

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Ellington, Connecticut

CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 10, 2016

The Curriculum Committee of the Ellington Board of Education met on Thursday, March 10, 2016 from 7:00-8:40 p.m. in the Board Room of the Administration Building. Present were: Board of Education Curriculum Committee members Gary Blanchette, Tracey Kiff-Judson, Andrew McNamar and Kris Picard-Wambolt. Also present were Board of Education members Dan Keune and Michael Young. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools; Erin McGurk, Director of Educational Services; Neil Rinaldi, Principal, Ellington High School; Mark Wursthorn, Assistant Principal, Ellington High School; and Jason Scavatto, an Ellington High School teacher. In addition, a number of parents and community members were present.

The meeting began with a period of public comment. A number of parents and some current students spoke to raise questions about the proposal to reconfigure course offerings in English at Ellington High School. Questions included concerns about what precipitated the change, the range of courses that would be offered for students, concerns about the level of rigor in heterogeneously grouped courses and the need for each student to be appropriately challenged in the level and type of work provided.

Dr. Nicol highlighted the process through which the decision to propose change was reviewed. Each year, the Board of Education reviews new courses and other changes in offerings at Ellington High School in preparation for the release of the Program of Studies. In this case, the proposal was generated at Ellington High School and went through a review process there by the English Department, the Curriculum Assistants meeting group, and the administration. The proposal was presented to the Board of Education Curriculum Committee at their December 11, 2015 meeting, and was discussed at the December meeting of the full Board of Education. When parent concerns were raised at the January and February Board of Education meetings, the district administration and the Board of Education Curriculum Committee scheduled a special meeting to allow for parent input and for the committee to discuss the concerns further.

Dr. McGurk made a detailed presentation to review the original proposal and to address the concerns that had been raised. She shared details on changes that have been made to course offerings at Ellington High School over the past nine years, including the development of 60 new courses. She presented data on Advanced Placement testing and a comparison of past and current enrollment in Advanced Placement and UCONN Early College Experience courses. Dr. McGurk's presentation provided the committee with information about the English requirements at the high school, a rationale for making the change in grouping practices, and data which indicated that similar grouping changes at the middle school and related changes in curriculum and instructional practices had resulted in high levels of student achievement.

Dr. McGurk presented the committee with three options that had been reviewed and considered by the administration. Option A represented the changes as currently published in the EHS Program of Studies. All English classes at EHS, with the exception of AP/ECE courses and the year-long Journalism in the 21st Century course, would be heterogeneously grouped, with students taking the course for college prep or for honors credit assigned to the same course sections. Students electing to take a course for honors credit would complete identified "Honors Challenge" assignments.

Mr. Scavotto described the success he had had using this model in his Speech and Debate English class this year.

Option B would have the same grouping patterns as Option A for juniors and seniors, but would have students in English I and English II all receive the same honors credit for the course.

Dr. McGurk explained that this approach is used at other high schools, including Farmington High School, and is commonly referred to as the Honors for All approach, signifying that all students are instructed using the same rigorous curriculum typically used in an honors level course.

Option C would retain the current structure of offering separate sections of English I and English II (College Prep and Honors) and have the same grouping patterns as Option A for juniors and seniors. On behalf of the administration, Dr. McGurk recommended Option C to the committee and further recommended that this approach be kept in place for the next two years, so that the high school would have time to gather data, including student, teacher and parent feedback, to evaluate this approach. The committee asked a number of questions and discussed the options at some length.

A motion was made to recommend to maintain the current configuration of honors and college prep sections of English I and English II, and to heterogeneously group students in elective semester English courses for juniors and seniors for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years.

1st. T. Kiff-Judson 2nd. A. McNamar

VOTE: Unanimous. The motion passed.

The next meeting of the Curriculum Committee is scheduled for Friday, April 8, 2016 at 1:00 p.m.

A motion to adjourn was made at 8:40 p.m.

1st. A. McNamar 2nd. T. Kiff-Judson

VOTE: Unanimous. The motion passed.

Respectfully submitted by: _____
Gary Blanchette, Curriculum Committee Chairperson