

ELLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DISTRICT AREAS OF FOCUS
MONTHLY REPORT
February 2017

Mastery Based Learning

Interventionists at Windermere, Center and Crystal Lake Schools continue to support students in learning prerequisite skills so they are more successful with their grade level curriculum. Math interventionists seek out and utilize various online resources to supplement classroom instruction and intervention services. Two of our interventionists attended a workshop recently that focused on helping students understand the expectation at each level of the Learning Progression, and how teachers can use the learning progressions to raise the level of work for individual students. Math interventionists attended the ATOMIC Math Conference. Sessions included work on fact fluency, SBAC interim assessments, and thinking flexibly about numbers. Lastly, our math interventionists and classroom teacher have been discussing practical ways to administer retakes for Bridges Unit tests at the elementary level, and best practices for recording data to reflect the growth students are making. Based on conversations with classroom teachers, math interventionists volunteered to give several students who didn't qualify for intervention services "end of unit probes" that assess essential skills in each math unit. This information will give classroom teachers an additional data point for assistance with planning and delivering small group math instruction in the classroom.

At a February faculty meeting the EHS staff engaged in a discussion of the new homework policy. The question put forth to the faculty was, "What are/have been the implications for practice with the new homework policy?" This is one of several discussions across the year to offer high school faculty collaboration time to reflect on the policy implementation and identify strategies for future growth. Faculty members were asked to identify dilemmas faced in the classroom with the new policy. The groups then talked with each other about the dilemmas presented and worked to define the issues more thoroughly and objectively. The suggested actions will be an agenda item for the March faculty meeting.

EHS Culinary Arts I students are learning about different kitchen tools relative to various cooking methods. They will need to know how to identify these tools, understand how they are constructed, and use them properly in order to attain proficiency and mastery.

Michael Larkin attended a presentation on Mastery Based Learning on February 1. Schools from around the state shared their work on implementing a mastery based learning environment. Grading and assessment practices as well as flexible scheduling models were discussed.

Equitable Opportunities

A group of EHS students, faculty, parents, and administrators from Ellington attended a networking session in Wallingford this past fall. At this session, participants discussed quality of life issues and concluded that it is influenced by the number of opportunities we are given to choose what we do, rather than what we are told we must do. This group began considering creating a "Flex Block," which would open up time during the school day for students and teachers to interact in support of our students' academic growth, and would also give high school students the opportunity to make choices about how best to use this time.

After visiting another school that has successfully implemented a similar program and gathering feedback from the EHS staff, the EHS committee then designed the EHS Flex Block pilot to collect data to determine if students are using the time as it is intended to be used. The committee will analyze the data they have collected and present their findings to the staff, who will be part of the decision-making process regarding implementation of the Flex Block at EHS. Special thanks to Mr. Richard Diamond, project leader for this initiative, Ms. Sara Spak, District Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and students, Kaitlin Johndrow, Amanda Marcus, Cynthia Mutua and Noah Welti for their contributions in the development of this initiative.

During the district's February Professional Learning Day, the Anti-Defamation League trained EHS students and staff for the "Truth About Hate" program. This is how Anti Defamation League describes this program:

Hate happens here in Connecticut and the seeds of hate can be found in every high school. Stereotyping, jokes, name-calling, and rumors are all seeds that can blossom into prejudice, discrimination and hate. The key to combating hate is to address these issues before they grow into major problems. This program is designed to help students understand how these issues affect their daily lives and the role they can play in challenging prejudice and hate.

The following students recognized the value of this program and spent their day off being trained as group leaders: Nick Abbruzzese, Victoria Amundarain, Danielle Bartlett, Kaitlyn Bartlett, Colin Berube, Karmelyn Boone, Serena Carl, Tori Chandler, Rebecca Cyr, Kati Einsiedel, Andrew Gains, Alexandra Hintze, Zachary Kindall, Alexandra Krajewski, Ryan LaDestro, Dan Meaney, Sylvia Muta, Tin Nguyen, Isha Patal, Megan Nolan, Freddy Rivera, Sarah Ward, and Alexandra Zen.

On March 2, the Anti-Defamation League, students and staff implemented the "Truth About Hate" program. This all-day program was presented to all ninth grade students. Many thought provoking topics were discussed during this presentation such as tolerance, hate, discrimination and prejudice. School counselors and psychologists were available during the presentation and later assisted students with these topics when necessary. Special thanks goes to the teachers who participated in this program: Caleb Johnston, Aaron Hoffman, Juanita Carroll, Rebecca Aldred, Deb Ward, Jason Scavotto, Lindsay McGinn, Katherine Lanz, Dylan Schroth, Emily Wry, Bill Prenetta, Kim Reilly, Suzanne Markowski and Lori Greenberg, and the committee members who made this presentation possible: Mark Wursthorn, Tim McCluskey, Catherine Lebron, Christina Plummer, and David Helmin.

EHS received a great deal of positive feedback about this program as seen below.

"I just wanted to let you both know how pleased I was to be part of this program. After our training I thought there was a good chance it could be impactful for our students, provided they were open to the message of the program. As I watched the students' faces during the video and the open mic, I knew that many of them were having their eyes opened."

"When we broke for lunch, I overheard one student apologize to another and say that she never meant to hurt him and she won't say anything like that again. SUCCESS! Several of my students told me it was a great assembly and that they thought we should do more like it and that all the students should get to do

it. A neighbor texted me to say that her son came home and told her all about it and that it was the best assembly he had ever been to and that we should do it with the whole school.”

The students, leaders and “Truth About Hate” committee members are meeting to discuss next steps and how these important topics can be developed and discussed in future student advisories. They are also considering expanding this program to other grade levels in the future.

Jessica Marshall, working with a group of fifth grade students, has created a ‘Kindness Counts’ program throughout Center School. Students in grades 2-5 acknowledge their peers with observed acts of kindness, publicly posting their actions in all the hallways of the school.

Dylan Schroth coached the Unified Basketball team again this year. He worked with the students to ensure both players and peer supports were enjoying the season. The team participated in several away games as well as two home games. The team also participated in a Saturday tournament in Hartford making Ellington High School proud! The end of the year faculty against the Unified team will be played in March to end the season.

Kristy LaPorte, Melissa Haberern and school psychologist Valerie Baigert held a Parent Conversations evening with several parents interested in learning more about Ellington Public Schools special education and SRBI programs. Several parents attended the evening workshop. The workshop included information on supporting the development of an Individual Education Plan as well as reading interventions and supports for parents to use at home with their children.

Innovative Practices

The Windermere Leadership Team collaborated on a Learning Walks faculty presentation. Small groups to respond to specific questions posed and after a specific response time, passed their information to a nearby group of teachers until everyone had a chance to respond accordingly. The teachers remarked on the value of the Learning Walks and how it was “eye opening” and clearly informative and helpful. The next round of walks is scheduled for March 2017.

Amy Borio and Krista Hespeler presented a professional learning session on Mindful Practices in the classroom. Participating teachers learned more about the concept, and had a chance to practice visualization and movement to help their students be more present in the classroom and aware of their ability to self-regulate. A presentation with links to articles and videos was shared with participants for their ongoing reference. These two teachers also provide a ‘Mindful Minute’ at each monthly Center School faculty meeting.

EHS Art students are responding to art by holding each other accountable for ongoing peer critiques using the “go-go-mo” protocol (give one, get one, move on) throughout their creative process.

EHS AP Spanish students are preparing for a socratic circle to discuss environmental concerns in Spanish speaking countries, the responsibilities of businesses and individuals, and possible solutions to the challenges.

Mrs. Santos, a special education teacher at Windermere school has revived the school store. She has been encouraging students to bring their ideas and inventions to the school store. One student has made an invention to help students who have difficulty opening their lockers. The student is planning to market and sell the item at the school store.

Ms. Wills and Ms. O'Donnell, special education teachers at Windermere, are experimenting with flexible seating. They are using exercise balls with students to use during their Intervention Block reading instruction. The teachers have supported the exercise balls with carpet squares on the bottom so students can move without the noise. Students are able to engage in small group reading lessons with more focus during the extended lessons.

Tracy Smith, the vocation and transition teacher at Ellington High School has continued to build merchandise and teacher coffee opportunities at the Knight's school store. Students work in the store and provide customer service while learning the responsibilities that are required to run a business. They assist with ordering, cashing out customers and restocking shelves. Students who start working in the school store are later able to use the experience on their resume as well as apply for community positions that require these skills.

Personalized Learning

During the February in-service day at Windermere School, Ms. Horvath, Ms. Korona, Mrs. Stroly and Ms. Maghini contributed to leading a workshop which focused on Student-Led Conferences, in preparation of transitioning from a pilot program to one which will be utilized by all grade 3-6 teachers. Windermere staff was clearly engaged in the previous work highlighted by teachers who had successfully implemented the Student-Led Conference pilot. Ideas for beginning the process and even fine-tuning the protocol were discussed. Teachers were visibly excited to implement a whole school Student-Led Conference initiative this year and next.

EHS Physics teacher Mr. DeCormier is working with Erin Graziani at the senior center to have his UConn ECE Physics students present their capstone projects at the senior center, open to the community. The presentations will take a multi-generational approach showcasing to all stakeholders in the town the wonderful and innovative learning happenings at Ellington High School. Presentation dates are planned for late May. The EHS Newsletter and the senior center newsletter will list specific dates and times in April/May.

Madame DeMarco brought her French IV students to Avert Brasserie, a French restaurant in West Hartford, on February 23. Dinner began with their choice of an hors d'oeuvre followed by an entrée including Boeuf Bourguignon or Steak frites. Dinner concluded with their choice of Crème Brûlée or Chocolat Pot de Crème. Students were also able to practice speaking French with the French speaking waiter.