

**ELLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DISTRICT AREAS OF FOCUS
MONTHLY REPORT
FEBRUARY 2015**

1.0 Status of Initiatives

District Data: January Reading Assessments

Grade	Percentage of Students Achieving Benchmark Independent Reading Levels			
	Exceeds	Meets	Approaching	Significantly Below
1	41%	26%	20%	14%
2	49%	40%	3%	8%
3	46%	43%	3%	8%
4	28%	49%	16%	7%
5	35%	51%	10%	4%
6	28%	47%	23%	3%

P.T.O. Room Parents hosted valentine parties for all of our students in the classrooms. Each student made a heart-felt valentine to be given into the community. Over 300 student-made valentines were given to the Meals on Wheels program bringing a smile to the elderly and homebound on Valentine’s Day. Thanks to **Amy Olender** for her efforts in distributing the cards. Our PTO continues to provide a wide range of high interest activities and events to engage all our students and families over time. Their vision and support of the school community is appreciated.

Center School is also grateful to **Deb Ellis** for coordinating a Science Fair. Classes visited the fair during the school day, and a large enthusiastic crowd came in the evening to view the projects. Over 90 students explored their own curiosity by working on self-selected projects in preparation for the event. Each student received a participation button to recognize their efforts. Students applied their newly learned skills in non-fiction reading to provide them with the scientific understanding they needed. We are proud of the accomplishments of our children and families who worked together to create the excellent exhibits.

Becky Wentworth held a Nutmeg Luncheon for fourth grade readers. Fourteen students had each read two of the Nutmeg Winning Books and met for a Book Club conversation. The Center School choice for the Best Nutmeg Book will be announced later in the spring.

Crystal Lake School Data Team Work:

The kindergarten data team is currently working on a data cycle focused on writing. The team’s SMART goal is *The percentage of students scoring at mastery or higher will be 75% as measured by a sentence dictation assessment.*

The grade one data team is beginning a new cycle focused on fractions.

The grades two and four data teams will be meeting in March to plan for new cycles.

The grade three data team is beginning a new data team cycle focused on writing about reading. The team’s SMART goal is *80% of students will demonstrate mastery on an open ended written response as measured by a teacher created assessment administered on or around March 27, 2015.*

The February Crystal Lake School faculty meeting was devoted to two professional book club conversations. Crystal Lake K-2 teachers are reading and discussing Reading Wellness by Jan Burkins. This conversation is facilitated by Louise Kelly. Crystal Lake 3-4 teachers are reading and discussing Notice and Note by Kylene Beers. This conversation is facilitated by Penny Hughes.

Throughout the month of February Crystal Lake School teachers met with Michael Larkin to review progress toward professional goals. Teachers have goals in three areas: Student Learning Objectives, Parent Feedback and Performance and Practice. Teachers provided updates on the status of these goals and shared progress toward their achievement so far.

Windermere's Whole School Student Feedback Goal makes a commitment to delivering consistent small group instruction to our students who are below grade level expectations. Our goal is for our teachers to meet with these students 60% of the school year. Our mid-year data shows that Windermere is on track to meet this goal. Currently, our whole staff has met with their students who are below grade level expectation 66% of the school year, and when looking at classroom teacher's data only, they have met with their students 62% of the school year.

Ms. Ducharme and **Ms. Duff** presented a district workshop entitled Incorporating Progress Monitoring Routines into Daily Small Group Work. Teachers were able to walk away from the session with an idea of how to target their instruction for their most struggling readers by asking themselves if it is accuracy, fluency, or comprehension that is preventing their students from reading the next level of text, and then selecting the corresponding tools to progress monitor the area of need by utilizing running records, oral reading rubrics, and/or comprehension rubrics.

Ms. Bienkowski, **Ms. Morris** and **Ms. Byrne** presented a session entitled Notice & Note. During the session, teachers learned how to get students to read texts more closely by paying attention to various signposts. When students recognize the signpost in their texts, they ask themselves an essential question that helps them dig deeper into the meaning of the story. The Notice & Note team also provided teachers with resources to help them be able to apply the newly acquired learning to their own classrooms.

The 5/6 Reading Team continues to support classroom instruction with Tier 2/3 strategy lessons as well as share student progress during weekly WIT meetings. Currently they are meeting with the Lunch Bunch Book Club. During our professional development day in February, **Ms. Warner** and **Ms. Loubier** presented a Close Reading Workshop to grades 3-6 teachers.

Windermere held its third round of BIT (Behavioral Intervention Team) this year on February 10, 2015. Students with 5 or more office referrals in the 6 week window are discussed at the BIT meetings. The December round of BIT reviewed and discussed 22 students. This round, we had 18 students that were discussed and plans were put in place to help them increase positive behavior and decrease office referrals. Interventions include individual behavior plans, CICO, and school based counseling.

Students at Windermere and Crystal Lake School participated in the NAEP assessment on February 20, 2015. This was a pencil and paper assessment in the areas of reading, math, and science. Our students worked diligently on the assessment and were praised by the NAEP administrators for their positive attitudes and strong effort.

Our Instructional Technology Specialist, **Ms. Dhandapani** facilitated technology-related professional development sessions during the teacher in-service day. Topics included Digital Publishing, Digital Assessments, Technology Tutoring, and Chromebooks & Google Apps for Education for K-2 teachers. In addition, our technology department held a parent night entitled "Parenting in a Google World."

The purpose of the workshop was to familiarize parents with students' Google accounts and share ways teachers are utilizing this technology in the classroom. Approximately twenty parents attended across the district. **Ms. Palasek** spoke at the Parenting in a Google World parent workshop. She shared how she has integrated technology effectively in her classroom.

Ms. Dhandapani continued implementing lessons on Digital Citizenship for students in grades 5 & 6; topics include "What is a Digital Citizen?", "Creating a Positive Digital Footprint", "Online Communication", & "Research & Publishing Online." She facilitated a Grade 3 Town Meeting assembly at Windermere School about using Google Accounts and Chromebooks safely, respectfully, and responsibly. These lesson objectives were tied into Windermere's RISE motto. Furthermore, **Ms. Dhandapani** continued to collaborate with several grade 5 teachers to implement a weekly *Genius Hour* in the classroom during intervention block. Students are creating short videos on a topic of choice and learning important research, publishing, and video editing skills. Skype sessions for three grade 5 social studies teachers with the Virginia Historical Society were arranged. The topic of the program was "Pocahontas and the Powhatan Indians." Lastly, **Ms. Dhandapani** collaborated with Student Advisor leaders **Ms. Schumacher** and **Ms. Marshall** and Career Day leaders **Ms. Toback-Reveley**, **Ms. Marshall**, and **Ms. Temple** are working to streamline the registration process and dissemination of information through digital formats.

This above-mentioned work aligns with the Multi-Year academic plan to create regular opportunities for students to demonstrate learning using technology and to provide professional development on system-wide programs and resources.

Kristy LaPorte, David Pearson, Liz Cole, Leslie Mancuso, Erin McGurk, Melissa Haberern, Kim Sztaba, Becky Derby, Bob Cuvellier, Bob Pennington and **Laura Santos** met to review math programming for students with special needs in grades six through eight. The discussion centered on self contained programming with the alignment to grade level expectations. The team reviewed current practices and discussed goals and objectives to ensure students are mastering grade level concepts. Teachers presented current methodology and inclusive supports for students with math disabilities. Leslie Mancuso shared information on work being completed to ensure SRBI supports are providing pre and post assessment with align with math curriculum.

The winter session of The Zone After School Program began at EMS on February 2. Choices include rock climbing, cake decorating, archery and others, along with academic tutoring in math, language arts, and French or Spanish. This program is a great way for students to learn new skills, have fun in a positive environment, and meet new friends that enjoy the same sports, academics, activities and interests.

Like at most schools with the amount of full or partial days missed due to inclement weather, February had a good number of stops and starts. The month began with a Teachers College professional development day where language arts and social studies teachers focused their efforts in the area of writing. For social studies, teachers worked with a consultant on the use of checklist in the area of opinion/argumentative writing. Student work was critically examined and high-yield teaching strategies were modeled. In language arts, eighth grade language arts teachers brought on-demand student work from the new literary essay unit. These pre-assessment pieces of student writing were valuable in discussing the effectiveness of the school's new use of writing checklist. There were very positive first impressions of having student complete a comprehensive self analysis of their own writing skills and then developing personalized goals before attempting this complex essay format which requires both strong reading and writing skills. In seventh grade, the day had teachers giving detailed analytical review of the grade 7 writing checklist before implementing its use in early March.

The February department meetings for both language arts and mathematics were focused on preparations for the upcoming SBAC testing later in the spring. During the February 17 professional development day, members from both departments spent time taking the SBAC practice test and working collaboratively to consider ways to align their instructional practices with the CCSS based assessment.

Beyond taking the SBAC practice test, the February 17 professional development day activities included sessions on topics like implementing student led conferences, integrating instructional technology into classrooms, exploring classroom questioning techniques, a wide range of curriculum projects, and investigating special education issues. Finally in the month of February, departments spent significant time revamping high school leveling rubrics which previously had relied heavily on CMT data. Now that the CMT data is no longer available, teachers developed leveling rubrics using indicators from the new standards-based report cards and local assessment data. Eighth grade students will begin the process of using these level recommendations to plan their high school schedules starting on March 18.

As part of the high school's ongoing focus on assessment, the faculty has recently completed an intensive review of their midyear exams. The teachers analyzed the score results in their data teams and completed a chart for each exam that identifies areas for adjustment in curriculum and/or instruction. Prior to the analysis professional development was provided to the staff by **Mrs. Cole** and **Mrs. Cirillo** on utilizing certain protocols in reviewing student work. To summarize the faculty work, a shared Google doc was created that allowed all data teams to report on the impact on instruction, how their work in the exam analysis met student needs, and what needs to be done next.

Kristy LaPorte and **Melissa Haberern** provided professional development to Ellington High School teachers in the area of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The PD focused on regular education teachers' responsibilities of students with disabilities. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) was discussed with emphasis on the Accommodation/Modification page as it relates to the regular education environment. The Planning and Placement Team (PPT) process was reviewed as it relates the responsibilities of the regular education teacher as well as interpretation of standardized assessment scores in the area of intelligence.

John Collins recently provided SBAC training for all those teachers who are proctoring the SBAC test. Additional meetings regarding accommodations for special ed students were also held in preparation for the SBAC test. The high school test administration will take place during regularly scheduled school days after the April break. The students will take their test with the teachers that they normally have during their English or math classes. The strategy is that the familiarization of the student with the teacher will help create a better testing environment than if an unknown proctor were administering the test. There is also a plan in place for all English and math teachers to take the SBAC training test. Teachers will also have students take the SBAC practice tests or part thereof prior to the actual testing window.

Kristy LaPorte, Jenn Blalock, Kandace Murdoch and **Tara Kelly** attended professional development provided by the Connecticut State Department of Education: Meeting the Challenge: Academic Optimism and UDL. The high school team consisted of representation from the ELL department, special services department, math department and science department. It was an excellent opportunity to work together from the various departments to support all students at the high school.

2.0 Next Steps

The Crystal Lake School All Hazards Safety and Security Committee will meet in March to review the school's plan and plan for future steps including emergency response drills. Serving on this important

committee are: **Colleen Bava, Martha Terrion, Lisa LaForte, Louise Kelly, Brian Evarts, Lynn Seypura, Jeff Schiavetti, Crystal Lake Fire Department Chief Chuck Pippin, Sergeant Sweeney, Parent Representative Jennifer Lund, and Michael Larkin.**

The Crystal Lake Safe School Climate Committee will also meet in March. This committee will be planning for the next meeting of the CLS CARES groups. The CARES groups are focusing on learning about ways in which to demonstrate Cooperation, Advocacy, Respect, Empathy, and Self-Control in all areas of the school as well as on the bus. The groups meet every other month.

Elementary Parent Conferences will be offered the last week of March to share and review student progress. Meeting with parents is an opportunity build strong parent-teacher partnerships—partnerships that are necessary to reach the common goal of helping each child get the best education possible.

Ms. Bashaw is planning a NASA video conference program for grades 5/6 in March. This is a special event and interesting subject matter for our students. It is basically a NASA Assembly, a Video Conference with NASA JWST Scientist and Deputy PM for Resources. Our guest speaker will be Dr. John C. Mather, a Senior Astrophysicist and the Senior Project Scientist for the James Webb Space Telescope at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, MD. His research centers on infrared astronomy and cosmology. The title of his lecture: "Observing the Universe with the James Webb Space Telescope."

As the middle school begins to approach the SBAC testing window, teachers will begin to weave test preparation into their instruction. Students themselves will begin to become familiar with this new format by taking practice exams. Being that it is an online test, the school will begin to prepare and realign its computer resources to meet the demands of having a school wide administration of the SBAC in both mathematics and language arts. Beyond this SBAC preparation, the March faculty meeting will have a focus on instructional technology. The entire faculty will be discussing several initiatives that will promote a BYOT (bring your own technology) environment at the middle school. March will also be the month that transition meetings begin where middle school special education staff will be meeting with their counterparts at both EHS and Windermere as they work together to begin the process of developing customized student schedules called IEP's (individual education program) for next year.

3.0 Recognitions

Our Hundredth Day Celebrations acknowledged being together for 100 days this school year, being 100 days smarter! Some classrooms encouraged students to bring in collections of 100 items, and in others, students wrote about 100 Acts of Kindness.

Katie Herrity and Cindy Desrocher hosted the afterschool homework center sessions for elementary students in connection with Youth Services and **Diane Lasher-Penti**.

Center School teachers **Allison Morris, Amy Borio, Cristine DiVenere, Deb Hillemeir, Sheila Byrne, and Valerie Baigert** facilitated professional learning sessions in our February Teacher In-service.

Sara Spak and Jackie Ham provided professional development in the area of behavioral interventions. They provided case studies for faculty to review and develop appropriate interventions.

Becca Dean and **Anita Sussman** provided professional development in the area of reading. Both speech pathologists are fluent in phonological awareness assessments and interventions that support student achievement in this area.

Carin Faraci and **Megan Glunt** provided professional development in standardized assessments. Teachers learned how to interpret cognitive and achievement test results. Based on the modeled scores, participants learned which interventions with accommodations and modifications would best support student achievement.

The Crystal Lake School PTO sponsored its annual Movie Night in February. Crystal Lake families were treated to pizza and popcorn in the gym for a viewing of *Alexander and the Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. Parent volunteers **Becky Smith**, **Jennifer Lund**, **Christina Emery** and **Erin LaFleche** organized the night.

The Crystal Lake School Town Meeting Assembly was held in February. First graders led the assembly by sharing their learning about the 100th day of school. The student shared with the school community some of the ways in which they celebrated the 100th day of school, including math activities, songs and movement activities.

Crystal Lake School fourth grader **Shannon Carbonell** initiated a school wide community service project in February. Shannon had the idea of creating Valentine Card Kits for patients at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. The kits contained items that the patients could use to create their own valentine cards. With the generous donations of Crystal Lake School families we were able to fill four boxes of kits. Shannon's mother delivered the kits to the hospital in time for Valentine's Day.

On February 17 Crystal Lake School teachers all participated in various professional learning opportunities throughout the district. **Lisa LaForte** and **Martha Terrion** facilitated a session focused on the newly implemented Math Bridges program. The session provided practical tips for addressing all components of the program as well as organizational strategies for the accompanying materials. Michael Larkin facilitated a session focused on The Power of Our Words by Paula Denton. Positive Teacher Language is one of the core components of the Responsive Classroom Approach to elementary teaching. This session focused on the use of language to provide feedback to students.

New this year is a Town Meeting initiative which occurs monthly. By grade level, students and teachers come together in the cafeteria to meet and discuss topics of interest, items relevant to Windermere, and celebrate student and school successes. It is a time to share and reflect. Many times, students create PowerPoints or write essays to share topics of interest or concern. It also provides an avenue to discuss our PBIS system and reiterate expectations to students. At our February Town Meeting, the following presentations were wonderfully delivered and well-received. Kudos to all of our students who demonstrate leadership (and bravery) by standing and delivering an important message to their peers:

✓ *From 6th grade:*

Caroline Minich (with help from **Alyssa Stetson**) provided us with a presentation about

Bullying

✓ *From 5th grade:*

Suma Venkatesh presented a PowerPoint with the theme: R.I.S.E. to the top

✓ Also members from the 5th and 6th grade Friends of Rachel Club *Get Connected* talked about what their club is all about:

6th grade Get Connected speakers:

Raghav Srivastava

Greyson Martin

Niko Giotsas
Rose Caso
Halei Frey
Erin Carbonell

5th grade Get Connected speakers:

Lian Alzubali
Varshini Manivannan
Zach McTighe

- ✓ Members from the Friends of Rachel Club *Making a Difference* shared what they've been working on:

Ian Kos
Jonathan Bruno
Toby Wan
Holly Warner
Jordin Byrd
Olivia Pitney

Also, several students made a plea for student choice of seating arrangements when it came to lunch.

- ✓ 6th grade students who presented their persuasive essay argument for "Sit Where You Want at Lunch" at the January Town Meeting were:

Lauren Lagasse
Rebecca Samson
Nick DeBaise
Logan Marshall
Jackson Kupferschmid

In our ongoing efforts to recognize and thank staff members for their relentless and consistent assistance to students, staff, and parents at Windermere, a new award has been created: the *Prize Para Award*. Each month, Principal Welch recognizes a paraprofessional in the building with a certificate and lapel pin as a way to say "Thank you, for all you do!" Our recipient this past month was **Ms. MJ Rancourt** who in an important presence in our Intermediate School and assists students in all academic areas. She is an instructional presence in all the classrooms she is assigned and extremely helpful with students in need. Our aides, paraprofessionals, and tutors are vital to the success which epitomizes Windermere School!

Each month, our Windermere teachers recognized a member of the faculty with a *Faculty-to-Faculty* recognition. In the month of February, **Ms. Jenna Dhandapani** was recognized by last month's winners, fourth grade teachers, Ms. Hall and Mr. Pechie. The Windermere staff is extremely grateful for the quality work which Ms. Dhandapani is doing and how she is a constant helpful resource with all of our technology needs. From class lessons on digital citizenship to iPad use at the elementary level, Ms. Dhandapani is an incredible resource and force at Windermere School!

Lastly, **Ms. Donovan**, **Mr. Pechie**, and **Ms. Varga** are continually recognized for their PBIS initiatives and leadership roles in holistic school incentives and protocols. They have recruited key staff members to lead the charge for bus driver breakfasts, lunch aide rewards, and student contests for outstanding behavior amongst our school population. Recently, a standard PBIS survey was administered to the staff. Thus far, the results demonstrate a school climate which is positive, productive, and uplifting.

On Saturday, February 21, both of the EMS Jazz Bands traveled to Enrico Fermi High School in Enfield, CT to participate in their 24th Annual Jazz Festival. Despite the difficulty of rescheduling many Monday rehearsals due to weather, the students worked incredibly hard to prepare for their

performances and they did an excellent job! Both groups received a silver medal for their performances, and **Aidan Caron** received a certificate for Outstanding Musicianship. Bravo to all the students who participated!

As the Journal Inquirer reported, “a sea of students and purple T-shirts fill the bleachers in the high school gym Friday morning to cheer as a school’s Special Olympics-sponsored **Unified Basketball** team played the varsity team for the first time ever. The game was part of “U-Knighted,” week the schools week long celebration of diversity named for its Knights sports teams.” Mr. Rinaldi reported that the entire week was a huge success for faculty and students. The feedback was supportive, moving and encouraging as EHS continues to move forward with the recognition of diversity. Mr. Rinaldi stated to the entire student body that it was now their time to step out of their comfort level and recognize and respect the differences that exist with everybody. Mr. Rinaldi also stated that the entire program was conceived and developed by the schools unified leadership committee that included students **Erin Wardrop, Danielle Markowski, Erin Meaney, Brandon Bogrette, and Nick Toper.**

EHS hosted the NCCC Cheerleading Championship in February and once again EHS was judged to be the NCCC champion team.

The high school held its quarterly Spotlight Breakfast for the end of the second semester honoring those students who received special recognition from their classroom teachers for academic achievement or achieving high honor roll status. Principal Rinaldi called students by name and recognized them for the awards they received. The current senior class had the distinction of having most students on the high honor roll list.

The **Ellington Friends of Music** held its annual pancake breakfast and cabaret at the high school on February 28 to a record crowd. Numerous students put on either individual or group performances as attendees had the opportunity to listen and enjoy breakfast. A group from Wethersfield High School also performed selections from their upcoming musical.

A Celebration of the Arts was held on Saturday, February 28 from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Ellington Senior Center. This free event, hosted by community student leadership group Rise Above and organized by senior **Megan Niger**, will include artwork from community members of all ages, live music, and refreshments. Paintings, photography, pottery, jewelry, graffiti art, quilts, and more were on display. A special “budding artists” section featured artwork from elementary school students. EHS culinary students provided refreshments. This event was very well attended.