

A meeting of the Curriculum Committee was held on Tuesday, December 13, 2022, at 5:00 p.m. in the Board of Education Conference Room, 47 Main Street, Ellington, CT.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Jennifer Dzen.

PRESENT Jennifer Dzen, Marcia Kupferschmid, Angie Moser, Liz Nord, Miriam Underwood

ABSENT Michael Young, Chair

ALSO PRESENT Oliver Barton, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
Michael Nash, Co-Principal, Ellington Middle School
Eric Senger, Teacher, EMS
Chris Messier, Lead Teacher, Center School
Laura Gentilcore, Teacher, Windermere School
Loretta Donovan, Teacher, Windermere School
Christina Knickerbocker, Teacher, EMS

AGENDA ITEMS

School Learning Walks – Reflections from teachers, visit design, and implementation to date

Mr. Oliver Barton, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction

Mr. Barton invited the teachers and administrator present to talk about how the walks are working.

Ms. Knickerbocker talked about the many different walks they are currently conducting at the Middle School whether it is district-based, school-based, or even subject-specific. EMS has an open-door policy which has become more of a culture for classrooms. The Learning Walks have a specific focus with a teacher inquiry group that will visit a classroom for 10 minutes. Watching her students interact in another classroom setting helps her relate to them on a different level. This year they are focusing more on personalized learning. Linda Robinson at EMS has been instrumental in connecting them with texts and articles related to their chosen inquiry focus. Two teachers are implementing the Modern Classroom model which visiting teachers, in turn, saw in action implement features in their classrooms. Ms. Knickerbocker also spoke about how much she liked the “sticky note” idea and that she still has hers, explaining that teachers left sticky notes in the classroom about one positive thing in the classroom they observed.

Ms. Donovan spoke of looking at different features and patterns across classrooms, looking for the positive things that are happening. It has been important to look at the vertical learning taking place—what is happening in the grades above and below at the elementary level. She spoke to the isolation the teachers feel being in their classrooms all day and how the walks help teachers feel good and connect with their peers. It is also interesting to observe what teachers vs. students are doing during a lesson.

Mr. Messier noted that it was important for teachers to be involved in the wrap-up sessions after the learning walks. Teachers want to hear the summaries and have an opportunity to join in on the reflection piece. It would help them to understand how they can improve their practice and lends itself to a comfortable place for teachers to speak honestly.

Ms. Donovan spoke to some teachers at Windermere being concerned the walks need to be more teacher-led, not administrator which contributed to the sentiment among some that teachers are being judged. Teachers would like the walks to be more focused on celebrating the positives, what is working well with those positives being highlighted in the staff meetings instead of what can we do to grow. Some of the staff feel they are being “voluntold” when the administration asks for volunteers as they do not feel like they can say no.

Board Member Underwood asked how they would handle a teacher that did not want to open their door to observation. Mr. Nash spoke to the opt-out option available with no judgment. No one at EMS has expressed concern over the last 4-5 years as it has become part of the culture. Ms. Underwood also asked how to encourage the staff that are not willing to participate. Ms. Donovan said they do that by offering the teacher to be an observer to help them with their comfort level or perhaps doing a smaller learning walk with fewer people to help build confidence in the process.

Mr. Barton spoke to the transparency of the process and how that is key. Moving forward the district is looking to do one formal walk with administrators and one less formal walk per year at each school. Each school has a different comfort level with the learning walks but universally need to ensure they are worthwhile for the teachers. They are not worth conducting if there is no added value for teachers and administrators. Mr. Nash said it is important to ensure the administration is giving the teachers the time to learn and the support to cover their classrooms so the buildings are creating a culture of collaboration.

Ms. Knickerbocker explained the modern or flipped classroom in which students are learning at their own pace creating a truly personalized learning environment. She spoke of the game board displayed in the classroom that shows the pace of lessons. Each student is assessed and placed at the corresponding table based on their knowledge level (below, above, or on pace). Students are more comfortable with the process when they start the year doing it. Everything is extremely organized behind the scenes by the teacher.

In conclusion, Board Member Underwood pointed out that Mr. Barton’s leadership and calm demeanor has helped bring the process to its current success. It is clearly a benefit to the students which is always a win for the district. Jen thanked the teachers and administrator for participating in the meeting. She spoke to the importance of hearing from the staff and that the Board values and appreciates hearing honest feedback.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION

First: A. Moser

Second: M. Underwood

To adjourn the meeting of the Curriculum Committee (6:05 p.m.)

Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer Dzen, Board of Education Chair

