

Teaching and Learning Committee

June 22, 2023

9:30 – 11:00am

Present: Kathy Sellitti, Cathy Collins, Dr. Padalino, Stacia Felicello, Steven Spicer Robin Jacobowitz, Alissa Oliveto, Beth Lewis-Jackson, Arie Drews, members of the public

Dr. Collins called meeting to order – 9:30am

- I. Approval of Minutes – Dr. Jacobowitz moved to approve minutes from 25 May meeting; Committee approved unanimously.
- II. Update on Montessori at GW
- III. Regents Exams
- IV. Literacy Committee
- V. Middle School Class Sizes
- VI. Q4 Star Scores

Update on GW

Received report from external consultant hired to review the Montessori program at GW. Recommendations included materials, teacher and TA training, in-house Montessori coach, curriculum writing, additional staffing (potential), and work cycle adjustments to produce uninterrupted 3-hour blocks. Administration is prioritizing recommendations and identifying funding sources. Money was already budgeted for staff development/training at GW, additional positions were not budgeted and these, along with some other recommendations, will likely require multi-year phase-in.

Timeline – administration will meet with business office to explore funding and put together summary in one week. Administration will meet with GW parents over the summer.

SCEP plans will include the recommendations from the consultant. Outside review of GW was covered by money received by GW for CEP development. SCEP development & BLT determination are ongoing at this time.

Update on district-wide literacy committee

The literacy committee consists of 50 members (including reading teachers, SLPs, SPED, ENL, classroom teachers) was initially formed during COVID-19 pandemic. The focus now is shifting the way we teach reading toward skills-based approaches. The core leadership team includes reading department representatives, Foundations trainers, Writer’s Workshop consultant, and a literacy specialist (Dana McDunna, Teach of the year 2016). The committee is auditing current materials to see if and what materials meet needs for teaching approaches consistent with the science of reading. Professional development will be offered to support teachers in shifting their teaching methods. Members of team were able to apply for curriculum-writing this summer.

The T&L committee discussed how challenging it can be to re-orient teachers trained in particular methods. During trainings, special attention is being paid to explaining the “why” behind pedagogical and curricular shifts.

Regarding Foundations, a curriculum consistent with the “Science of Reading” approach: Grade 3 roll out will occur this year. Training offered for new Gr 1 and 2 teachers, or those switching grades, to ensure all staff are delivering consistent instruction.

Phonics instruction in higher grades has been a topic of discussion. IReady program will be integrated into grades 4,5 & 6 for phonics. Discussions occurring over where in the Quest period IReady could be incorporated. IReady is not all-computer based and involves direct instruction.

Regents Exams

The practice since COVID-19 has been to take the higher of two grades (Regents and local assessment, i.e., final exam) to factor into a student’s final grade. This approach errs on the side of the student. This year, the district retained this grading practice.

Looking long-term: To involve teachers in the conversation about how to deal with final assessments (which comprise 15% of a student’s grade), teachers were surveyed. The goal is to collectively generate a menu of options, such as projects, portfolios, exams, etc., so teachers have flexibility in how they assess student learning, while maintaining rigor and consistency across instructors. We discussed the fact that project-based approaches have added value of inclusion and relevancy for students. Dr. Hunter (and teacher’s he’s worked with) has provided inspiration, training and examples of what happens when teachers let students select the final project topic, then build a curriculum around those ideas. We discussed the potential need for expanded professional development to make project-bases options work in different disciplines.

Decision about how to treat Regents exams in the final grade will be made by late August/early September.

Middle School Class Sizes

During 2022, there were 30 students in many 5th grade classes, but 28, 29 in most classes (eSchool).

Many factors influence class size. Class sizes will fluctuate with the total number of students in each cohort; for instance, At Miller we had large 5th grade cohort in 2022, but much small 5th grade cohort for 2023. Integrated classes, ELL classes, etc. have fewer students. Reducing class sizes by opening more sections requires space and staff, both of which are limited. Space issues at JWB and MCM make splitting classes difficult.

We discussed that rather than focus on number of students, perhaps we can focus on student:adult ratios. For instance, classes with more students may need more resources (TA, consultant, coach). Middle School (and all of K-12) would benefit from PD for properly using a TA, coach, or other help in the classroom.

We also discussed 7th grade language instruction– we are hiring Spanish teachers. Able to hire teachers to fulfill this need. Canceled contract with the online program. Moving teachers around within world language department to help students who might have had a sub-standard experience with the online program succeed at the next level.

Q4 Star Scores

Students are still struggling due to pandemic and it shows in STAR scores. We are not meeting goals set at the time of ARP funding. What interventions are happening to improve numbers?

- Foundations will help younger students with reading and perhaps address drop in reading levels we have traditionally seen in upper grades
- IReady for ELA and math will improve vertical continuity
- Using one math curriculum instead of piloting multiple should help with math

However, teachers need PD to learn all of the new curricula.

IReady will replace STAR testing—there is a “crosswalk” to help compare STAR and IReady scores.

STAR data is a snapshot: we discussed the value of tracking student growth throughout year, and throughout a student’s career.

Next meeting: TBA