

Barre Town Curriculum and Teacher Support Committee Meeting Notes

April 6, 2016

Present:

Brenda Buzzell, Chairperson

Tim Crowley, Principal

Jen Nye, Principal

Erica Pearson, Assistant Principal

Lauralea Curavoo, Kindergarten Teacher

Sarah Hill, Kindergarten Teacher

Beth Hulbert, Math Curriculum Specialist

Lindy Johnson, K-2 Literacy Specialist

Rick McCraw, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The meeting was called to order at 8:07 AM.

Agenda:

1. Review/approval of minutes
2. Additions/deletions to agenda
3. Current practices on handwriting instruction
4. Kindergarten class update
5. Looping update
6. Discussion of future meeting times

1. Changes to the agenda

The kindergarten presentation was moved to the beginning of the agenda.

2. Kindergarten class update

This discussion stems from the behavioral challenges exhibited by the current kindergarten class and discussions that took place early in the year around ways to support the class.

Four topics were covered:

- Behavior progress
- Literacy progress
- Math progress
- Supports provided.

Behavior progress

Erica reported on kindergarten behavior referrals. From August to December, there were 239 behavior reports from kindergarten. From January to March, there were 139 reports. Erica attributes this decrease to work on fine-tuning supports, developing expectations and determining how best to meet individual student needs.

Brenda asked if there is any one area in which students particularly need support. Erica reported that antecedents to behavior are not generally recorded. Lauralea and Erica reported that the cohort is, overall, not as mature as a typical kindergarten class. They require more movement breaks, and they benefit from more partner-oriented activities than has been the case in the past.

In at least one classroom, students can earn outdoor time at the end of the day. Needs were highly individualized, and it took time to identify those needs. Examples include varying psychological needs and some need for special education services around emotional issues. As a measure of progress, there are children who were placed in the behavior classroom but are now successfully transitioning back into the classroom.

Brenda asked if teachers were aware of current research on executive functioning, an example being the work done by Ellen Galinsky (*Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Skills Every Child Needs*). Brenda commented that children now face challenges outside school that were found rarely in years past.

Lauralea thanked the board for support provided to the kindergarten teachers. It's "overwhelming" to think of the progress that's been made. Jen mentioned that there has been extensive communication between the kindergarten and the pre-K teachers, culminating in the kindergarten teachers have begun observing their incoming students in the pre-K setting.

Literacy progress

Lindy presented data from the reading program (handout 1). The data show excellent progress since September to December and spring. Discussion ensued upon the effect of quality preschool on developing foundational skills, with the effect that when the children begin receiving formal instruction, results are demonstrated quickly. In handout 1, the measure labeled *text* is a Fountas and Pinnell assessment. Lauralea mentioned that many of her students could not write their names when they arrived in September.

Math progress

(The kindergarten teachers returned to their classrooms during this time.)

Beth shared math performance data (handout 2). She pointed out that as is typical, kindergarten students arrived relatively weaker in math than in reading/writing. Again, students showed excellent progress from September through January (when the second assessment was administered). Note that percentages reflects students who are proficient or higher. In each category, a significant number of students are in the level immediately below proficient. Tests include FNWS (forward number word sequencing) and BNWS (backward number word sequencing).

Jen described how an art teacher has been working with kindergarten students in fine motor skills.

Beth concluded by saying that she is completely satisfied with progress in math. That said, Beth continues to provide extensive PD support to the kindergarten teachers.

Supports provided

There has been quite a bit more paraeducator support this year, and some students required one-on-one behavioral support.

Brenda asked about the duration of preschool: 2½ hours.

Brenda summarized by observing that the students' needs appear to be being met well. The teachers are obviously teaching individual children, attending to individual needs and not just teaching the whole class.

Tim pointed out that with administrative and curricular support, the staff has learned a great deal over the course of the year, and teachers rose to the challenge in a way that was "incredible." Julia expressed her appreciation for the teachers' perseverance.

3. Review/approval of minutes

The minutes of the January meeting were approved with these changes:

- Add the word "awareness" between the words "bullying" and "introduced" in point 2.
- Change the phrase "tool use" to "use of tools."

4. Current practices on handwriting instruction

The *Handwriting without Tears* program is introduced in pre-kindergarten. (This is where students learn to write numbers, not in math class.) Cursive writing, when taught at all, is introduced in grade 3. Jen mentioned that the emphasis has shifted to keyboarding. She says that some teachers write their morning messages in cursive to provide experience to students. Erica mentioned that legal signatures need no longer be signed in cursive.

Brenda asked if the school has considered sending a letter home to describe the school's approach to cursive writing. Lindy suggests polling the grade 3 teachers to see what questions parents are asking about handwriting. Brenda asked if the current generation of students needs exposure to cursive (even if they do not learn to write using it). Julia pointed out that high-quality non-cursive writing is more important than cursive: OT referrals can arise from poor printing. There was discussion regarding systematic focus on handwriting instruction, including manuscript to cursive exposure and keyboarding. At present, Barre Town's practice is inconsistent across classrooms.

Beth suggested creating a simple curriculum map to identify current practices across the grades. Jen, Karen and Lindy will create such a map.

5. Looping update

(The discussion expanded to specialization as a related topic.)

Looping is not currently happening in Barre Town. Two years ago, the grade 3-4 teachers initiated discussion of looping, in part because Barre City does. (In fact, BC has two-year loops from grades 3 through 8.) Subsequently, BT grades 3-4 have continued to express interest in looping. As an outgrowth of those discussions, Jen created handout 3 to exhibit pros and cons of looping. No final decision has been made but will be by the placement meeting in late April. Jen will update the Curriculum Committee at the May meeting.

Specialization commences in grade 3 (grade-wide) with specializing in one grade 2 team.

Tim mentioned that although there are strong arguments in favor of looping, the ability to implement it is highly personnel-dependent. Jen then commented that many practices are not consistent across classrooms (of which homework is only one example).

Erica mentioned that a recent school-wide health committee meeting, parent opinions around looping were strong and varied.

Beth mentioned that under looping, you “lose no instructional time” in students’ second year with a group of children because the teacher already knows the majority of students.

6. Meeting day for the Committee

No change was made at this time, keeping meetings on the first Wednesday of May.

7. Discussion of Future Meeting Agendas and Dates

The next meeting will take place Wednesday, May 4th at 8:00.

Agenda topics:

- Update on decisions made around looping
- Homework practices in elementary and middle school.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:35 AM.

Respectfully submitted,



Rick McCraw
Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment