



**Tri-State  
Consortium**

**Bedford Central School District**

TRI-STATE VISIT 2023  
K-12 English Language Arts  
January 25 -27, 2023

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# Tri-State Consortium

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## **Executive Summary**

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### **The Tri-State Consortium**

The Tri-State Consortium, a professional network of **fifty-seven** public school districts in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, advances student performance through a continuous improvement process. Based on a framework of [eight quality indicators](#), the process involves a self-study by member districts and a triennial cycle of review by teams of fellow educators whose districts also belong to the Consortium. Serving as critical friends, these teams provide Tri-State districts with external feedback about current strengths and promising next steps.

The Bedford Central School District (BCSD), located in Westchester County, has invited the Tri-State Consortium team to study its approach to **advancing reading instruction** for all its learners. This objective reflects the district's focus on **Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum and Disciplines**. Prior to our visit, they shared their [2022-2023 Success Plan](#), which states their mission and core values, and identifies two goals that the District is working towards this year.

The Tri-State's team spent three days, January 25 - January 27, 2023, in the district. Amy Fishkin, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, welcomed us on the first day and introduced us to Dr. Robert Glass and the members of the District's Tri-State steering committee who worked tirelessly to prepare for our visit. During our three days in the district, the visit team observed literacy lessons in numerous classrooms at seven schools and interviewed many faculty members, administrators, students, parents, and Board of Education members.

In her introductory overview, Amy Fishkin shared a wide range of data with the Consortium team. BCSD is a geographically large, diverse district encompassing several communities across

its boundaries. It has five elementary schools, one middle, one high school, and the Hillside Alternative program that serves children in Grades 9-12. There are two Pre-Kindergarten classes, one housed in Bedford Hills Elementary School and one in Mount Kisco Elementary School, and 10 Pre-K students placed in local community-based organizations. There is a lottery for Pre-Kindergarten admission. Mount Kisco also runs a Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) program. Families who reside within BCSD have the option to opt into the DLBE program.

The District serves 3,714 students. The student population is predominantly white (50.5%) and hispanic (37.4%). Asian, African-American, and other identified children collectively represent the remaining 9.2%. 37.4% of their students receive free and reduced lunch, 17.9% are English Language Learners and 16.3% are identified as Students with Disabilities.

Amy Fishkin defined the context and purpose of the visiting team's work. The District employs a cycle of continuous improvement. Reading and writing are in Phase 1: Study and Plan, the start of the process, an important time to get a sense of where they are in their journey. There has been significant public debate on the teaching of reading, prompting the District to look closely at the work they are doing. There is continued concern around the lingering impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on student learning. BCSD has also been thinking about measuring success and how to do that given the strengths and challenges of its diverse student population. Related to this, the district has concerns regarding assessment data. As a long-time member of the Tri-State Consortium, the District has welcomed the Consortium to review multiple programs and initiatives over the years and has been looking forward to tapping the critical friend's feedback that the visiting team can provide.

There have been programmatic shifts in reading and writing across the last five years. This has prompted the District to create a Success Plan that identifies the goal of **Advancing Active, Connective Learning** and defines two strategies related to it. In the first strategy, **Active**

**Learning, advancing reading instruction** is a primary objective. It is here that the Consortium has been asked to consider the district's work answering three Essential Questions:

- *To what extent does the BCSD identify and support a diverse range of readers and writers, particularly our struggling readers and writers in elementary, middle, and high school?*
- *To what extent do our current instructional practices (Curriculum / Instruction / Assessment) and programs provide explicit and systematic instruction in reading and writing that is aligned and cohesive?*
- *To what extent does the BCSD provide reading and writing opportunities and experiences in all content areas across the district?*

The District prepared and provided these questions well in advance of our visit. The questions provided the schema for the team's study. These questions are answered separately and inclusively and serve as the format for the Annenberg Consultancy protocol that we facilitated on the second day of the visit. The responses to these questions are in another section of this report, and they are meant to assist BCSD in the future planning of reading and writing instruction, K-12.

On the first day, which was abbreviated due to the threat of bad weather, the Tri-State team examined documents prepared by teachers and administrators. The materials were presented through a digital dashboard. They were well-organized and easily accessible. Thorough notes were taken that focused both on the Essential Questions and on the following three indicators:

- *Indicator #3: Metrics of Student Performance*



*A variety of assessment practices, including norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments, provide data and evidence of student knowledge and higher-level thinking. The districts' system engages teachers and administrators in collecting and analyzing multiple forms of student performance data and disseminating the information to appropriate constituencies. Teachers and administrators use this information collaboratively to make informed decisions to advance student learning.*

- **Indicator #4: Curriculum and Instruction**

*Teachers and administrators collaborate to develop an articulated and aligned curriculum designed to ensure optimal student results. When making curricular and instructional decisions, teachers and administrators consider current research and evidence of student performance from multiple sources. In their planning, teachers purposefully select and differentiate strategies and resources that advance the learning of all students.*

- **Indicator #6: Equitable Support for Student Needs**

*Processes and practices are in place that identify and address students' academic and non-academic needs. These processes are informed by data and evidence gathered from a variety of sources and are aligned with learning goals for students at all performance levels. Policies and practices that govern student access to all curriculum and programs are non-discriminatory and set expectations that permit students to be challenged at the highest levels. All students have equitable access to all programs.*

## **Response to Essential Questions**

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### **Essential Question #1:**

***To what extent does the BCSD identify and support a diverse range of readers and***

**writers, particularly our struggling readers and writers in elementary, middle, and high School?**

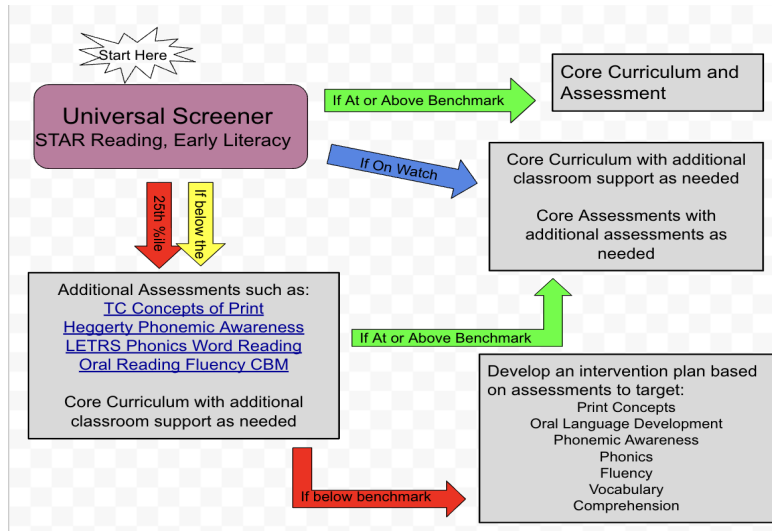
Bedford Central School District has developed impressive, robust measures to both identify and support its range of readers and writers in the elementary and middle schools. This is still an area of focus at Fox Lane High School (FLHS). The District is working hard to raise attainment for all its learners, and to close the achievement gap between its white and minority sub-group students. Summary data in Bedford's [New York State Report Card \[2021 - 22\]](#) indicate that, on the whole, students outperform their peers statewide. However, when looking specifically at grade level and sub-group results, the data are more complex and nuanced.

The District has been proactive in gathering in-house data that allows them to more accurately target those in need of additional support. Children entering Pre-Kindergarten are administered the DIAL. In Grades K-8, the STAR assessment, as a universal screener, identifies students who may require related services. It is given in English and Spanish. After the initial administration, those who score below the 25th percentile are tested again to ensure the accuracy of the results. Once the need is confirmed a process is initiated to create a support plan.

**Elementary Schools**

The elementary schools' process for data and assessment gathering is illustrated below:

[Elementary Schools Universal Screener Flowchart](#)



Teachers and administrators at the five elementary schools described structures that enable them to collaboratively analyze curriculum-based measures (CBMs). This is initially done by grade-level teams. When a concern is raised, it is referred to the Teacher Resource Team (TRT), which designs and progress monitors interventions at Tier 1. Students who do not make expected growth begin the RTI process.

In addition to the CBMs, elementary teachers have access to iReady to look at historical data (although those interviewed expressed some confusion on how to use it). Reading Plus, a Tier 1 intervention, also generates achievement data. There is evidence that some grade levels create grade-level data sheets to house student information and to inform decisions about student-tiered interventions and support services.

The relatively short length of the school day makes it difficult to embed structures where schools can analyze data across the grades. There are data teams at the elementary schools and they try to meet three times during the year, but finding time to meet during the school day is challenging.

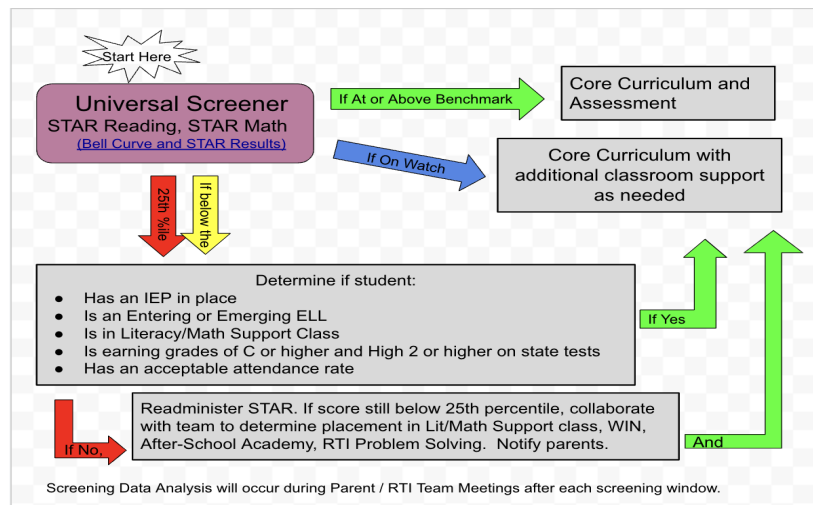
The elementary schools have a great deal of support for struggling readers and writers. Each kindergarten class has a dedicated teacher aide . Post-pandemic, the District has invested in

keeping class sizes low in order for students to have more individualized attention. There are Tiered Interventionists who support teachers in implementing and progress monitoring students who need additional help. Learning Specialists provide special education services to children with Individual Education Plans.

### Fox Lane Middle School

A detailed process to use data to identify and support at-risk readers and writers is in place at the middle school:

#### Fox Lane Middle School (FLMS) Universal Screener Flowchart:



At the middle school, STAR data are used not only in the flowchart progression, but for leveling, as well, and conversations around deepening its use are at the beginning stages. Individuals and teams of teachers look at global assessment data, but more structured data dives can be helpful. There are common assessments in departments that provide information on how students are responding to instruction. Middle school staff have access to iReady to explore longitudinal data.

All K-8 teachers have access to their STAR data. This enables them to look for instructional strategies to support their “hovering” students, those who sit just about the cutoff and do not qualify for additional services. Members of the Steering Committee noted that this is not

systemic, and happens in, “places and pockets.” A survey is given to staff after its initial administration to gather data on how to maximize the use of the tool.

The bulk of assessment data in the District is gathered in reading, however, there is a common rubric across Grades K-12 to look at writing achievement and to identify students who struggle. At the elementary school, it is used as a pre-assessment at the start of one of their three writing units and also as a post-assessment. The value assigned to these measures by staff varies across the buildings.

At FLMS and FLHS there is a belief that the rubrics have limitations, and in many instances, they have been used more as a checklist than as a tool to inform instruction. At the high school, English teachers have created a “middle of the table ” rubric that allows them to define the criteria for meeting the expectation of the assignment and provides space to give targeted feedback to those who fall below or above it. The social studies department uses the NYS Social Studies Framework Rubric as an anchor, and also has a teacher-developed, grade-specific common rubric.

### **English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

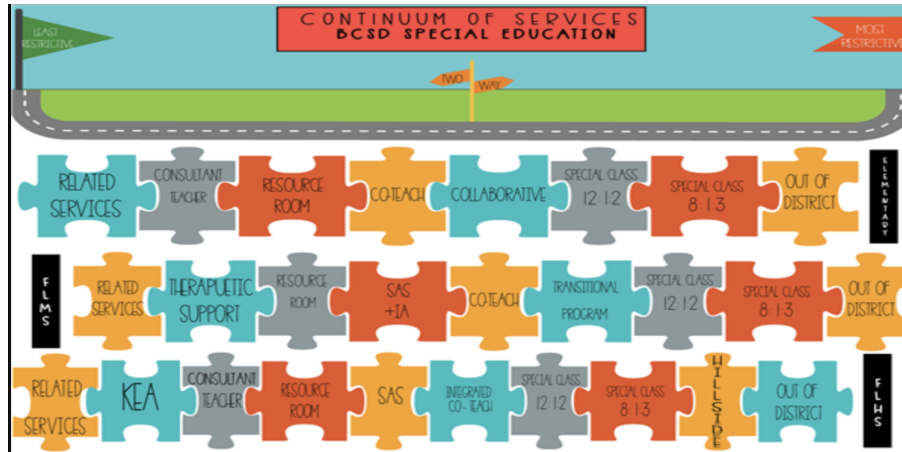
BCSD has approximately 700 English Language Learners (ELLs). To assess their performance, they take the STAR in both English and Spanish. At Mount Kisco Elementary school, a Dual Language Bilingual Education School of Choice, running records are in use to measure achievement. There is also a Summer Bridge Academy to support skill development for the students in Grades K-2. The staff at MKES is extremely proud of the work they do and wonder if the assessments that are in use accurately measure the growth and achievement of Dual Language Learners. As one teacher noted, “Benchmarks are designed for monolingual students.” By designing ways to gather data with clear expectations in both the dominant and the new language, staff feels that they will have access to information that will allow them to more accurately and efficiently meet the children’s unique needs.

The Director of ESOL Services and Programs noted the DLBE program is making transformative change in the District. However, due to the pandemic and other financial challenges that the district has faced, the supply of resources to ELL students has not been commensurate with their rate of growth. There are also issues with access to the curriculum for students. At middle school, ELLs cannot take electives due to ESOL services taking their place (this is true for special education students, as well). And, at the high school, ELLs may not have access to certain courses due to their language demands. This may result in a free period. The visit team wonders whether the current high school schedule may not be maximizing a student's ability to acquire language.

Throughout Grades 1-12, the WIDA rubric is used to assess attainment in writing. There is a belief among some members of staff that the district is looking at the achievement of ELLs through a monolingual lens and that it would better serve these learners to be thought of as biliterate. There are opportunities to earn the Seal of Biliteracy. Student selection into this program is determined by scores on the New York State English Language Arts test and their grade in Spanish. In addition, the middle school uses formative assessments to monitor progress.

### **Special Education**

The District's Continuum of Services in Special Education outlines a host of programs and staff that are in place to meet the challenges of their most at-risk learners.



At the elementary schools, there is a Core Period, where no new learning takes place while students in need of support services are pulled out of class. There are also opportunities for children to receive a “double dose,” of instruction. This allows students with related services to receive them without losing access to the reading and writing curriculum and instruction. And it affords opportunities to review and rehearse new learning. At the secondary level, the FLMS’s [Student Handbook-Special Education](#) and the [Fox Lane High School Course Catalog](#) provide a comprehensive look at the structures and the staffing in place to support literacy development.

### Communication

The Tri-State visiting team had the opportunity to speak to a small number of elementary parents who expressed concern that they do not always know how their children are doing in school. STAR data are not shared with District families due to a fault in the program that does not allow for accurate reports to be generated. In the elementary school, classroom information is shared through a monthly newsletter (six from their classroom teacher, six from special area teachers, and where appropriate, Tier 1 intervention specialists). There is one Back to School Night and three parent/teacher conferences. The parents we met expressed concern that the information they receive reflects what has happened at the end of instruction and not how their children are progressing through the learning process. This makes it difficult for them

to provide support at home, and to understand what their children know, understand, and are able to do. For students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), Learning Specialists hold meetings, share data and reflect on goals. Report cards are generated at all levels, and all families of students in Grades 3-12, receive state standardized testing reports.

### **Equity vs Equality**

The visiting team had several opportunities to discuss and consider issues of equity in Bedford. One teacher described it as a, “diverse, high needs, high resource district,” a statement evidenced in its standardized and anecdotal data. Members of the staff shared that their commitment to equity and access is strong across the board. They have put in place hiring practices in order to actively recruit bilingual staff. In the past, ESOL and content area secondary teachers would co-teach, and the district is looking to bring that structure back. They are able, for the first time since their past budget crises, to create new courses that meet the needs of all but particularly their struggling and ELL students. Conversations have begun as to how to best distribute resources to ensure that staff has what they need, although from an instructional practice perspective, they have work to do. In Special Education, they are mainstreaming as much as possible. And, they have begun to ask important questions about Tiered Support, considering it on the district level where staff deployments would be made based on need, and not, as it is currently, by building.

### **Commendations and Recommendations**

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The District, in asking this important and deeply layered essential question, has prioritized the use of data to ensure that all students are receiving the instruction that they need and that teachers are meeting them where they are and supporting them to grow. The high value that staff places on data collection provides an opportunity for Bedford to create a culture of data analyses that is streamlined to avoid redundant assessments and that allows for a rich balance between formative and summative measures. The wide range of programs and staff to support struggling readers and writers is another indication of the commitment the District has made to



advance achievement. And the willingness to engage in complex, challenging questions around equity and access finds the District poised to move forward in a way that puts cohesion and clarity at the center of all that they do. To this end the Tri-State team would like to share the following:

**Commendations:**

- The District is collecting an impressive amount of data;
- Some teachers, departments, and grade levels collaborate on analyzing data;
- Use of universal screeners at the elementary schools and at Fox Lane Middle School drive a comprehensive Response to Intervention process;
- The elementary schools have a CORE and a double dosing period, and the middle school has a WIN period that allows students with related services to receive them without missing new instruction.
- There is a great deal of staff to provide instructional and therapeutic support to struggling readers and writers. Special educators provide a wide range of support services.
- There is a bilingual social worker and a community liaison to support students and families in the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program.
- The DLBE program has made a strong and positive impact on its students and the community.
- The collaboration of FLMS ESOL teachers is very positively impacting the program and the student experience.
- FLHS has many teachers who are dually certified in ESOL and in a general education content area. This allows them to provide support and communicate with their ELL students.
- The District has begun to consider issues of equity in hiring, programming, and in resource allocation.

- We understand that the Panorama Survey of climate and culture will be given to students in the near future. This will provide important data about equity and access.

### **Recommendations:**

- The District may want to expand its definition of success to include measures other than standardized data. This will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how to best support all learners. We also think defining the characteristics of, “diverse readers and writers,” could be productive.
- There appears to be a redundancy in the information provided by assessments, particularly CBMs. It would be useful to analyze the data that are being generated in order to see how student metrics can be streamlined. This will allow staff to use data more effectively and efficiently.
- The CBMs in use are tied to particular programs. An analysis of what information they provide, and how and when they are used would enable them to be aligned in a way that would allow staff to assess the process of learning and the growth of students.
- There were not many student work samples in the evidence presented to us. Analyzing student work is a powerful formative assessment practice. There are many strong protocols that, if used, can enable staff to meaningfully collaborate in this work. We wonder if the creation of capstone or other common assignments might be a way to formatively assess important reading and writing skills.
- The District would benefit by putting in place strategies for sharing data on growth and performance with families and students while learning is happening, not just at the end of a unit or a project.
- The criteria for entering and exiting students from the RTI process might benefit from examination. This would ensure that children are receiving impactful tiered interventions and are making the progress necessary to avoid remaining in the program indefinitely.

- Resource deployment is challenging, but considering it based on need, rather than as an equal share of what is available may enable the students and programs that need the most support to receive it.
- The system would benefit from educating staff at every level in providing responsive, differentiated instruction to all students, with a particular focus on those who were just above the qualifying benchmark for Tier 1 interventions on the STAR assessment.
- The extension of the DLBE in the middle school could prepare ELL and Dual Language Learners opportunities to hone their skills in preparation for high school.
- The faculty who work directly with AVID see enormous benefits for their students. We wonder if more students might benefit from access to the program.

**Essential Question #2:**

***To what extent do our current instructional practices (Curriculum / Instruction / Assessment) and programs provide explicit and systematic instruction in reading and writing that is aligned and cohesive?***

The BCSD has made a significant investment in programs to ensure that their students are receiving a challenging, expansive curriculum that will meet the literacy goals and instructional objectives of its schools.

Most of the investment has been in reading, where programs at the elementary level have been brought in to ensure that there is explicit instruction in comprehension, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Prior to the pandemic in 2018, the District had adopted the Teachers College Reading Units of Study and the phonics programs, Foundations (English) and Estrellita (Spanish). A full, best-practice launch of these curricula was very negatively impacted by the need to move to online schooling. It was very difficult to collect important student data that would inform the next instructional steps. When school returned, additional programs were brought in to enrich the reading experience. Heggerty was added to

address phonological and phonemic awareness to all students in Kindergarten and then as an intervention for students in Grades 1-2. And, very recently the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training has been introduced. Tiered Support, ESOL and some elementary teachers are being trained in its use. Some staff shared with us the need for a word study program in Grades 4-5.

There is dedicated time in the elementary master schedules for daily instruction in reading and writing. This includes:

- A reading-writing workshop block (45 minutes);
- The Core tiered support period (40 minutes). Students who do not receive intervention work in small groups in their classrooms;
- Foundations-Grades K-2 (30 minutes);
- Heggerty-Kindergarten (10 minutes).

Administrators stated that they do a great deal to encourage reading, particularly in the acquisition of decodable texts and the enrichment of classroom and main libraries. For example, one teacher described an audit they did of the Pound Ridge library where, “they looked at what they had to make sure every child saw themselves in the books they read.” There are also summer reading challenges at Bedford Hills with rewards for students for every three books they read.

The District has a Student Achievement Advisory Committee (SAAC). The committee is composed of members of the Board of Education (BOE) and the community, families, and administrators. The role of the SAAC is to provide the BOE with feedback and recommendations related to student achievement by gathering stakeholder input. The BOE chooses the area of focus. In the 2021-2022 school year, the SAAC studied elementary reading. The [SAAC Recommendations](#) are reflected in the essential questions, indicators, and evidence that the District has shared with the Consortium.

There are implementation plans and/or scope and sequence plans for each program in use at the elementary level, providing the opportunity to align both in and across grade levels. In speaking with teachers, it appears that there are common practices and space for them to exercise agency and creativity in curricular choices. As a result, there is some evidence of alignment across Grades K-5 in reading. However, some teachers and parents suggested that some grade levels and individual teachers are more faithful to curricular sequences. And, moreover, some may not be using all the assessment tools available to them within each program. Teachers are asking for increased professional development in reading to ensure that everyone has been thoroughly educated in the use of curricula. Several teachers noted that if, “you weren’t in the District when the program was launched or you could not go to the training, or you were not chosen to go to the training, you had to depend on your colleagues to know what was going on.” They added that with a short school day and a full curriculum, it was challenging to find time to collaborate and engage in professional learning.

The District does contract with Teachers College. Elementary teachers work with one of two consultants five days a year. There is a strong focus on supporting Grades 3-5. Sometimes, a consultant will go to a classroom to coach.

In the DLBE at Mount Kisco Elementary School (MKES), questions were raised about the efficacy of some of the Teachers' College Reading Units of Study, and Foundations, for Dual Language Learners. They noted that the TC reading units of study did not provide explicit instruction for language development and that the pacing of the curriculum was challenging. The staff feels that they have had little voice in the selection of curricular resources, which they assert is done through a, “monolingual lens.” They would like to see greater equity in the acquisition of authentic literature in Spanish. They currently depend on translations that are sometimes presented as photocopies. Both staff and families expressed the need to all MKES stakeholders to gain a better understanding about the research related to literacy development for Dual Language Learners.

In the other elementary schools, support for English Language Learners is given during reading and writing workshop. One administrator has been discussing with his ESOL team the possibility of providing remediation during content area instruction where the demands of academic language are more challenging.

There is no, “official” writing curriculum at the elementary school although there is agreement that each grade will teach three units a year: narrative, informational, and persuasive. The teachers try to align writing genres with similar units in reading. Some second grade teachers do additional writing projects. A teacher described work her students did composing fairy tales. There is a writing rubric in place for each unit that includes pre-and post-assessments. Some teachers shared that they did not feel that the pre-assessments were useful.

Resources for writing are an issue for elementary teachers. Many indicated they would like a writing curriculum. They noted that the District had conducted a [Writing Curriculum Survey](#). It found variability in resources used throughout the elementary schools. A teacher suggested that this was a result of a, “past culture where they were told that resources didn’t need to be consistent.” Parents believe that there is an overreliance on Chromebooks in writing, although they understand the necessity of their use during the pandemic. The technology is available to all K-5 students, and the children begin bringing them home in the first grade. Some parents shared that their children cannot spell accurately and depend on the Chromebook to autocorrect their errors. They are also concerned about the teaching of mechanics and grammar. They feel that their children produced more “creative” writing when they worked on paper. They are also concerned that students, “do not like to write anymore, “ and that they, “wrote longer stories before the Chromebooks came.”

At the secondary level, reading is heavily geared to the analysis of text. Students receive 40 minutes of reading and writing instruction, primarily in English, although there is writing in the content areas. For children in special education, there is a 40-minute class that is multi-sensory and takes the place of an elective. Reading and writing occur daily.

Unlike the elementary schools, there are no curriculum programs in place. There are methodologies used in the middle school, like the Frayer Model, a graphic organizer that supports vocabulary development, and teacher-made presentations, and like the Hexagon Connection to write paragraphs and a strategy lesson in writing transitional words and phrases that support students in constructing essays. FLMS English teachers teach the Cornell Method of note-taking to support text comprehension. There is also evidence of a close reading strategy #CUBA that guides students in the process. Many lessons are highly scaffolded. The use of AVID Focused NoteTaking Strategies provides a structure to make sense of literature with complex plots and challenging language.

In high school, teachers shared that they feel their students have strong reading skills. There is an instructional scope and sequence. Literary essays are written after finishing a book. The focus during junior year is on preparing students for the Regents examination.

The high school teachers noted that students need support with writing. They are asked to write personal narratives, arguments, and literary essays. There are also some creative writing opportunities. For the first time, the high school has received a ninth-grade cohort of students that went through the Dual Language program. The teachers have found that they have a strength in literacy that they have not seen before. They also shared that when the children have an opportunity to speak, they have strong language skills in English.

FLMS and FLHS do not have a DLBE. This is challenging for students who have been in the program and are used to a high level of support in reading and writing. Some assignments like the [“Masque of the Red Death” Symbol and Allegory Activity](#) in Grade 10 ELA use collaborative group work as a scaffold. Others, like [The Outsiders: Final Project](#) in Grade 7 ELA, use choice as a means of differentiating instruction and providing access to all learners. And, in Grade 9, students are assigned an informal summer reading letter where they share details about themselves and about the text they completed. English Language Learners are asked to read one book, instead of two. The evidence suggests that in order to meet the needs of language

learners at the secondary level, the English departments rely heavily on monolingual scaffolds, structures, and assignment choice.

The District has some structures to support English Language Learners and Dual Language students as they move from the primary to secondary level. At Fox Lane Middle School, there is a Spanish Language Arts course that provides strategy and skill instruction in reading and writing. Scaffolded assignments and collaborative work demonstrate work at a range of language proficiencies. At the high school, eligible students from the DLBE are placed in higher-level Spanish classes.

The Consortium recognizes the efforts the District has made to ensure that best practice curricula in reading and writing have been put into place so that students can successfully navigate challenges in literacy as they move through the grades. It is clear that all staff are invested in promoting not only skill and strategy development but a love for reading and writing, as well. To support Bedford in moving forward with their curriculum alignment efforts, the visiting team commends and recommends the following:

## **Commendations and Recommendations**

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### **Commendations:**

- Bedford has put in place a range of reading programs.
- There is some evidence that teachers at the secondary level have embedded scaffolds and have used group work to enrich their reading and writing instruction.
- Within and across the elementary schools, work has been done to align curricular practices and to provide common learning experiences for students.
- There is a common writing rubric at different levels.
- Heggerty was implemented in response to a need to develop phonemic and phonemic awareness in Grades K-2.



- The instructional practices in reading across Grades K-8 demonstrate some articulation.

### **Recommendations:**

- The District would benefit from the creation of a shared vision and common language for reading and writing instruction. Amy Fishkin noted that they had begun this, but the pandemic had interrupted it. There is energy and a desire around much of the staff to do this work. In doing so, the District would have a “northstar,” to guide decision-making. It would also enable them to think about what they want reading and writing to look like in five years and use backward planning to create an articulated and aligned plan to get there. Student participation here is important and would provide a key stakeholder perspective that would enrich its work.
- In addition, we wonder whether the district is ready to create its own K-12 literacy curriculum and whether it would be helpful to do so. This is an important conversation for the District to initiate.
- Bedford shared that they have reassembled their literacy committee. This will be helpful in starting conversations that will allow for greater articulation of programs, skills, and strategies in literacy. We recommend that the committee’s work should include a curriculum audit. This would enable the District to establish instructional through-lines, to identify redundancies and gaps in instructional practices, and to analyze the impact of curriculum on student learning. It would be useful to consider which key stakeholder groups should be included on this team.
- Many teachers across the district shared that they wanted increased opportunities to collaborate. A system to share best practices and analyze a wide range of student data would provide important articulation information and a structure to assess the implementation of programs and courses.
- There has been a great deal of professional learning in the District, but access to it has proven challenging. By leveraging the knowledge of their teachers, the District can

establish structures that would allow staff to lead and disseminate professional development and mentor new staff.

- We also suggest that the District could benefit from organizing focus groups of students, faculty, and perhaps parents and ask them the essential questions that were posed to the visiting team. This could provide additional, rich anecdotal data.
- The creation of something like a Portrait of a Bedford Learner could be a powerful way to identify the outcomes the district considers most worthy, identify the evidence that is aligned with those outcomes, and capture it in a way that tells a broader story than test data tell.
- We also think it could be productive for the district to examine the life of a reader, K-12, and the life of a writer, K-12, in Bedford.

### **Essential Question #3:**

***To what extent does the BCSD provide reading and writing opportunities and experiences in all content areas across the district?***

At the elementary schools, there was some evidence of reading and writing in social studies. There were student work samples that included writing in response to reading across the grades. Some reflected social studies work done within units (All About Me, Kindergarten and Active American Citizenship, Grade 2), projects (Continents, Grade 3 and Explorers, Grade 4), a response to reading (Teachers College focus on civil rights, Grade 5), and social-emotional learning (the Meta Moment, Grade 1). There was also a sample from Resource Room learners where they practiced closed reading on a passage about Rosa Parks. English Language Learners created a presentation about horses.

Elementary teachers also shared that there was writing in science and in art, though that was not uniform across buildings and there were no samples of this in the evidence we were given. However, staff did report that the level of understanding of particular science concepts was assessed in writing. Second-grade learners were asked to make a claim and explain their thinking, and in fifth grade, children create an inferential piece based on a photograph.

At the secondary level, reading is done in social studies and business, and also in World Languages. It was difficult to assess the extent that students read in mathematics and science. There is writing in the content areas, though it is uneven. At FLMS, the majority of evidence is in social studies and business, and World Languages, with some assignments that ask students to explain their mathematical thinking ( ESOL students were taught focused note-taking in this content area.). At FLHS, opportunities are more comprehensive. There was no evidence presented to the visiting team of writing in science. There was mention of the use of The Writing Revolution, to advance thinking through writing in all subjects and across the grades, but it is not clear how or where that is being implemented.

The District is clearly making an effort to ensure that there is writing in all content areas, though with the evidence presented and the information acquired by the team, it is challenging to provide in-depth feedback on this essential question. However, the Consortium team can commend and recommend the following:

### **Commendations and Recommendations**

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#### **Commendations:**

- There is evidence of content area writing across the district, particularly at the secondary level.

- The assignments are varied. Some represent authentic purposes for writing and enable students to explain their thinking.

### **Recommendations:**

- In addition to the curriculum audit suggested earlier in this report, an audit of expectations, assignments, and projects would allow the District to benchmark where they are in content area reading and writing, and determine where they need to align and grow these opportunities. This audit would be enriched by a comprehensive analysis of student work.

### **Final Thoughts**

Before closing, we want to mention that several members of the staff told us of initiatives that were started in the district, gained some support, and were then abandoned when the initiatives' champions left the district. They expressed the desire to have the district establish priorities and stick with them over time. One administrator summed it up by saying the district needs to provide "focus, support, and time."

The Consortium team was impressed with all that we saw throughout the visit. Bedford is a happy, productive place. Students love coming to school. They feel comfortable and safe. They are very well supported. Teachers love their jobs and are deeply committed to providing only the best for their learners. Administrators have much to be proud of and they shared these sentiments at every opportunity that we had to speak with them.

Bedford is fortunate to have a very talented staff and leveraging their professional capital is key to the ongoing success of District initiatives. Teachers want to be involved in guiding the District's future. Many of them have received professional learning that they are eager to share.

They are actively looking for opportunities to collaborate and share their knowledge.

The District has embraced a range of initiatives but has found it challenging to establish priorities. We noted that, while there is “initiative fatigue,” staff are ready to support the new central administrative team. There is a sadness about work that is no longer prioritized and that was tied to those who have left. But, there is a great deal of hope that the District is entering a period of stability. And with that comes the sense that if reading and writing are prioritized, and if the community is committed to the work, transformative, meaningful change can happen. We are excited to see what is next for literacy instruction in Bedford.

The Tri-State team thanks the District for their warm welcome and kind hospitality. The Steering Committee attended to all our needs and the entire staff pitched in to ensure we were able to seamlessly do our work. Special mention needs to be made of the work Stacy Ferraro did in preparing for the visit and sending information to the team. And it was not surprising that when Amy Fishkin fell ill, that Kevin Hanlon and the rest of the Bedford team stepped in to ensure that things went on without a hitch. That is just the way things are done in Bedford. It was a pleasure spending time in a place where we were made to feel part of the family. Thank you!