

**BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Ellington, Connecticut**

**Curriculum Committee Meeting Minutes**

The Curriculum Committee of the Ellington Board of Education met on Wednesday, May 30, 2018 in the School Administration Building.

**Attendees:**

*Administrative Team Members:* Dr. Erin McGurk, Ms. Elizabeth Cole, Ms. Michele Cirillo,

*Board of Education Committee Members:* Ms. Marcia Kupferschmid, Ms. Jen Dzen, Dr. Michael Young (Chair).

Not present: Ms. Kris Picard-Wambolt, Mr. Gary Blanchette

*Also in attendance:* Ms. Tracey Kiff-Judson

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 5:36 PM by Dr. Young (Chair).

**Discussion Items**

1. Common template for syllabi at Ellington High School

Dr. McGurk described how this project emerged from an identified need for consistency in expectations including grading and grading policies across HS courses. Core expectations are being discussed and clarified by course instructors. In the past, it was possible that two teachers teaching the same course would not have a common syllabus or identical expectations. This project might also make it easier for students to seek help from other teachers teaching the same course; since there is a common core of topics, students could potentially learn that there are multiple teachers who could help them.

[Handout "[EHS Syllabus Template/Guidelines](#)"]

The new syllabus template will list major topics covered throughout the course as well as standard texts that will be used by the entire class. There will also be student book choices and independent reading that will not necessarily be listed on the syllabus. Students will bring home a copy of the syllabus for each course for parent signature. Parents or students may identify reading materials that they do not wish used. Alternative texts will be made available in those situations. Students will not be "opting out" of the unit, but will read an alternative text that illustrates similar themes or points.

[Handout "[Language for English Syllabi](#)"]

Alexei's book, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, was discussed as an example of how the syllabus might contribute, along with Open House presentations and other communications, to improved transparency to aid parents in exercising their judgment in these curricular matters.

The administrative team reminded the committee that as students enter the high school curriculum, the topics across subject areas become more complex in their content and address more mature

themes. The administrative team provided a passage from Gus key's book, *On Your Mark* to help explain bullet 4 of the "Guidelines" concerning changes in Pass/Fail grading scale policy, in which Failure is equated to 50%, rather than Zero, and no work and late work are coded NW.

The committee inquired about the 100 point scale and how, if failure is equated to 50%, it might appear that doing nothing equates to learning half the content. This seemed "clunky" as an interim process toward revising the grading approach at the high school, but reasonable as a first step. This sparked a discussion of the retake/redo policy as well. Bullet 5 of the handout clarifies that completing homework prior to a test is a required basis for requesting a redo/retake. The goal is for instruction to provide multiple opportunities to learn and grow, but also encourage students not to avoid the preparation and work (and habits) needed for success on tests and exams. The purpose of replacing failure as zero with failure as 50% is that computing averages as a measure of central tendency can be unreasonably influenced by very high or very low scores, as described in Gus key's book. The committee inquired if most middle school students currently working under the mastery-based learning system are figuring out that doing homework and other study preparation as requested is still a better strategy than relying solely the redo/retake policy options. Administrative team reported the number of redos and retakes reported by some teachers has indeed dropped across time. Bullet 5 is also intended to support and reinforce parents in communicating to students the value of doing work in preparation for learning.

[Handout [sample Physics Syllabus/Grading Policy 2013-2014](#)]

A sample Physics course syllabus was handed to teachers as an illustration of how the guidelines might be implemented. It was noted that, as a single example, some aspects of each actual syllabus may be a bit different, but still meet the guidelines.

1. Update on the Habits of Success work at EHS

[Handout "[Ellington High School Habits for Success DRAFT](#)"]

Dr. McGurk described a draft version of the Habits for Success document for the high school that is intended to parallel the PRIDE system at the middle school. Ms. Cirillo described that the Mastery-Based Learning Task Force had suggested that the high school should have a system similar PRIDE. The current version is being pilot tested by some high school teachers. Ms. Cole described how some mathematics teachers are piloting the rubric by asking students to self-reflect before the students receive their assessment results. She related how the rubric is also intended to help identify what is needed between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> attempts of the redo/retakes. The rubrics may also guide teacher-student conferences with regard to expectations for being prepared. For example, in an ECE physics class, the rubric is sometimes presented to students during class work time, as a reminder of the habits for success they should be implementing.

The committee inquired about how this form of feedback may help teachers communicate to parents and students the value of preparation, and if it is connected to the soft skills identified in our Vision of the Graduate. The committee asked if the rubric is a self assessment or teacher-provided assessment, and was told it was both. Teachers are reporting the results but students should be involved.

The administrative team discussed the possibility of tying incentives to the Habits for Success and whether these might be course-specific or affect students across courses. Such an incentive system is not ready for implementation at this time. The committee asked if some process for getting quantitative and representative qualitative data about the trial could be designed. There were some technical issues with getting this type of data currently from our reporting system, but some system for acquiring good evidence for decision making was described as possible. The committee also inquired about the philosophical view of learning theory that provides the framework for their approach, specifically asking how controlling behavior with external rewards might relate to the goal to develop internally motivated self regulation skills.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 6:50 PM.

1st: Ms. Marcia Kupferschmid, 2nd: Tracey Kiff-Judson, Vote: Unanimously approved.

### **Minutes respectfully submitted by:**

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Michael Young, Curriculum Committee Chairperson