



Minutes
Curriculum & Professional Practices Committee
Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury, Avon, Connecticut 06001
Via Zoom
Monday, June 8, 2020 - 6:00 p.m.

Attendance

Members Present: Jackie Blea, Chair; Debra Chute; Jeffrey S. Fleischman; Bogdan Oprica

Member(s) Absent: none

Administration Present: Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent; Dr. Donna Nestler-Rusack, Assistant Superintendent; Michael Renkawitz, AHS Principal; Jodi Kryzanski, Program Director and Kim Mearman, Director of Pupil Services

Others Present: Todd Dyer, Director of Counseling; Jenna Alysworth, AHS English Dept. Coordinator; Jaclyn Lawlor, AHS Math Dept. Coordinator; Shirley Moy, Board Clerk

- I. Call to Order
Committee Chair Blea called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.
- II. Approval of February 3, 2020 Minutes
Jeffrey Fleischman moved, Debra Chute seconded, to approve the February 3, 2020 Curriculum & Professional Practices minutes as presented.
The motion carried 4-0-0.
- III. Proposed Graduation Requirements Beginning With Class of 2023
Dr. Donna Nestler-Rusack explained that in 2017 the CT General Assembly updated the Public Act 1742, which was related to the graduation requirements. The overall changes included an increase in the number of required credits from 20 to 25. Avon currently requires 22.5 credits for graduation. Increased flexibility with multi pathways for students and less restrictive course requirements allowed districts to decide what they think is in the best interest for their students and what they want and are able to provide. There is also a new Mastery program requirement. Dr. Rusack compared the current graduation requirements with the new requirements beginning with the Class of 2023.

Mr. Renkawitz, AHS Principal, further explained the Mastery requirement in wanting to give students a good experience much like the Capstone. The Mastery based learning can be a college experience course that was not used to meet another requirement; a community service project that emulates an internship program; an independent study designed by the student but approved through a process; service learning project or a work experience. Another area of focus is the Health full credit requirement.

Mr. Dyer, Director of Counseling, added that the various pathways to meet the Mastery based learning requirement would allow students to decide what works best for them. Mr. Dyer

agreed that the Health piece would be a challenge moving forward. The majority of Avon High School students already meet the 25 credit requirement so the District is ahead of the curve. Dr. Rusack added that there are currently many Health courses available as electives and can easily be part of the Health and Safety curriculum.

The C&PP asked questions regarding not having a single course meet two separate requirements and the requirement of 25 credits. Discussion was further had on the flexibility of the Mastery based learning program, how credits are categorized, how Avon already had a broader range in its curriculum structure, allowing students to earn credit for some of the community services they are already doing and clarification on English and Math course requirements. Dr. Carnemolla added that the District continues to look at partnerships with other programs such as dual enrollment with Tunxis. Mr. Dyer said that the new requirements offer new opportunities for students and to expand how we help student meet their requirements. Responding to questions from the committee, Dr. Rusack explained that the requirements for all subjects are clearly stated in the Course of Studies for student. Dr. Rusack also confirmed the Holocaust was not yet a requirement.

Jeff Fleischman moved, Deb Chute seconded, to move forward to the Policy Committee the Proposed Graduation Requirements Beginning with Class of 2023. The motion carried 4-0-0.

IV. Primary Instructional Materials Recommendations

Dr. Rusack explained that CPDC met remotely. The first two recommendations are in response to what is outlined in the Blueprint for Excellence. There was an action step to identify a reading and writing approach for the District. A committee was formed and came to the unanimous agreement on the workshop model for K-12. Jodi Kryzanski, Program Director explained how the books were selected. Dr. Rusack explained that there might have been some disapproval from the committee due to the newness of the approach and standardizing of the subjects with the use of the new material. Ms. Kryzanski added that the workshop models does allow flexibility and emphasizes the students where they are individually as readers and writers as it gives a high level of choice. Ms. Kryzanski clarified for the Committee that approval is being sought for a set of instructional units; teacher materials and subsequent related texts. Dr. Carnemolla stated that this will provide an overarching vision of what we do as a school district and will bring a new methodology and approach to teaching while being very student centered. Ms. Kryzanski added that this is the work of revising the ELA curriculum with differentiation in providing skill progressions in academic goals. The assessment practices in the District will honor this workshop model and the ultimate goal is to have all students continue to grow and read more complex text at a high level of comprehension independently. This is an incremental change in looking at assessments. Finding the right content while still being challenging for high-level readers is a challenge. Dr. Rusack replied that building the classroom libraries to offer independent and small group reading opportunities. Jenna Alysworth reviewed the recommendations for the ECE English courses at the high school. The books allow students choices to read for the various courses. Dr. Carnemolla called to the Committee's attention that there are now notations should a book have any potential mature content. Ms. Alysworth clarified that all the recommendations are new to the district. Dr. Rusack added that some of the books might have been used as choice books but not as primary instructional material. Ms. Alysworth added that parents and students can opt out of reading any of the books even if the books are whole class reads. Dr. Rusack stated that parents and students would soon have access to a list

of all high school English books on the District website. Ms. Alysworth listed the books, which will be required and included: *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, *Forest Gump and Me Talk Pretty One Day*; *The Journalist and the Murderer*; *In Cold Blood*; *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*; *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*; *Florida*. Ms. Alysworth has found that students were not singled out when they opted to read an alternative text and were still able to contribute to the class. The Superintendent added that the degree of mature content was related to the class subject. Though it may be more age appropriate for students in grade 12 than lower grades added a committee member. A question was asked about the level of communication in advance to parents to help guide students make appropriate choices. A suggestion was made to list the books with the course descriptions in the course of studies. Mr. Renkawitz added that it would not be feasible for guidance counselor to go through the lists of every book that will be read when a student signs up for high school courses, however, it may be possible for teachers to provide a list of possible books they would be using should a student be interested in researching a course. Dr. Rusack added that perhaps on the website's list of books it could include the courses the book may be used with a disclaimer that the book may not be used. It was already discussed that teachers send home a list or syllabus at the beginning of the semester of books that would potentially be used. Dr. Carnemolla stated that she did not feel the list of books belonged on the course of studies but perhaps directions to the list of books on the website and would still get the information to the parents. Dr. Rusack also explained that those voting on books are members of the Curriculum Professional Development Council (CPDC) which has members from all grade levels, teachers from all departments, a couple of administrators, and a couple of Board members. Jaclyn Lawlor presented the proposals for the Business courses. Two of the textbooks were for current Business courses while one was for a new course. The textbooks are through Tunxis Community College and is part of grant where the textbooks are provided to Avon at no cost. Dr. Rusack explained that the Science curriculum was revised a few years back based on the Next Generation Science Standards using the Life Science Standards for 7th grade Science. The textbooks being proposed is to align with this standard and new curriculum. Dr. Rusack also spoke of the last proposal, which will be used as a supplemental resource for the Civil Rights Movement elective course.

Primary Instructional Materials Recommendations include:

- Units of study for Teaching Reading - ELA grades K-5
- Units of study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing - ELA grades K-6
- *A Visit From the Goon Squad* - ELA grade 12
- *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* – ELA grade 12
- *Florida* – ELA grade 12
- *Let the Great World Spin* – ELA grade 12
- *Nothing to See Here* – ELA grade 12
- *Saturday* – ELA grade 12
- *Cat's Cradle* – ELA grade 12
- *Election* – ELA grade 12
- *Forest Gump* – ELA grade 12
- *Me Talk Pretty One Day* – ELA grade 12
- *Naked* – ELA grade 12
- *The Essential Writing of Jonathan Swift* – ELA grade 12
- *Vacationland* – ELA grade 12
- *Cover Her Face* – ELA grade 12
- *Gone Girl* – ELA grade 12

- I'll Be Gone in the Dark – ELA grade 12
- In Cold Blood – ELA grade 12
- The Girl on the Train – ELA grade 12
- The Journalist and the Murderer – ELA grade 12
- The Talented Mr. Ripley – ELA grade 12
- The Namesake – ELA grade 12
- College Accounting – A Practical Approach – Mathematics grade 9-12
- Financial Accounting – Mathematics grades 9-12
- Introduction to Business – Mathematics grade 9-12
- Life Science – Science grade 7
- Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement From 1950s Through the 1980s – Social Studies grades 10-12

Jackie Blea moved, Debra Chute seconded, to move the Primary Instructional Materials Recommendations to the full Board for approval and purchase. The motion carried 4-0-0.

V. Gifted Identification Process Update

Dr. Carnemolla prefaced that this was a review and update of what had already been presented to the full Board on this process. The Superintendent also acknowledged the work of Dr. Mearman, Dr. Rusack, Ms. Kryzanski and the principals for work in researching current practice. Dr. Mearman gave an overview the identification process for talented and gifted, which is initiated for all students in grade 3.

- Step 1 – the screening will be administered in the Spring of grade 3 using the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT).
- Step 2 – for students who scored at or above the “X” percentile on the OLSAT, the Smarter Balanced Assessment will be reviewed and the following included in a discussion with certified professionals
 - Smarter Balanced Assessment
 - Degrees of Reading Power
 - District and Curriculum Summative Assessments
 - District Report Cards
 - Teacher Questionnaire
 - Parent/Guardian Checklist
- Step 3 – for students who scored at or above the 98th percentile on the OLSAT and met the criteria in Step 2, a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting will review the data and discuss eligibility and identification as Gifted
 - Per CT Regulations “For purposes of the evaluation identification, or determination of the specific educational needs of a child who may be gifted, the PPT means a group of certified or licensed professionals who represent each of the teaching administrative, and pupil personnel staffs, and who participate equally in the decision making process.
 - The student’s parent/guardian is required at the PPT, however, an offer of participation in the PPT process will be made available to parents/guardians. They will also be provided a copy of the PPT notifications and determinations.

While the process takes place in third grade, a teacher or parent can ask that any student, including those new to the district be considered for giftedness using the same assessment and identification process. Students with special needs who are identified as Gifted would be

entitled to an IEP related to their specific disability but not required to provide services related to gifted and will be supported in the same manner as all other students determined as gifted.

Dr. Mearman went on to explain the notification and appeal process. Dr. Rusack explained that the old criteria was used for the current fourth grade students and parents were notified that their children met the initial criteria to be considered and will be administered the OLSAT in the Fall when they are fifth graders at TBS. Current third graders would have been administered the OLSAT this Spring but will not be administered the test in the Fall and next year's third graders will be administered the test in the Spring of next year. To catch up, three grades will have to be administered the test next school year.

Dr. Mearman responded to a Committee question stating that multiple measures were needed to make the determination of eligibility criteria with heavy emphasis on the OLSAT. Dr. Mearman explained that in the prior process the OLSAT was given only to students meeting eligibility criteria and now changed so of the OLSAT is the initial assessment given. Discussion continued on the flexibility of looking at the various measures for looking at the whole child, which also widens the net and gives more opportunity for identifying gifted students. The process of the PPT and what is done to nurture gifted students was also discussed. Dr. Rusack and Ms. Kryzanski reviewed the various enrichment programs and enrichment clusters available to all students. Dr. Carnemolla added that MakerSpaces are also targeted instruction and provides student choice. In response to a Committee question, Dr. Rusack stated that while Avon does not provide a Gifted program per se, focusing on Enrichment for All, differentiating within the classroom and providing different opportunities during targeted instructional blocks to allow students to explore and follow their passions/interests. Teachers are notified if a student is identified as Gifted with a notation on the student's screen on PowerSchool. Dr. Carnemolla added that the identification also opens the door to conversations with parents about the opportunities for their children. Dr. Rusack replied to a Committee member's question and stated that the Enrichment Coach is to work with teachers to model, to provide PD and train teachers. Dr. Carnemolla added that reading specialists can also be a resource for teachers in finding appropriate reading material and follow-up discussions for Gifted students. There are currently 96 identified Gifted students in grades 5 to 12. A Committee member suggested having a designated person/coach to be able to assist Gifted students and their parents. Dr. Carnemolla agreed with the suggestion and stated it is one of the action steps. Dr. Rusack replied that the Enrichment Coach works primarily with grades K to six as academic leveling begins in the seventh grade. Accelerating curriculum was also suggested by a Committee member to which Dr. Rusack replied a balance was needed so that there is not a "rush to nowhere." The Superintendent confirmed that there are currently students who are accelerating where they take higher grade level subjects. There are also the opportunities at the high school for college level courses and dual enrollment even allowing students to graduate early. Dr. Mearman reminded everyone that it was important to look at the whole child including his or her social needs. The Superintendent added that there are three considerations - where you can enrich, where you should accelerate and the social/emotional needs of a child. There must be a balance of all three particularly with Gifted and Talented. Chair Blea thanked everyone for the input in the conversation.

VI. Open Choice Professional Development Update

Dr. Rusack reviewed how the District utilizes the Open Choice Professional Development resources. Two free days are provided for PD. Each year Open Choice provides a list of the

trainings related to cultural proficiency. Storytelling as an Empathy Building Tool was presented at PGS, RBS & TBS; Implicit Bias was done at PGS & AMS. Culturally Responsive Families – How to Engage Families; Culturally Responsive Teaching; Restorative Practices; Looking at Culturally Relevant Literacy; Racial Equalities and Social Justice and Cultural Responsiveness in Schools; Looking at the Culturally Responsive Practices were among the list of professional developments Dr. Rusack mentioned were offered to staff. At least one PD day is dedicated to this area. Discussion was had regarding the loss of the Open Choice Liaison and whether there is still a contact person for the students and families to ensure good communication. Dr. Rusack stated that the first contact is the teachers and brings the families in for the orientations so there is an initial contact. Buildings will also have family events with the district providing bus transportations to engage the families. Social workers and school psychologists will also engage with the students. CREC also has their version of a liaison for extra support and other resources, which the District and Open Choice families can access if needed. The Committee expressed appreciation for the social/emotional support provided to Open Choice students and families. Dr. Rusack mentioned that there have been only a small number of Open Choice students that have withdrawn from the program. While there have also been instances of Open Choice families moving to Avon to be part of the community. Chair Blea also mentioned the scholarships CREC offers and that Avon had a recipient of one of the scholarships. Ms. Blea also suggested perhaps resuming holding meetings in Hartford to allow Hartford parents the opportunity in attending.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 8:29 pm.

Minutes prepared by Shirley Moy, Board Recording Secretary

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jackie Blea, Curriculum & Professional Practices Chair

Jackie Blea, June 13, 2019

Minutes respectfully received by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary

Jeffrey S. Fleischman, June 13, 2019