



**Board of Education Open Topics Forum November 15, 2016
Administration and Board Responses to Questions Posed by Community Members**

Curriculum

Q. How was the Columbia Teachers College Writing Program chosen for the District? Who made the decision? What other programs were looked at? Were teachers involved? What were the criteria?

A. Members of the current administration were not in the District at the time, but it appears that the decision was made in stages from 2014-15. The level of teacher involvement is difficult to discern. Among the factors considered during the process were the following:

- A study completed in 2012-2013 by Shelly Harwayne indicating the weaknesses in our reading and writing program at the primary level;
- research on comparable districts and the programs they used;
- relationships which members of the previous administration had with Teachers College, where they had been students;
- a presentation to the Curriculum Council.

Q. How long will it be before the District can evaluate the Teachers College Writing program and how will it be evaluated?

A. Including this year, three years would be an appropriate time period for a program review. Since this is the implementation year and teachers are learning about the program, and still writing the units, this would be our year 1. We would expect to see improvement in our students' writing performance in year 2 and year 3. The evaluation would take place through a multi-variable format, including observation, data review and feedback.

- Observation: Administrator observations--formal and walk-throughs--to determine how well the program is being implemented and how responsive students are to the program.
- Data Review: Review of student work using rubrics and protocols (some of this would be conducted with Shelly Klein, the consultant, some with building and district administrators), long-range review of rubric scores, and review of State testing data--specifically looking at students' scores and responses on the 2 and 4 point written questions.
- Feedback: Student, teacher, administrator and parent surveys, and review of student exit tickets.

Q. Would the District be willing to consider the Hochman Method (*Writing Revolution*) writing program used by Windward School, which is good for all students and not just for those with language-based learning disabilities?

A. We are currently considering it. Both Ms. Goffman and Dr. Monahan are researching it. Ms. Goffman and Ms. Chung have visited Tuckahoe, which uses the program K-12 (see question below). Dr. Monahan, through his association with Bank Street School of Education and Pace University, has been gathering information from NYC educators that use both Readers/Writers workshop and *Writing Revolution*.

Q. Would the District be willing to consider a multisensory reading program at the MS for parents whose children are placed out-of-district and who want to bring them back in-district?

A. Our Middle School teachers do use a multisensory reading approach, but it is not the structured 'Wilson Reading' program. The Middle School Special Education teachers use grade level vocabulary to teach reading in the Gateway program.

Q. We understand that Special Education Director Julia Chung went to observe the Windward program in place at Tuckahoe. Were there any reports back?

A. Sherri Goffman and Julia Chung went to visit Tuckahoe to see the *Writing Revolution* program. They met with Ellen McDonnell, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum there, and visited three classes. Tuckahoe works as a partner district with the *Writing Revolution*. They trained every teacher, all content teachers too. Tuckahoe is a very small district with one elementary, one middle and one high school. The total number of students is around 1,000. The cost of the implementation for the Tuckahoe district was around \$80,000 in year 1.

The positive aspects observed included the following:

- Commonalities among the grades visited (grades 1, 4 and 7-ELA), common strategies, vocabulary, and posters hanging in rooms;
- integration of the program with Writers Workshop.

The disadvantages observed included the following:

- The program is too basic for some students. Teachers, especially at the elementary school, are asking for the opportunity to differentiate and move students along to higher levels.

Q. There has been turnover at the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum level. It feels like this has resulted in delays in standardization and implementing changes. What can we do to fix this?

A. The Board of Education is fully aware of turnover in that position and is working on a plan for a long-term solution. The District and Board are grateful to have Ms. Sheryl Goffman, a curriculum professional with many years of experience in the field, at the head of the Department.

Q. What can we do to promote more authentic differentiation within the classroom?

A. Currently, the District’s teachers offer differentiated learning through flexible groupings, choice, and varied materials. Differentiation is inherent in the Readers and Writers Workshop model employed at the elementary schools through leveled readers, guided and independent reading, and guided and independent writing.

Promoting more authentic differentiation within the classroom requires that teachers understand what differentiation is and how to implement a differentiated learning environment in their classes. Conducting professional learning sessions during after-school Professional Development time and as a part of Superintendent's Conference Days, along with teacher and administrator attendance at workshops and conferences, supports this learning process.

Principals currently focus on differentiation as part of the Student Engagement Component of the Danielson Framework for teacher evaluation during formal and informal observations and walk-throughs. We are currently investigating the possibility of working with a consultant (akin to how we work with Shelly Klein for literacy) in the field of differentiation for the 2017-18 school year.

Q. How does the Curriculum Council work? What is the scope? What role does the Curriculum Council play in looking at current curriculum? How does it get involved in feedback loops?

A. According to the Curriculum Council guidelines, the Curriculum Council was formed to provide structure, guidelines, and procedures for development and review of new course proposals. The Council is composed of administrators, faculty, students, parents, community members and members of the Board of Education.

The role of the Curriculum Council is:

- To review proposals for new course offerings;
- to consider and make recommendations regarding initial curriculum proposals;
- to make recommendations to the Superintendent for curricula development and adoption of curricula by the Board of Education.

Curriculum proposals are processed through the following steps:

- Development of written proposal by faculty member(s) originating the proposal
- Presentation to Curriculum Council
- Council discussion and review
- Decision regarding recommendation to Superintendent/Board of Education for curriculum development
- Presentation of fully-developed curriculum to Council
- Decision regarding recommendation to Superintendent/Board of Education for adoption

In the area of development, the guidelines state that teachers proposing a new course complete the appropriate District form, and submit the proposal to the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. These proposals and the subsequent curriculum development documents

use District forms found on the website. Following the presentation at a meeting, the Council deliberates, reaches consensus and makes recommendations regarding each agenda item. The Council sends approved proposals on to the Superintendent. The Council works to achieve consensus on its recommendations.

There is no mention of looking at current curriculum or feedback loops in the guidelines for the Council; however, we are investigating whether to revisit the process outlined above in order to broaden it and add procedures that would incorporate a five-year curriculum cycle review and feedback loop, such as the following:

- Step 1 – Study trends, review research, and assess needs
- Step 2 – Establish and/or review philosophy, student outcomes, scope and sequence
- Step 3 – Design, pilot, adapt, and recommend
- Step 4 – Adoption and implementation of curriculum
- Steps 5-7 – Monitor and evaluate curriculum

Parent Relations

Q. Can we offer evening parent-teacher conferences? The 11 a.m. dismissal for parent teacher conferences would seem to disrupt instruction, and daytime conferences are difficult for working parents to attend.

A. According to the labor agreement currently in place between the District and the Rye Teachers Association (RTA), evening conference times would require agreement pursuant to negotiations with the RTA.

Q. Many school events are planned during the early part of the week and early in the day. For example, during the November 14-18 American Education Week this year, visiting hours were 9-11 a.m. on a Monday or Tuesday. Can we plan some events for working parents that are later in the week, later in the day, or after school?

A. Later in the day or later in the week is possible. Having them after school would again be subject to negotiations. As we develop next year's calendar, it is possible to consider such options. Obviously, there are a number of factors that must be part of the decision.

Q. The school calendar seemed to have a lot of days off this year. How do we compare to other Westchester County and Connecticut public schools?

A. Rye has the minimum allowable number of school days according to State Education Department (SED) regulations. Many other districts have more instructional days. Additional instructional days would also be subject to negotiations.

Website/Communications

Q. Can the District broadcast the Board of Education meetings live like the City Council does?

A. We are currently exploring the possibilities.

Q. Can the District “push” information out to the community, e.g., Board of Education meeting agendas, presentations, etc.?

A. The District is in the process of creating a new, more user-friendly website. The new website will enhance our ability to communicate. In developing the new website, the plan is to incorporate mass communication capability. Of course, people will need to sign up to receive those communications.

Q. Will parents and the POs/PTOs be able to provide input into the new website?

A. Yes. The District will look to them for input into the new website. We will send an online survey to parents and will meet with the PO/PTO heads to garner their feedback.

Superintendent Search

Q. What is the timeline for the Superintendent search? The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum search?

A. The Board of Education is working with the search firm of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates to conduct the Superintendent search. The Leadership Profile, based on the interview focus groups that took place in the District, is complete and was publicly presented at the November 15 Board of Education meeting. Our search consultants report the recruitment process is well underway. The Board intends to appoint a new Superintendent by early spring, with the new Superintendent assuming responsibilities in July 2017. The new Superintendent would then hire the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum. It is desirable that the new Superintendent do the hiring for this position; search firms are not typically used to fill an Assistant Superintendent position.

Physical Plant

Q. What is the status of the exterior wall of the Science Wing?

A. Litigation regarding the exterior wall of the Science Wing continues with the District’s contractor. The District intends to close the exterior wall by the end of January, weather permitting. Thankfully, the building is fully functional and has been in continuous use by students and faculty.

Athletics

Q. Can the District help the crew team with transportation support? The meets are at 4:30 in the morning and the team travels long distances to regattas. The team has been very successful, both in competition and in providing a large number of Rye students with valuable extracurricular experience.

A. When crew was approved as a recognized sport, it was with the explicit agreement that the team would not receive funding from the District and that it would be entirely booster funded. The same agreement has been made with other teams added to the athletic roster since that time. Later, approximately \$20,000 in District funding was made available to the crew team. Providing

transportation would be costly, and other sports and activities that were also added to the roster in difficult economic times with the same understanding with regards to funding would likely expect the same treatment.