

Board of Education
Newtown, CT
Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee

Minutes of the Board of Education Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee meeting held on January 7, 2016, in Meeting Room One of the Newtown Municipal Building, 3 Primrose St.

J. Vouros M. Ku J. Evans Davila C. Geissler L. Dievert C. Salvatore A. Hiruo T. Einhorn
J. Ross M. Hiscavich L. Rodrigue B. Nichols E. Holst-Grubbe B. Burgess

J. Vouros called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Motion: J. Vouros moved to approve the minutes of December 11, 2015. M. Ku seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Public participation: M. Burnham, former educator and Newtown resident

A Kindergarten update was given by C. Geissler and a team of three teachers, Grades K-2 . It has been reported that the transition from full- day K to 1st grade has greatly improved students' reading, writing and math abilities. Children not only academically have shown improvement, but also they have become more socially involved. Full day kindergarten has allowed students to take part in all activities that are offered to Grades 1-4 students, including all specials and attendance at school assemblies, allowing them to feel part of the school community.

The importance of play was also discussed and its developmental role in learning for young children. Play and learning centers are stationed in the classroom where students are allowed to create and collaborate with each other throughout the day. Teachers have noted also that full day sessions have allowed them to know the students and families earlier in the school year, as well as to become more responsive to learners' individualized needs with this additional time to get to know their learning styles better. Early intervention can be addressed more readily with students as they enter Grade 1 having attended full day kindergarten.

Grade 1 teachers have shared that children now start the school year with greater readiness for the day and their stamina is much better coming from a full day of Kindergarten. Students are writing more than one sentence on their baseline writing assessment, in many cases they are able to write a few sentences. When writing, their consistency with spacing between words shows improvement earlier in the year, and they are taking risks in their writing by writing deeper and more authentic pieces. Currently, the first graders have finished a lesson on opinion writing, which is part of the Common Core expectations. Children are reading more and are aware of the books they want to explore. Additionally, students have shown an increase in math sense, allowing for a steadier pace with the math curriculum.

Suggestion was made to arrange a meeting with Newtown K teachers and Pre-K Schools within the district to exchange ideas on how to prepare for Kindergarten.

T. Einhorn, Principal of Newtown Middle School (NMS); J. Ross, Assistant Principal of NMS; and M. Hiscavich, Director of the District Music Program met with the C & I Subcommittee to explain further the proposed changes to the NMS Music Program offerings for students in the 2016-17 school year. M. Hiscavich noted that approximately 50% of students leaving Reed Intermediate School (RIS) and entering NMS are choosing not to continue instruction in Band, Orchestra and Chorus. Plans are being made for high school students to visit with RIS music students who will be transitioning into NMS. Discussion also occurred regarding taking the NMS music students to visit the high school music students to learn more from their peers about the opportunities that are offered there and the long term benefits of remaining in the Band, Chorus, and Orchestra. It is hoped that this will encourage more students at NMS to remain in the Performing Arts.

L. Rodrigue and B. Nichols discussed the upcoming Freshman Academy for September 2016 which is being created to engage the top learners from middle school in opportunities to take more rigorous and advanced level courses when they enter the high school as ninth graders. The academy will consist of high achievers not only those identified as gifted. An additional benefit of the program is an anticipated higher level of rigor at the middle school level. Freshman partnerships will consist of teams with two teachers that share the same cohort of students. Students groups will be formed according to the strand the students have interest in following in the program (e.g. Humanities, Art, English, Social Studies, Science, Engineering). L. Rodrigue is in the process of seeking a commitment from a staff member to become trained this summer to teach Project Lead the Way next year at the high school.

E. Holst-Grubbe and B. Burgess submitted a New Program/Course Pilot Application for Video Game Design to the Subcommittee. This is a course in which students will learn the intricacies of video game design and use that knowledge to create their own video games. Students first will be exposed to the history of the video industry and conduct a research project that allows them to explore the history, current profile and future outlook of a company. It will teach students problem solving skills and effective communication skills.

Update on Elementary "Special" Progress Reports was tabled until January 26, 2016.

Public participation: None

J. Vouros motioned to adjourn . M.Ku seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 1 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beverly Schaedler

These are draft minutes and are subject to approval of the C and I Subcommittee

