



LAS VIRGENES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
CURRICULUM COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING

May 22, 2019

SES:

**Freckle Differentiation Platform**

Mr. Scifres introduced Freckle, an elementary school differentiation platform for English Language Arts and math. Freckle is a digital tool that meets students at their current levels. It can also be used as an assessment tool, which will provide important data on where students are in their learning.

Mr. Scifres reminded the Council that the District implemented a new ELA curriculum this year. And though it went very well, they experienced some hurdles in grades 3-5 and one of the concerns the District was hearing from teachers is they felt they needed a way to accrue more data. The new report cards ask for a lot of information and teachers felt they did not have enough ways to accumulate this necessary data. The team looked at a few assessment platforms and took Freckle for a pilot. There were 24 teachers from 8 different school sites on the pilot committee. The team recommended this platform as a replacement for Newsela for grades 3-5.

Linda Yollis, Bridget Stevens, and Daneille Randolph presented an overview of their experience with Freckle:

Freckle provides choices for students and for teachers and is a great way for teachers to assess their students. The program offers the following for ELA:

- Word Study: This is similar to a digital *Words Their Way*. Students take a pre-test to be placed in a level, and then they are able to login and work at their individual levels independently.
  - Students are able to receive immediate feedback on their work.
  - Tutors: If a child has already passed a level, peers in the class have someone identified that they can go to for help.
- Articles: Students take a pre-test and are placed at their reading level. This can be used as an assessment piece or for skills practice. Teachers can monitor progress relating to a specific standard. This helps with providing the data which can be referenced for standards based report cards.
- Benchmark Assessment – ELA: provides data and also the specific areas where students need work. Students can see their questions and answers, so they can better understand where and why they may need help.

There is another side to Freckly for math, which offers:

- Students work 5-10 minutes independently.
- There are helpful videos. Coming from a report card perspective, it is great to have videos that teachers can assign students to go back to, for review.
- Students can go to a tutor for help.
- When students work through a domain, they take a test to determine their level, and then they can go back to work on problem areas, or continue with enrichment, if they are ahead.

*Question:* Do students do this on their Acers?

*Answers:* Yes.

*Question:* This is replacing Newsela, right? How does this compare to Newsela in costs?

*Answer:* Freckle is \$72,000 for 3 years for ELA and Math. Newsela was \$50,000 for ELA only.

*Question:* I love Freckle – I used it this year. It seems like it is more of a formative assessment.

Will there be a summative assessment?

*Answer:* Benchmark provides a more summative assessment.

*Question:* Is there a parent portal for this program?

*Answer:* Teachers can add parents or parents can sit and watch as their students are working on it.

Mr. Scifres reported that teachers will be gathering on June 6<sup>th</sup> for an assessment summit to finalize some questions and to develop teacher training for next year.

Literacy Coach Lauren Welsh shared that RENstar and Freckle will be joining forces, so they will be speaking the same language. Freckle has been very responsive to feedback.

#### **Approval of the Freckle Differentiation Platform**

**Motion to Approve: Lauren Freedman**

**Second: Kendra Napier**

**Passed Unanimously**

#### **Freshman Seminar Update**

Mr. Scifres reminded the Council that this school year was the first year offering Freshman Seminar as a graduation requirement. The idea was to create a course for freshman, that allowed them to be connected to campus and to provide education in the areas of health (mental and physical wellness), leadership, and college and careers. LVUSD piloted 3 sections at both high schools last year before launching the course District-wide.

Jason Busby shared that when building the class, they went to the senior students and asked them what they would have wanted to learn more about. The team determined they wanted to present more about career options, so students did research on a career and had the opportunity to learn about numerous career options from student presentations. Financial literacy was an important piece of this. Students could start to consider what training they might need to enter a particular career field. What type of school



would they need to graduate from (whether that would be four year, community college, or a certificate program)? Also covered was what students would have to do to make sure doors would be open to them down the road, such as developing public speaking skills; being able to communicate effectively, research skills, and supporting them to be successful in their current and future courses.

Mr. Brad Boelman explained that for the health curriculum, they focused on specific topics that would be relevant to students currently, and in the future. They worked on building structures in the classroom, so they were able to have constructive conversations about these subject matters:

- Mental Health and Wellness
- Drugs & Alcohol
- Sexual Health Wellness

The last part of the course was an incorporation into campus. If students feel integrated, they will feel more successful. They had students attend events and reflect on them. They also brought guest speakers including principals, counselors, etc., in to speak to the classes.

Mr. Scifres shared that one of his favorite things was working with the Freshman Seminar Task Force. They met six times over the year, to talk about the challenges and successes. They also discussed:

- Professional development for the course
- Calibrating AHS and CHS instruction
- Navigating challenges of first year implementation

The District surveyed students at the end of the semester and found:

- 90% of AHS students said the class had been valuable.
- 61% of AHS students said meeting with their teacher had improved their grades in other classes.
- 92% of CHS students said it helped them become more involved on campus.
- 72% of CHS students said they thought it was helpful with decision making and emotional wellness overall.

Mr. Scifres updated the Council on suspension data for freshman. He reported that there are additional reasons why the numbers had decreased drastically, however, he felt Freshman Seminar had helped with this, in addition to the efforts the District has invested in student social-emotional well-being.

Mr. Busby shared some areas for growth:

- Scope and sequence – Alignment: We want to make sure we are all covering the same materials at the same time.
- Professional development on health curriculum: Most of the teachers coming in were not health teachers. They want to make sure we are offering the best practices and the most updated information to our students.

Mr. Scifres agreed that the District could use training on the health portion of the curriculum.

Mr. Busby summarized their success over the year:

- Personal connections with students in a low stakes environment
- Opening eyes to college and careers
- Supporting personal growth in both personal and academic areas
- Open dialogue on a wide array of topics
- Connection to school campus
- Coping skills

Ms. Stein shared that this course was a big leap for the Board and the District to take. It was a risk for these teachers as well. She thanked the presenters for their work and for what they are doing for students.

*Question:* Are all teachers surveying their students?

*Answer:* Yes, they will all be surveyed.

*Question:* Are we going to be offering professional development on health?

*Answer:* Yes we are. We are looking at a summer date.

This is a graduation requirement for our students, and other Districts are reaching out to our District to learn more about this course.

*Question:* I echo Lesli's comments about this course. Wondering if a course like this could add value in the other grades: sophomore, junior and senior year?

*Answer:* We've looked at that and the challenge is the student schedule for our students. The hope is that the students are building relationships and will continue to go back and visit their teachers.

Ms. Cutbill said one of the things the District is looking at is how this will impact students down the line. How will this impact them, as a senior?

Agoura High School counselor Ms. Willig shared that she has seen a difference in the students and she thinks Freshman Seminar is really fabulous. She thanked the teachers for their contributions.

*Question:* Committee member said he is blown away by the work the District is doing and asked if the military is being introduced.

*Answer:* Yes.

*Question:* As you are tracking data on the program, what correlations are you making? What measurement tools will you be using to see if the curriculum is having an impact on the students.

*Answer:* GPA and discipline are the two main things we will look at. Mr. Scifres added he is interested in the pilot data from the previous year - to see how the students who did take the pilot compare with those who did not.

Ms. Cutbill said she is more interested in how this will set students up for high school success. Mr. Scifres said the metrics on college and career will be found in our student responses to our Healthy Kids Surveys.

Jason Rosenthal teaches Freshman Seminar at AHS. He shared that being able to have open discussions and build relationships with his students has been the most rewarding part of the process.

*Question:* Can you talk about the differences when taking Freshman Seminar over the summer?

*Answer:* It is not ideal, as there is a lack of context when it is taken over the summer. There has been less of a demand to take this course over the summer, because students understand the value and prefer to take it during the school year.

Mr. Boelman shared he noticed an air of confidence in the students when they come back to campus at the beginning of the year, for those who have taken it over the summer.

Mr. Scifres reported he does not love this class for summer school because students will miss out on building the campus connection. As a freshman, there is a lot of research and data on the struggle in the transition from grade 8 to grade 9, and it is nice for students to have their own cohort to work through things in real time, during the year. The reality is that for some of our populations of students (i.e.; on an advanced placement track, in the arts and sports or both), this can become a scheduling necessity.

Mr. Scifres thanked the committee and reiterated how much he and the District appreciate their time and involvement in the process. The meeting was adjourned at 4:52.