

## SCHOOL COMMITTEE

### (Official Report)

#### Roundtable Meeting

November 12, 2014

Called for 4:30 PM in the Teacher's Resource Center, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of a Roundtable Meeting to discuss CRLS course levels.

Members Present: Ms. Cronin, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Osborne, Mayor Maher (~~ABSENT~~)

Mr. Fantini in the Chair.

Also Present: Dr. Jeff Young, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent  
Dr. Victoria Greer, Asst. Supt. for Student Services  
Dr. Jessica Huizenga, Asst. Supt. of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment  
James Maloney, Chief Operating Officer  
Bobby Tynes, Assistant CRLS Principal  
Linda Mason, LC C English Dean of Curriculum  
Tanya Milner, LC R History Dean of Curriculum  
Allan Gehant, LC L Science Dean of Curriculum  
Jeff Gaglione, LC S Math Dean of Curriculum

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Vice Chair called the meeting to order at 4:35 PM.

Dr. Young welcomed Principal Damon Smith and acknowledged his staff. He stated the purpose of this meeting with CRLS Administration and the School Committee Members is to review the issues of two motions/orders from a few months ago by Mr. Harding, Ms. Kelly & Mr. Osborne. These Members along with Dr. Turk and Dr. Young met in a small group meeting with Mr. Smith. We are gathered here today to address those issues. Mr. Smith is prepared to walk through a PowerPoint presentation of a pathway system and address concerns. Dr. Young explained that a Roundtable Meeting is free flowing and less formal than a Regular School Committee Meeting, so ongoing conversation back and forth is encouraged.

At the arrival of the Mayor, Dr. Young explained that the Vice Chair called the meeting to order. The Vice Chair ceded the chair to Mayor Maher.

Mayor Maher in the Chair.

Mr. Smith thanked everyone for attending; acknowledged the students, and said he is prepared to walk the Members through a PowerPoint presentation on the CRLS course pathway system; where we are with our course enrollment data, look at where we have been and discuss where we are currently. After the presentation he and his Administrative Team will respond to questions. Principal Smith explained that it is important for each student to be matched in their appropriate levels between academic desires and challenges and also where they want to go in their best kind of learning environment. He strongly emphasized his goal toward matching.

The following four questions came up from the small group meeting with Dr. Young.

- What is a pathway system at CRLS and how does it work

- What are different course levels; in particular, does the CP level live up to its name and prepare students for college
- How do levels compare with one another
- Is the pacing different, or is there different content as well

Principal Smith stated when we talk about CRLS Course Levels, we are talking about more than just College Prep, Honors and Advanced Placement. College Prep is the standard level of course placement.

- College Prep (CP)
- Honors (HN)
- Advanced Placement (AP)
- Sheltered English Language Acquisition (SE)
- New Level: Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SE/SLIFE)
- Special Education (OSS)

Mr. Smith referenced the course catalog – SY14-15 The CRLS Experience which describe all that is offered, as well as the CRLS Parent Handbook which also explains and talks about the different course levels.

At the suggestion of Dr. Young, all Deans identified themselves so all questions can be directed to the proper person.

Bobby Tynes, Assistant Principal  
Linda Mason, Dean of Curriculum for English  
Allan Gehant, Dean of Curriculum for Science  
Tanya Milner, Dean of Curriculum for History  
Jeff Gaglione, Dean of Curriculum for Math

Mr. Smith began by explaining the different course levels.

- College Prep Courses are our standard level courses that are challenging and aligned with appropriate grade level standards and aligned with MA frameworks, Common Core and a focus on increasing the CP courses ability to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. CP courses also feature embedded HN option courses (Physics, ELA 9, World History). Students in CP HN option courses can choose to participate in the HN option pathway to earn an HN level designation on their transcripts and report cards. Many CP courses have honors options, these courses are in the school handbook. It is not accurate to say that CP courses are not challenging or rigorous since there are structured pathways that students can avail themselves of in these HN option courses to begin to move into higher level or more challenging work. We have moved beyond just the Honors pathway to an Earned Honors Distinction in World History (correction from slide 2 of presentation) which Ms. Milner can speak about this for pathway. If a student, by Benchmark assignments, achieves a certain level of mastery, she/he will receive a Honors Distinction on her/his report card.
  - To develop connections between Honors and CP, there is a fair amount of alignment between CP and HN courses of the same subject, thereby one of the features of the master planning and scheduling of the school year is that we provide all core teachers of the same subject with common planning time. Sometimes this planning allows teachers to work across levels between honors and college prep so that teachers that are teaching the same subject can be on the same page with pacing, rigor, assessments and work with other groups of teachers to develop consistent pathways between courses. So, embedded HN option courses are working and we have moved beyond this and expanded to a Math Move Up Program which was introduced last year by Principal Smith. Mr. Gaglione and Ms. Mason are prepared to elaborate on this.

- The Math Move Up Program will allow students the option or opportunity to physically move from a college prep environment to a honors prep environment at the end of a given semester of a year-long college prep course. The ELA Dept. is looking into doing this also.
- Science (Physics course) was the first department to implement the HN option. Math, ELA, and History have developed HN option courses and other pathways to provide opportunity for students to access HN level work in CP courses. There is room for pedagogical and instructional improvement on all CRLS levels in our curriculum. However, he mentioned it is not the course you sit in, it is the level of work you put into it. If students do the work, they will be able to do well at the next level.

Principal Smith stated Ms. Milner can talk about the variety of commonality amongst benchmark assessments and assignments across levels and she can also talk about the World History course which has consistent finals across levels.

- Honors (HN) Courses are aligned with appropriate grade level standards of a given subject. HN courses are aligned with MA frameworks. CRLS staff has been working to align curriculum with Common Core and increase focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. HN level courses prepare students for AP and college level work. We are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of our evaluation system.
- Advanced Placement Courses are approved by the College Board. AP courses are in the midst of being revised to connect with the Common Core and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills/expectations. Because some AP courses have been changed, two teachers went to the AP Institute to be trained on the revised AP English and History courses. In the past, they have emphasized content, not necessarily depth especially in AP US History, it has been a sprint to go from the beginning of United States recorded History to the present. The AP college program is revising their thoughts on that. It was also brought up that some colleges recognize student performance on AP credit and some do not.
- Sheltered English Language Acquisition (SE) Courses have not been on the radar, but should be included.
  - These courses are designed for students who are non native speakers of English and who are new to our country, state and city. These courses comply with State and Federal regulations around English Language learners and language acquisition and focus on intensive English language instruction but also courses in math, science & social studies/history. There are a fair number of students in our SE or ELL population and they have a set of courses that are outside of what we call the CP or general education pathway.
  - Eventually these students will move into mainstream general education courses. When and how these students move from sheltered to mainstream is dependent on the growth of their own particular skills. This program works with students to continue to build those skills.

New added program to the SE pathway this year.

- SE/SLIFE program. We hired a SLIFE instructor for students who are non native English speakers that arrive in the United States from home countries in which they have had limited or no formal education. These are among the most vulnerable students in our population because their age indicates that they are close to being considered adults but their inability to have a formalized educational environment in whatever region or country they came from puts them at particular risk in terms of being able to have high quality of life outcomes at the age of adulthood. The needs in these courses are particularly acute in that there has to be intensive English instruction; there also has to be foundational work done around basic concepts of math, reading and science. History is not a course that is offered in this program. This is a growing population in our community. In the last 2 years, the numbers have grown significantly. This is also a pathway that is outside of the general or college prep pathway. Mr. Smith asked that we please reflect back to the idea of college prep as a non challenging environment. For these students,

moving into college prep is a challenging level. This is an example to merit a conversation about appropriate matches and where we can provide the most challenge for students that will help them grow. With enough time and instruction these students can move into a general education curriculum program. These students' courses are designed to meet the academic, linguistic and social needs of English Language Learners in compliance with state and federal regulations. SE courses provide an environment where students can progress academically through an intensive sequence of English language courses, supplemented when necessary with native language facilitation. Non native English speakers with little or no formal education are the most vulnerable students.

- Special Education (OSS) Courses – In this program we have Academics, Basic Academics, Structured Academics & Functional Academics which are the 4 course program/pathways in the OSS program. As students move through this program, they develop the opportunities to integrate more fully into the general education program. These students are outside the general education stream which, this year, number about 50 students.
  - Academics program classrooms have one special educator. Students in Academics courses have a diagnosed specific learning disability and are 4 or more years below grade level in related skills. These students understand concepts but lack skills due to their disability. In academics courses students receive modified instruction, performance criteria and content, while being exposed to major concepts of CP level courses.
  - Basic Academics classroom also work with one special educator. Students in Basic Academics courses have a diagnosed intellectual impairment and 5 or more years below grade level in subject related skills. Students in these courses need specialized instruction regarding curriculum concepts and academic skills. The curriculum is broken down into small obtainable tasks which are related to real life experiences. Students receive a modified instruction method, performance criteria and content, and are also provided with supplemental vocational training, while being exposed to major concepts of CP level courses. There are about 20 students currently in this program.
  - Structured Academics classroom work with one special educator. These students have a diagnosed emotional impairment which prevents the student from accessing, participating and progressing in general education/CP courses. These courses are taught in highly structured classroom environments in order to manage behavior and students receive specially designed instruction. Students receive a modified instruction method, performance criteria and content, while being exposed to major concepts of CP level courses. The Venture program is an example with 10 students enrolled in that structured academic program/pathway.
  - Functional Academics Program Courses. Students in these courses have a diagnosed intellectual impairment which prevents the student from accessing, participating and progressing in general education/CP courses. Students require and are provided with specially designed vocational training. These courses are scheduled individually based on student need. There are about 5 to 10 students currently enrolled in this program.

Principal Smith concluded the first portion of the PowerPoint presentation. There are a lot of pathways for the students to opt into, get support and challenge themselves. He will talk about demographics data in the next set of slides.

Mr. Smith responded to the Members questions, comments and concerns as follows:

Ms. Cronin stated there was no mention of RSTA in this pathway description and asked Principal Smith to talk a little bit about how the RSTA Department functions within the structure of the high school. Mr. Smith explained the reason he did not include RSTA courses in this presentation is because they meet the same criteria as CP or HN level courses. They are a department within CRLS with multiple shops. RSTA students are allowed to earn certificates or distinctions so they will be ready, upon graduation, to enter into a field of employment whether it is Automotive, Health Careers, Culinary, Engineering, Bio Technology or Carpentry. These programs located in the RSTA department are within the structure of the school. RSTA students are required to choose a major in order to complete the certified Chapter 74

course requirements. Over the past 3 or 4 years RSTA has developed course pathways that allow non RSTA based students access to their shops. There are some new courses like the Basic Home Repair, which is a carpentry based course, now available for non RSTA major students. Previously, only the students enrolled in carpentry as a major could take this course. Other courses include The Science of Cooking, Basic Robotics & Car Repair. These courses are open to the CRLS population and are operating at a CP or HN level.

Ms. Nolan asked what the process/pathway looks like for various students to select these courses? Are there different pathways for students of SE? Mr. Smith admitted this is an area where there is a lot of room for growth, but he would rather expand on it after demographics section of the presentation.

Mr. Harding thanked Principal Smith for the thoroughness of his presentation and stated that his chief concern is around the language used for people that do not master the English language when engaging the system, specifically immigrant parents of CRLS students. Does CP really mean what it says it means? Some students are not even prepared for Bunker Hill. What is the actual pathway from within the school and where does it lead the student? Are we sure this language is appropriate? What are some of the perceptions of the courses?

Supt. Young suggested the agility and the flexibility to move from one level to the next needs to be explained. Supt. spoke on having conversations with students, asking them why they choose the programs they do. He also stated that the CPS communication practices with families may be lacking. We may need to upgrade our communication strategies and any help from the Members would be appreciated on how we can better communicate with families.

Mr. Gaglione spoke first and explained since he has to leave for an open house in Framingham, he is leaving some statistics with Ms. Milner on the Move Up Program, Honors vs. CP breakdown and enrollment in math classes. He offered his contact info and welcomes either a phone or face to face conversation with anyone with any questions and to talk about what is going on in the math department.

Mr. Smith responded to Mr. Harding's questions stating there is room for improvement with communication. He has looked at some data from 8<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS scores. Publishing these scores impact students levels. CRLS has 125 low income African American students. 45 of these students scored proficient or advanced in their Math or ELA MCAS at 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. These students may not be enrolled in a honors level course that they scored proficient or advanced in. The qualifying score to be proficient is not really high, you can have high proficient or you can have low proficient. The threshold score should be at least 250, at which point you can move right in to honors. Guidance, after reading the transcript, is concerned about the student work and what the best match for these students are. Some Guidance Counselors feel the students are misplaced.

Ms. Milner read from a blue handout left with her by Mr. Gaglione on college readiness in Math. There are about 30-60 CP students each year that are ready for honors, which means 181 students across 4 years. When given a choice, 172 of these students accepted the challenge to move up to honors level math, 114 were under represented.

Ms. Milner spoke on History – GATES, PSAT and MCAS scores determine who she feels can move up to honors. 15 to 20 students usually move up. PSAT has an AP potential list which can identify which students have a 60% or higher chance of earning a C or above on the exam.

Mr. Gehant spoke on Science and the Honors option course with physics. He would like to see it move toward earned honors credit. There are a large number of under represented students choosing honors biology or honors chemistry. The process of choosing a pathway is teacher recommendation, family understanding of choice and guidance. These are the 3 leading pieces of the pathway choosing process.

Mr. Osborne asked Mr. Gehant about transitions in the Science Dept. and how involved is he with the upper schools? Mr. Gehant answered that for the 6-12 pathway, thanks to Dr. Huizenga's curriculum review process, he is now working more using a vertical lens so he can see classes blend from upper

school to CRLS. Mr. Osborne asked if the number is growing in SLIFE? Mr. Smith responded that there are no scientific projections, but we have a good sense of how things are going for students' individual needs that don't speak English as a primary language. There is a big need to support their limited capacity in English language or advanced age – they don't have much time. Dr. Turk mentioned this number is increasing across Massachusetts all the time.

Ms. Nolan wants to hear about student input. Students know why they are choosing the courses they do. Some can move up if encouraged. We need to reach out to better understand why the choices on levels are being made.

Ms. Milner explained to get an CP World History Earned Honors – 9<sup>th</sup> graders complete the same 4 benchmarks – document based question, common mid-term, research paper and common final exam. If students in CP get B+ or above in the final grade, they earn the honors option.

Mr. Fantini suggested we eliminate CP courses completely and move toward Honors and AP for all kids. If we hold high expectations for kids they will reach high expectations. For the most part, he supports what he heard tonight and feels we are moving forward in a positive way.

Ms. Cronin expanded on Mr. Harding's point about kids graduating successfully by asking what does college prep mean? It is the lowest level of rigor in CRLS, how is this prep for college? It is a huge misnomer. Why does a student graduate and cannot succeed in community college? Our students can pass the MCAS in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but not succeed in a community college. We know it means nothing, but it is a qualifier. Mr. Smith stated that we need a different assessment pathway. 15/50 is the number we are shooting for. Students who get 15/50 usually get a B- or better in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of college. We have a lot of assessment weariness in our community. Many of our students are in danger of needing remedial support when they get to college. There are some issues around 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSAT scores. 10<sup>th</sup> graders do better, then they take it again in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and don't do as well. We need to look at how to help our students that place low on the acu placer. We have dual enrollment classes with Bunker Hill. What do we do for our students so that if they want to enter a community college or workplace or 4 year college they will succeed without needing remedial help?

Mr. Osborne asked how deliberate we are in our pursuit of raising the lower income students' ability to transition. Mr. Smith answered that each department has a different, yet similar, way of achieving this goal.

Mr. Mayor reminded everyone about the last part of the presentation. A graph handout on demographics and a pie chart of 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 demographics by course level was passed around. Mr. Smith stated that ASPEN has great capacity in tracking demographics.

- What is the demographic breakdown of students in each level?
- 1<sup>st</sup> slide shows the demographics of AP, CP & Honors of the school year 2013-2014 which can be considered quite true because it was concluded by using grades of completed courses. School year 2014-2015 – is projected using schedules before the conclusion of add/drop, therefore not necessarily an accurate chart of the demographics. Ms. Nolan asked for clarification and mentioned that students can be counted in more than one demographic if he is in AP and CP. Therefore, some of these students are double counted. So, how accurate can this be if students are double counted? Multi race is not an accurate term. Ms. Nolan suggested it be noted how many students are double counted. The data is not as clean as it could be because of the identifying characteristics.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> slide shows pie charts demographics representations which show room for improvement. We want to be clear, our priority is that when students graduate they will be successful. If the students are successful, that is a win for us even if the demographics are not diverse. Placement is important but naturally we want the rigor to be evident in all of our classes.

Ms. Kelly asked Mr. Smith how he felt about the term college prep? Mr. Smith stated he is fine with the title CP and also said when it comes to the course catalog we need to inform families that taking CP does not necessarily put you on track to be prepared for college.

Mr. Gehant stated that he doesn't want us to close doors by getting rid of CP. He cautioned everyone that NCAA looks at CP courses and they count toward athletes' eligibility. Mr. Smith thanked him for bringing that up. NCAA issues are very relevant concerns.

Ms. Nolan stated she is most concerned with outcome – don't get rid of any levels until you know what will replace it. We should fix what we have. She offered two suggestions:

1. Do more to work with guidance counselors and homeroom.
2. Make at least one core academic class at the honors level a requirement for graduation.

Mr. Smith explained that to reach Course Level decisions in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, teachers must indicate agreements via their signature to 8<sup>th</sup> grade student's proposed HN course request for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Guidance Counselors meet with students/ families. In closing, Mr. Smith expressed his concern about representation in classes but more importantly his wish is that students have the necessary skills to succeed after high school regardless of their pathways or their demographics.

Mr. Mayor thanked Mr. Smith and expressed his concerns as well. We are faced with the challenge of increasing rigor and challenging students to their full potential. We have a better understanding of the pathway to success at CRLS.

On a motion by Ms. Nolan, seconded by Mr. Osborne, the meeting was adjourned (6:45 PM).

Dosha Ellis Beard  
Confidential Secretary

**CRLS Course Pathways Roundtable Presentation Back-up Documents** (copy on file in the School Committee office).