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BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING

BUUSD Central Office and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
September 28, 2021 - 5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Renee Badeau, Chair (BT)
Alice Farrell, Vice-Chair (BC) – departed at 6:41 p.m.
Tim Boltin, (BC)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Chris Hennessey, Superintendent
Mary Ellen Simmons, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

OTHER BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sonya Spaulding – departed at 6:19 p.m.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS PRESENT:

Josh Howard

1. Call to Order

The Chair, Ms. Badeau, called the Tuesday, September 28, 2021, BUUSD Curriculum Committee meeting to order at 5:30 p.m., which was held at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference.

2. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

None.

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Approval of Minutes -

4.1 August 17, 2021 Curriculum Committee Meeting Minutes

On a motion by Mrs. Farrell, seconded by Mr. Boltin, the Committee unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the August 17, 2021 BUUSD Curriculum Committee Meeting.

5. New Business

5.1 Proficiency Based Learning 101

Ms. Simmons provided an overview of proficiencies, which are known by different names (e.g. non-negotiables, competencies, masteries, best practice etc.). Ms. Simmons provided an overview of Curriculum (not programs, but essential standards taught in class – all curriculum is tied into the Recovery Plan and the Strategic Plan), Instruction (practices done in the classroom to assure students meet proficiencies), and Assessments (tied to proficiencies to determine if proficiencies are being met). Ms. Simmons engaged with the Committee to assist with their understanding of how proficiencies are measured/assessed. Rubrics are important to assure that students and parents understand what is expected to achieve the next level of proficiency. Much work has been performed over the last few years to develop the proficiency system. All classes at SHS are tied to the Standards and all of the assessments are reported out based on where students are within the Standards. The next step is to prioritize the Standards and create the Essential Proficiencies (which will assist with creating alternative pathways for students to achieve proficiency). Outlining graduation requirements will be part of this next step. It was noted that all Essential Standards have been identified for students in grades K – 8, but need to be defined at the high school level. A community member expressed frustration that proficiency grading makes it difficult for him to know where his children ‘stand’, noting that he found that traditional ‘letter grades’ provided more clarity. In response to a query regarding how the high school assists students who are struggling with specific standards, it was noted that the high school is working on identifying the Essential Standards, and creating alternative pathways to assist students who are struggling. At the present time, students do have opportunities to receive extra assistance (daily), and every three weeks, students who are struggling have the opportunity to receive additional assistance. In response to a query regarding the District’s goal for proficiency (e.g. 80%), Ms. Simmons advised that after all Proficiencies are documented (including at the high school level), the District will use reporting to determine how many students are meeting proficiencies. Ms. Simmons reiterated that data will be utilized to identify where ‘needs’

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are in the classroom (based on essential standards), and instructional practices will be modified accordingly. Research will need to be performed to determine teacher proficiency in providing alternate ways to assess students. Mr. Boltin expressed concern that there are students who cannot perform basic math and have very poor writing skills, noting 'something is wrong', that students have been allowed to progress throughout the school system, while continuing to lack these basic skills. Mr. Boltin is concerned that the 'system is broken', and the District is not achieving its goals.

5.2 Roles for Curriculum Work

Ms. Simmons advised that the 'roles/organizational chart', is available for viewing on the BUUSD web site under the Curriculum Department tab. The basic structure is; Superintendent, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Two Coaches (Math and Literacy), an Administrative Assistant, and an MTSS Coach.

5.3 Process for Approving Curriculum Materials Across the District

Ms. Simmons advised that a list will be going out across the District (to Administrators and Staff). The information being provided does not pertain to basic classroom supplies. Ms. Simmons advised regarding the process of approving curriculum materials, which includes; identification of the need (curriculum materials), compilation of a list of materials, checking costs, following bidding requirements, obtaining appropriate signatures (for purchases), identifying how the material relates to classroom instructional practices, identifying if similar materials are in place, determining if the material is common amongst classrooms and schools (horizontal and vertical alignment), and identifying resources for materials. Once all of the first steps have been completed, approval must be obtained from building administrators, and if approved and grant funded, is forwarded to the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. In response to a query, it was noted that if a teacher wants to use a different 'canned' instruction, that deviates from what is in place, it will not be allowed. It was noted that on occasion, approval has been given for teachers to use something unique (in addition to what is in place). In response to a query regarding curricular opportunities for students that excel, it was noted that identification of the proficiencies will assist on this front, and that there is currently a structured block that involves interventionists and SPED personnel to assist students who are struggling with proficiencies. It was noted that the high school no longer has honors classes, but instead provides additional learning tracks for students who want to receive 'honors' credit (Imbedded Honors). AP classes are available at the high school level. Mr. Boltin does not believe there are adequate practices in place to serve students that excel. A parent reported that their students preferred the separate honors classes and felt that with the implantation of imbedded honors classes, their learning was slowed, as their teachers needed to follow a pace that would reach all students. Though there was extra work they could perform (to achieve honors status), a lot of that was self-taught. It was reiterated that the students felt they achieved a greater knowledge in the honors classes, where they moved at a faster pace and delved deeper into subjects. One activity that her students enjoyed in imbedded their honors classes, was the opportunity to assist students who were struggling. It was noted that there is a wide range of 'needs/preferences' amongst students (those who excel and those who struggle), and that the disparity in student needs has been amplified during COVID.

5.4 Current Reporting System

Ms. Simmons advised that all report cards are Standard's based. All required Standards are listed on the report card. Students at the high school receive progress reports every three weeks. Mr. Hennessey advised that 'over reporting' can make students feels stressed and the schools need to be mindful of that aspect. The approach at SHS is proactive and meant to assist with meeting students 'where they're at'. It was noted that the three week reporting at SHS was implemented because students were waiting until the end of the marking period, and once realizing they were not going to pass, had much work to complete and reassessments to take. The change to a 3 week reporting period was made in an effort to keep kids on track throughout the marking period. Reporting at the elementary level can be found on the BUUSD web site (a three page document). Ms. Simmons displayed an example. The high school also has information on the web site. On the SHS site, information is provided on grading, weighted grades, AP classes, how GPA is calculated, a rubric for transferable skills, and a section on how colleges are looking for proficiencies as part of their acceptance process. A community member reiterated his frustration that proficiency based grading is confusing to parents, and makes it difficult to assess where their children are struggling/excelling. It is important to keep community members informed on proficiency based grading, and to be consistent with grading. Ms. Badeau queried regarding producing progress reports at the elementary and middle school levels.

6. Old Business

None.

7. Other Business

None.

8. Items for Future Agendas

- Professional Development (October)
- Allied Arts (October)
- Any other items listed in the Work Plan for October

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Ms. Simmons will add the following items to the Work Plan:

- Specific Procedures For Challenging Students Who Excel, Including Oversight To Assure Procedures Are Followed (TBD)
- Comparisons of Proficiency Based Grading, Statewide and at a National Level (TBD)
- How SHS Deals with Students with High Needs – Training High Needs Students with Life Skills (Functioning in Careers) Including Procedures for Immediate Corrective Actions When Issues are Identified (TBD)

9. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting is Tuesday, October 26, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. at the BUUSD Central Office and via video conference.

10. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Boltin, seconded by Ms. Badeau, the Committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 6:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrea Poulin