti-Racist.” The feedback from staff was very positive and expressed appreciation that the District was engaging in this important topic. Some even said it was long overdue. A. Uberti shared that she believed we struck the right balance with this first rollout which is getting people to think about and reflect on their own beliefs, of where you are with yourself. More training will be required specifically in assisting teachers in facilitating conversations about race with students as well as reviewing our curriculum to ensure that it is appropriately representative. A. Uberti noted that it will take time to get to where the District needs to be, but added that there is already a great deal in place. M. Ku stated that she was appreciative of the efforts being made to address this important topic even while realizing there is a lot on everyone’s plate right now due to the impact of the pandemic.

Para Educators

A. Uberti shared that training on how to work with remote learners is being provided to all para educators. She collaborated with Marlene Bucci, Para Union President, and Deborah Petersen, Director of Pupil Services, to develop specific guidance to support their work with students. In October, a session was offered to the paras at middle and high school. Due to some changes in schedule, the K-6 para training has not yet happened. However, it is expected that it will take place over the next two weeks. Most paras still do not have a school-issued device and we are working to address this.

NWEA

Now that all students have devices, testing for students in grades 1 through 8 is underway. A plan has been developed to bring full remote learners in to school or, in the case of Reed, in to the community center so that they can be tested on site, under the direction of a certified teacher. This will offer the greatest opportunity for valid and meaningful test results. In all cases, students would be separated from on-site learners with appropriate safety protocols in place. While remote testing may occur, it is being discouraged due to the many challenges it brings, the biggest one being that there needs to be a caregiver present during the entire testing period. The concern is that some older students may not have a caregiver home with them. An effort will be made to bring in as many students as possible and then reassess whether remote testing should be considered for those chose not to come in. J. Vouros agreed that it was very important to get test results and agreed that having students on-site was the best way to achieve valid results.

Profile of a Graduate

Frank Purcaro, Kim Longobucco, Dana Manning and Anne Uberti attended a two day workshop on how to develop a Profile or Vision of a Graduate. Districts from all over the region attended. Many districts have engaged with this work in order to articulate a collective vision for the attributes a student will possess upon graduation. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) is now looking for this component in their accreditation visits. A. Uberti shared that we have probably 5 years before our next NEASC visit, but she believes that this work will tie together so much of the other work that has been done in the District, especially around SEL and the Capstone Project. The planning is in the beginning stages and more information will be brought forward as it evolves.

Middle School Schedule

Tom Einhorn continues to work with a committee on a schedule redesign for the 2021-2022 school year. A. Uberti has had follow-up meeting with T. Einhorn, J. Ross and J. Pope. There are some exciting possibilities being discussed including some new course offerings. A. Uberti would like to have T. Einhorn attend the C&I meeting on December 9th to share details relating to the new schedule and the impact it might have on curriculum and instruction. She explained that there would also be a review of new curriculum on that date and that the C&I members should be prepared for a lengthier meeting.

Public Participation: None

J. Vouros adjourned the meeting at 11:57 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.