

**On November 29, 2023, the Communications Conference Committee met in the District's board room to discuss various topics with district administrators.**

Below is a summary of the question and answer session in the following order:

1. Transportation
2. Outdoor fields
3. Literacy
4. Math
5. Elementary Health/Sexual Education
6. Elementary website
7. SEPTA
8. Lunch
9. Recess
10. Dress Code
11. Phone usage

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## **1. Transportation**

**Is there a bus tracking app that the District is piloting to help parents determine when the buses will arrive for pick up and drop off?**

Several years ago, Syosset re-bid its transportation services in order to ensure that buses had surveillance cameras and GPS devices installed. The surveillance cameras have worked well and buses now can be located with GPS by Huntington Coach (HC). Before the pandemic, Syosset explored a GPS bus tracking app that was introduced by HC. It was piloted on several routes and found by test users to be unreliable.

HC was recently acquired by Beacon Transportation. Beacon is a national company with a reputation for an emphasis on technology and we are in conversations with them regarding improving technology for Syosset's buses. Currently, when the District is made aware of bus delays, our protocol is to send text messages to parents, which come from either the transportation office and/or the school.

## **2. Fields**

**How often do geese control vendors visit schools?**

The District utilizes the services of a vendor trained and certified to remove Canadian Geese from our fields. The vendor performs services on a weekly basis at all schools to scare the geese off of the property. We will also be adding faux foxes to the properties to keep the geese away, and doormats for kids to clean residue off of their shoes before they walk back into school.

**Does the district have the school fields checked regularly for poison ivy, including inside bushes on school grounds?**

The District groundsmen are very knowledgeable about how to spot poison ivy and look for it during their frequent checks of the grounds. If they find poison ivy, they contact an arborist who will spray the tree with an approved brush killer. We will explore additional ways to rid our grounds of poison ivy before it spreads. We will also educate students to avoid plants that have a whitish film on them because the eco-friendly weed killer leaves residue.

**3. Literacy**

**We were informed that Elementary Teachers College was being discontinued. What is the plan going forward and will phonics be part of the curriculum?**

Teachers College (TC) has not been discontinued. Over the past several years, we have used TC's Units of Study and had their staff developers offer professional development to our teachers and Developmental Learning Specialists. It is a resource, among many others we use, that helps us to design instruction for students. In recent years, TC has been adding phonics resources to its early elementary units. The new units from TC for grades K-2 now integrate phonics instruction directly and our teachers wrote curriculums this summer to take advantage of this shift. A team of Syosset Developmental Learning Specialists worked with other teachers to adapt these units and update lessons for our K-2 teachers. All teachers have been introduced to these units, received professional development, and have been implementing them since the end of September. The feedback we have collected has been very positive. The same process will occur for three more units this spring. Curriculum writing for those units will be starting next week for units that will be taught in March. We have the capacity to modify these units to best fit our needs. We still use Teachers College as one of our multiple resources.

Additional support is available for any student struggling with phonics instruction through our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). This can include Tier 1 instruction, which occurs in the classroom alongside curriculum exposure. This can look like a double dose of Foundations or remediated word work. Much of this work takes place during our reading workshop model. If more significant intervention is required, students can continue to move up the tiered support and engage in small group pull-out remediation with additional programs we have available. For a listing of the programs we consider when meeting a student's need, please refer to [our MTSS plan located on the district website](#).

**Do all elementary schools follow the same program or are lessons a school decision? Is there a District standard?**

All elementary schools follow a similar scope and sequence for teaching and instruction. This information is archived for teacher reference in our "Year at a Glance" document. These curriculum resources contain direct links to the resources and the individualized scope and sequence documents used by all teachers, across grades, K through 5. We utilize these scope and sequence documents across all content areas to identify optimal points in our curriculum where we can crosscut and design interdisciplinary project-based learning opportunities for students. Our goal with the interdisciplinary crosscuts is to create lessons that are exciting, interesting, and memorable to help

students make rich connections between the multiple elements of our curriculum.

**At the High School level, is it possible to introduce new reading material? In some cases, children are reading the same books for years that have not been updated with the changing times.**

Every year our English teachers meet to plan for the year and work to incorporate new books across our curriculum. For example, a group of teachers and students meet each year to select a book for High School Book Day. This year our students are reading *Frankly in Love* by David Yoon. Our goal is to provide windows and mirrors in our curriculum. We want students to be able to see the world through books, and we also want to ensure that they see themselves reflected in what they read as well. Book Day is just one example of how our teachers work to accomplish that goal.

We also need to strike a balance between books that are relatable with books that students struggle to understand. As we all know, in college, we were not always interested in every piece of literature we were assigned. From Kindergarten, we are working to build students' reading stamina. In fact, one of the units in Kindergarten is called *Bigger Books, Bigger Muscles*. This type of skill building is also important. Our teachers work to strike a balance between classic books and new novels that still enable students to meet grade-level ELA standards.

#### **4. Math**

**Is “Go Math” being discontinued? If so, what will take its place?**

The current version of GoMath will not be supported by the vendor after 2025. However, they are publishing a new edition of GoMath. We have a team of elementary principals and teachers identifying our mathematical curriculum needs and reviewing potential replacements, one of which is a new, enhanced edition of GoMath with more online resources. We are intentional and thoughtful about possible replacement programs and the final choice must include the opportunity for teacher creativity. Our teachers have identified the key components for Syosset math lessons: there must be real world applications and many opportunities for project-based learning. In addition, there must be a balance that includes opportunities for practice and skill building. Once a math program is chosen, the District will engage families to ensure that parents and guardians know how best to support their children.

**Will the coding KidOyo “hack-a-thon” be replaced with another elementary-wide competition?**

While KidOyo offered an exciting competition option, it was not providing students with exposure to rigorous coding languages. The Python program is a more versatile programming language that has many real world applications. Learning Python also includes skills that are transferable to learning other programming languages. The District is currently working with *Code Monkey*. This program includes programming tasks at all skill levels. If a student feels they need more challenging practice, teachers and library media specialists are able to assist with addressing individual needs.

Our primary goal is to treat algorithmic literacy like other forms of literacy (English and world languages, numeracy, etc.), ensuring that students have a basic understanding of

how algorithms work and how machines solve problems, or create rules. What ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence (AI) projects have shown us is that computers will have an ever increasing role in the world of work. Our students must have the skills to understand and master these AI tools.

## 5. Elementary health and sexual education

**What does the school teach about sexual education and puberty, and at what age are these lessons? Are health topics being updated each year?**

As we continue to expand our health curriculum to incorporate social emotional wellness, as well as new resources (including [Erin's law lessons](#)), classroom lessons relating to maturation will be included. Currently, the District sends a video home for parents to review with their children before they move on from elementary to middle school. These videos are meant to be a starting point for healthy discussions about sex and puberty in the home. The District is discussing the possibility of hosting a family health night to further encourage these important conversations.

Health Education is a large umbrella that includes components of social emotional wellness. Last year, we had a Health Curriculum Workgroup come together to discuss our needs for Health education across K-5. We currently utilize two resources that address the New York State Health Curriculum. We use Nearpod, which includes elementary health lessons, as well as Harmony which focuses on overall social emotional wellness. In addition to these resources, the team identified the Great Body Shop health program as a research-based resource to enhance and to address any health-instruction components that are currently missing in our curriculum. The plan is to roll the Great Body Shop out in the 24-25 school year.

## 6. Elementary Website

**The website is not specific with what topics or units are being taught at the elementary level. Can there be more specific documents added, including a grade-level breakdown?**

Elementary parent guidance documents that are [already on the website](#) are being updated to better explain the scope and sequence for each grade level. They will also be updated to align with quarters, rather than trimesters. This will be completed early in 2024.

## 7. SEPTA

**The school calendar often has overlapping events, particularly when it comes to special classes. Parents who have students in different elementary schools are unable to make both events. Can this be fixed?**

Calendars in the District have always been very challenging to manage given the wide array of events across our grade levels. There is a conscious effort to prevent overlapping events, particularly when it comes to special class rosters. We will continue to try our best.

## 8. Lunch

**On the Elementary level, why is there an opportunity for upper grades to sit with students in other classes at some schools and not others?**

School culture has dictated how lunch seating works in each building. In speaking with the principals, one solution wouldn't be appropriate for all seven buildings and where/when possible "seating choice" is selectively used for upper grade students. One of the downsides of "choice seating" is the possibility of a student being left out with no one inviting them to join the table. Assigned seating ensures that no child is left out.

**Are there gluten free options at all schools?**

Yes! We have a monthly Gluten Free lunch calendar that parents need to order in advance. [The menu is available on our website](#) and is accessible for students who have a documented need for the gluten-free option. If a family would like access to this, they can reach out to their building leader or building nurse. They also can email [foodservice@syossetschools.org](mailto:foodservice@syossetschools.org) to receive the menu and submit their lunch orders.

## 9. Recess

**At our Communications Conference last year, there was a discussion about a permission slip for students to be allowed outside if the temperature was below 32 degrees. Is there an update you can provide?**

The District administration has had several conversations about this with the Elementary school principals, as well as Human Resources. We also consulted our health and safety consultant. Though the idea is interesting for students to have the option to go outside despite the temperature, we are unable to make this happen for a variety of reasons.

- Student dress sometimes is not warm enough, and students may not be in the mindset to self-regulate as far as exposure to temperature.
- We are unable to staff enough supervision to have adults both inside and outside if we split groups, especially given elementary clubs run during recess time.
- We are unable to ask staff to be outside in temperatures below 32 degrees.

To ensure our students have the structure they need at recess time, our faculty offers unique elementary clubs during lunch. The clubs vary by school, but always serve as a great opportunity for students to be engaged even when they cannot run around outside.

## 10. Dress Code

**Who enforces the dress code and how is it enforced?**

The Board of Education dress code policy is spelled out in the student Code of Conduct ([policy 5300 in the policy manual](#)). This policy is written very carefully to respect the individual rights and freedoms of our students. All dress must be safe, appropriate, and not disrupt the learning environment. Clothes must also not be "extremely brief." The broadness of these rules often makes dress code difficult to enforce. This is where we need the partnership of parents to explain to their children what is appropriate dress.

## 11. Phone and camera usage

**How is student phone usage, specifically cameras and recording devices, enforced outside of classrooms?**

In our Elementary Schools, cell phones are required to be turned off, put away, and not seen throughout the day. The Middle Schools and High School have the same policy, but it is more challenging to enforce. The students are expected to follow and adhere to the school rules regarding cell phone usage and responsibility, which can be found in the [Board's Acceptable Use policy](#).