

## **CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MINUTES**

### **May 26, 2015**

Attendance: Laura Schulkind, Richard Walker, Deirdre d'Albertis, Joe Phelan, Marvin Kreps.

#### **ELA District Curriculum and NYS Common Core Learning Standards**

Prior to this month's meeting, Marvin presented the committee with a binder full of documents pertaining to Rhinebeck Central School District's redesign of the ELA curriculum in CLS (K-3) and BMS (grade 8), along with the actual text of New York State's P-12 Common Core Learning Standards.

Members of the committee praised the dedication and hard work that went into producing such a comprehensive approach to the new standards. Teachers have been integral to this process, developing lesson plans and adapting aspects of their current practice to support curricular innovation. Marvin's role has been to "build the frames" within and across grades, drawing from and reinforcing what he refers to as the "Power Standards" at each level.

How much autonomy do individual teachers have in relation to the new curriculum? Marvin acknowledged that the unique practices of elementary school teachers in the past were both "interest-driven" and "project-based." As such, however, they may have been inherently unequal as well. Students in one section of a particular grade might not share important learning experiences going on in another section. With curriculum revision comes an important opportunity for each teacher's "great ideas" to be shared with others: then all students in a particular grade will be able to count on engaging with the same material and experiences equally. Rick asked if there is any flexibility for improvisation or response to student interest built into the new system. Marvin replied that there is some time allotted within unit plans for teacher choice and pacing, but the Common Core is for the most part a "stubbornly, inexorably rigorous" plan. Teachers will not be able to "stray too far" from the content outlined in the curriculum documents. This will be particularly true in the higher grades (from middle to high school).

Rick also asked about developmentally appropriate curricula. Marvin answered that "we are pressing out against the boundary of what kids can do." Under Common Core, every student needs to hit the standard. This presents challenges and reinforces the need to build in "assessment checkpoints" throughout. With a "backward design model"—charting expectations for "college and career readiness" from 12<sup>th</sup> grade to K-1—there is pressure to regard development as steady and progressive. Yet, as Marvin observed, children don't necessarily develop "linearly." Public schools must accommodate a spread or range of performance across every grade level. A "mastery" approach such as the model built into the new standards fails to account for the fact that some children grow in fits and starts, surging forward and then reaching a plateau. How

and when this occurs is hard to “map” in relation to a heterogeneous population of learners.

Marvin pointed out that this new emphasis on “college and career readiness” can be compared to coaching students for life. There is a focus on drills and practice to prepare the student to “play the game.” Just because it will be hard doesn’t mean it isn’t worth doing. The challenge for educators implementing CCS is “how to give the right challenge at the right time.” Scaffolding of learning is important; becoming an independent, self-directed learner is the ultimate goal (“transference, maintenance, and generalization of knowledge”). Circling back to whether or not the Common Core Learning Standards are “developmentally appropriate,” Marvin encouraged the group to consider that question in the context of “instructional strategies” as students encounter such foreseeable challenges.

Where does differentiated learning fit in? “Learning progressions” are being built into the curriculum, Marvin stated, and there will be multiple levels built around each of the “Power Standards” (“a few things worth knowing deeply”). We are trying to implement a “thinking curriculum,” no longer a mile wide and an inch deep.

Members of the group spoke at some length about the perception on the part of a few parents that writing is “not being taught” with sufficient rigor in the secondary grades (a concern raised in one of the coffee hours). Marvin asked if our students graduate unable to secure admission to higher education degree programs or to complete their course work in writing intensive subjects? That would be one powerful indicator that our students are not learning enough. The summative data, however, show nearly 100% pass rate on Regents exams: 88% score a 3, 4, or 5 at present.

Laura asked about instructional delivery: what is the role of technology moving forward? MK spoke about Foundations, a program integral to reader/writer workshops in K-2. We are using technology at present to access content. Steve Jensen is looking into building technological tools into each unit. Many hours of “screen time” for young children is “not necessarily a good thing,” so thinking more broadly about technology in support of literacy and looping the ISTE standards back into the map of this new curriculum will be critical. Yes, teachers will increasingly function as facilitators rather than “sages on stage,” seeking to guide students as they make their own “learning visible.”

Deirdre observed a powerful linkage between imaginative engagement/literature and other domains in the curriculum documents being produced in Rhinebeck. Marvin agreed that there are many praiseworthy aspects to the CCS: reading, writing, and thinking deeply are all skills well worth defending. Explaining the technical distinction between Tier 1, 2, and 3 words as alluded to in each unit, from high frequency, general vocabulary to domain-specific words such as “photosynthesis,” Marvin praised the wisdom in building curriculum so as “consciously and recursively to come back” to key concepts of analysis, understanding, and argumentation.

**Next Steps.**

The massive binder reviewed by members of the committee represents only a fraction of the work generated around curriculum writing for the new standards. After the board approves each section of the curriculum, documents will be made accessible online. Rubrics can also be posted to help guide parents in their reading of these materials.

Practically speaking, how would it be best to approve the curriculum? It was agreed that we want to proceed building by building, so as to avoid creating an impossible obstacle to careful review. Marvin said he likes the idea of “school level ownership” of the curriculum—this method makes sense. His office is committed to ensuring vertical alignment across buildings and grades.

When will the math curriculum be ready? In CLS “Everyday Math” is still in use: it will either be revised or migrate out of the program altogether (not being in synch with the state testing schedule, for instance). Grades 6 and 7 are currently using CCS aligned textbooks. Overall, the arc of adaptation to the new standards has been challenging but successful. The High School is writing its own math curriculum locally. Social Studies is being tackled this summer.

Marvin expects to report on overall progress of curriculum development via this group by the end of the school year.

The group briefly discussed sharing feedback with CDEP as it has entered a very productive phase in its deliberations.

Next Meeting on June 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Agenda: continuing review of curriculum documents as they are completed.

Respectfully submitted,

Deirdre d’Albertis