

**ELLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
DISTRICT AREAS OF FOCUS  
MONTHLY REPORT  
November 2016**

**Mastery Based Learning**

Crystal Lake School data teams continued their work in November by addressing student mastery of the following skills/concepts: kindergarten phonemic awareness, grade one nonfiction writing, grade two math fact fluency, grade three writing conventions, grade four essay writing, grade five fraction operations.

Working with Mrs. Cirillo, Curriculum Supervisor, a group of 7-12 English teachers have begun the process to identify content specific standards for English/Language Arts. These standards will be articulated 7-12 and will truly represent a shared vision of the skills we hold to be essential to all our students.

Teachers from the middle school and high school are piloting mastery-based learning in Algebra I. Power standards have been created and standards are being assessed and documented on all assessment cover sheets.

World Languages teachers are collaborating to pilot a year-long project scenario, inspired by the high school's book club reading *Role Reversal* by Mark Barnes, for the second semester. These EHS teachers have been working together to include Alignment of the National Standards for Learning Languages (ACTFL) with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), personal choice and choice boards into the project. Additionally, the high school world languages teachers have been communicating with middle school language teachers to increase support and articulation of the world languages program for students in both schools.

**Equitable Opportunities**

The Crystal Lake School Equitable Opportunities faculty study group continues to examine master scheduling at Crystal Lake School to ensure access for all of our students to Tier 1 instruction. The study group is examining our intervention block schedule in a cycle of continuous improvement.

Center School intervention teachers schedules include both pull-out instruction and push-in support. Using the six models of co-teaching, they have been planning with classroom teachers to provide instruction to all students, including those needing enrichment as well as intervention.

Mr. Wursthorn has established a committee that held a planning session in November to prepare for the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) "Truth about Hate" assembly that will be held at EHS in March. The Truth about Hate assembly combats hate (stereotyping, jokes, name calling, etc.) before they grow into major problems. This program is designed to help students understand how these "hate" issues affect their daily lives and the role they can play in challenging prejudice and hate.

With the guidance of Mrs. Cirillo, the English department will be implementing new curriculum units that focus on multicultural texts. The freshmen English classes will be piloting a book club that explores multiple cultures.

**Innovative Practices**

On November 17, Ellington Physical Education teachers Ines Knopes (Center School) and Katie Johnson (Ellington Middle School), along with Mike Raddleback from Tolland Middle School, were

invited to present at the Connecticut Association for Physical Education, Health, Recreation and Dance (CAPEHRD) Conference in Cromwell, CT. Their presentation focused on how European Team Handball and Tchoukball can be effectively integrated into K-12 Physical Education curriculums. Tchoukball is a great non-contact sport that involves critical thinking skills and teamwork. Team Handball is a great quick paced game that uses skills related to other games. All three educators presented firsthand experiences and examples of how these international games can be introduced, and effectively taught, in American classrooms. This innovative approach to student health and fitness instruction was well received by 40 fellow Physical and Health Educators from around the state of Connecticut.

*Meditation Mornings* for teachers at Windermere School have begun. Linking with a community meditation and yoga instructor, staff has begun a two days a week meditation program to help them with life's stressors and to encourage the practice to spill into the classroom to assist all of our students.

Mr. Rinaldi, Mr. Diamond, Ms. Spak, and students Mandy Marcus, Noah Welti, Cynthia Mutua, and Katelin Johndrow visited Lyman Hall High School in Wallingford to observe their innovative practice of "Office Hours." This site visit allowed them to gather information from students and teachers which will help inform the development of a new initiative at EHS to adjust scheduling to address learning choice students. Following the visitation the students did a presentation of their visit to the EHS faculty. The students collected questions from the faculty that they will respond to at the next faculty meeting.

On November 1, Mr. Rinaldi attended a conference sponsored by the Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER) for high school principals for leading Innovative Practices at the high school level. This conference focused on strategies to help close the achievement gap as well as a presentation by Dr. Douglas Reeves who has authored over 30 books and 80 articles on leadership and organizational effectiveness.

Mrs. Chandler will pilot "The Homework Challenge" as discussed on November 29 at the EHS Book Club meeting from the book *Role Reversal* by Mark Barnes. Mrs. Chandler will pilot the strategy of assigning no homework during the next unit of study in Algebra II. At the end of the unit Mrs. Chandler will compare the data from the unit assessment to the data from previous assessments and the current assessment in other Algebra II classes.

At EHS, based on research of how highly effective the practice of providing formative feedback is, Mr. McCluskey is using a feedback model to replace daily grades in Fitness class. A Google Doc is shared with the teacher and student, direct teacher feedback is given approximately 2 out of every 5 days. Students are expected to look at the feedback and use it to frame their actions and participation for the next class. Every two weeks Mr. McCluskey will meet with students individually to discuss prior feedback and what an appropriate grade would be at that time.

## **Personalized Learning**

In Mrs. Tautkus and Mrs. Bolduc's 7th grade science classes at Ellington Middle School, students are figuring out the phenomenon, "How does ice cream melt?" by exploring thermal energy through discussions and investigations. In order to figure out how to reduce thermal energy in real-life situations, students are working on solving the problem of keeping water or air cold or warm. Students were allowed to choose which of these problems they were interested in solving. Currently, they are using the engineering LAUNCH process in order to solve their chosen specific problem. Students are encouraged to create their own daily goals and schedules so that they are in control of their timeframes, learning and explorations. Students will also be able to make their thinking public

with a method that they choose. There is a common due date for all students, but this type of experience allows students to choose multiple pathways while they explore thermal energy reduction.

Teachers at Windermere are looking at growth mindset theory as part of molding student initiative to adopt perseverance and ultimate success as a norm for all. In concert with personalized learning, Ms. Cusano's teaching focus helped students to understand the validity and power of self-belief and how a growth mindset can help us with personal success and perseverance as it relates to their lives and development. Ms. Cusano prepared students for the lesson with some bumble bee breaths (our yoga integration interfaced with Second Step).

Third, Fourth, and Fifth grade teachers at Center and Crystal Lake Schools guided students through the self-reflection process to select work samples to provide evidence for their own learning in preparation for sharing at their Parent Conference. Students used learning progressions and content assessments to explain how they set goals for their own learning.

Mr Rinaldi produced a video that featured a number of different students commenting on their middle school experiences of student-led conferences. The student-led conferences are scheduled for December 7, 8, and 9. Mr. Rinaldi plans to collect parent feedback through an exit survey to assess and adjust this program prior to the next round of student-led conferences.

College Board has informed Ellington High School that they have been accepted for implementing the AP Capstone program at EHS. This program will provide students with unprecedented opportunities to personalize their learning and the possibility for students to be recognized as an AP Capstone Certificate or Diploma recipient. This recognition depends on the number and scores of other completed AP coursework. Ellington High School is 1 of 7 other high schools in the state that have been chosen by College Board to run the AP Capstone program.

Several new high school courses were presented to the Ellington Board of Education Curriculum Committee that will further the school's commitment to meeting all students needs by providing a rich and varied curriculum for student choice.

Mr. Stiles and Mr. McCluskey are piloting Personalized Learning with a PE 1 class. Students are given resources and learning targets that must be met. Students are able to work on individual skills that incorporate student voice and choice in groups or by themselves to master the target. Throughout the unit Mr. Stiles and Mr. McCluskey will assess progress and help transition the skill acquisition into game play.