

**Boyertown Area School District
Curriculum Committee
April 3, 2018
Minutes**

Mrs. Dennin called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Education Center Board Room.

Board members in attendance: Mrs. Dennin, Mr. Lewis, Mrs. Dierolf, Mr. Breece, Mr. Elsier, Mrs. Usavage, Mr. Boyer, Mr. Foose

Administration in attendance: Mr. Krem, Dr. Woodard

BASD Staff in Attendance: 2

Members of the Public: 1

Everyone recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and observed a moment of silence.

The minutes from the November 9, 2017 meeting were discussed. Mr. Breece asked for an amendment to the minutes to specifically state that he asked about the STEM program comparisons and that Dr. Foley specifically stated that he did them. Mrs. Dierolf and Mr. Boyer abstained from voting on the minutes because they weren't on the board at the time of the meeting. The minutes from the November 9, 2017 meeting were approved with the addition of Mr. Breece's amendment.

Presentation and Discussion

Dr. Woodard introduced her co-presenters, Mrs. Catherine Gehman and Mrs. Melissa Schmitz. They will be presenting an overview of the Reading Units of Study in the elementary schools. Dr. Woodard stated that if time permits there will be an overview of the Every Student Succeeds Act which takes the place of the No Child Left Behind Act so that the board is aware of the requirements associated with the implementation. In addition, switching to trimester reporting periods for K-8 for next year will be discussed.

Elementary ELA Curriculum Overview

The objective of the presentation is to inform the board and community about the ELA curriculum resources that have been piloted and that will be implemented in all intermediate classrooms, specifically grades 4 and 5, beginning with the 2018-2019 school year. We had some teachers who piloted the Reading Units of Study on a very small scale last year. This year we've expanded the pilot to about half of our 4th grade classrooms and several of our 5th grade classrooms. This allowed the instructional coaches and lead teacher to support what we need to do to prepare for the full implementation next year.

The goals of the implementation of the Reading Units of Study are to provide a comprehensive cross-grade curriculum in which skills are introduced, developed and deepened. We want to make sure we're supporting explicit instruction in reading skills and strategies while offering lots of time for independent reading. We also want to provide strategic performance assessments so teachers know how to monitor progress, provide crucial feedback to students and help them set

clear goals about how they can become better readers. A key piece of the Reading Units of Study is about professional learning. When we really think about what it takes to teach literacy, it's integration of a lot of skills and strategies to really make our students read and comprehend more deeply.

We've thoroughly reviewed components of the Reading Units of Study and believe that implementing these units will assist us in developing a student's deep comprehension of text, both in narrative text as well as informational texts. When we take a look at our data, what we're finding is we need to make sure that we grow a student's strategies and skills in comprehending, analyzing and interpreting deep text. Reading Units of Study provides opportunities for students to practice that deep analysis and interpretation with teacher guidance and support.

The past 3 years of the Common Core Aligned PSSA results for grades 3 through 6 were reviewed. In 2015, 74% of our 3rd grade students were advanced and proficient and 26% were basic or below. In 2016, we dropped down but in 2017 we went back to where we were in 2015. Looking at grade 5 we were absolutely stagnant with 74% advanced and proficient and 26% percent basic or below for all 3 years. In 4th grade, we started out with 70% proficient or advanced in 2015 and in 2016 rose to 73% and in 2017 to 77%. The only difference in what was going on in the classrooms is that we had about 20% of our 4th grade students engaged in Reading Units of Study. The fact that we've seen upward mobility in trends is a good sign and an indication that this is a resource that helps us to fill in where our gaps have been. This is why we have made the determination to expand and utilize Reading Units of Study in every ELA class in grades 4 and 5.

Mr. Lewis asked for clarification on whether Reading Units of Study was the difference and what it involves. Dr. Woodard explained that Reading Units of Study is a curriculum resource out of the Teachers College at Columbia University which is a very distinguished education school. Mrs. Schmitz and Mrs. Gehman will be discussing the different components of the Reading Units of Study and how Mrs. Gehman's class looks different this year. Dr. Woodard shared that the Reading Units of Study is set up in a workshop approach and a key piece of implementation is engaging students in text they like to read.

The cost of materials for the program is \$310 a classroom which is for teacher resource materials and an authentic trade book pack. We also need books for the students to read during independent reading time. These books come from our classroom libraries and the building library. Each unit of study is thematic so we want to make sure we have books that center around the theme so we will be continuing to spend funds on growing those books that students can independently read that align with the unit's theme. In addition, there is a need for the literacy coach's time and talents in order to make this implementation a success. We also need to make sure that nonfiction reading is present which aligns completely with the common core where there is a huge focus on informational texts. We need to arm students with comprehension skills and strategies to support their reading. The read aloud is vital at all grade levels to model interactive strategies and is centered on the mentor texts that are used in this resource. It incorporates instruction on foundational skills and phonics, emphasizes writing and promotes literacy-rich content area instruction. There is a lot of solid evidence and research that supports the Reading Units of Study.

Mrs. Gehman explained that in the reading and writing workshop, students experience choice, creativity, risk-taking, expert modeling, instruction and side-by-side coaching to grow and become more expert at reading and writing. She continued by explaining what is known about best practices of reading and writing becoming a reality in her classroom. The goal is to help students develop effective and joyful reading and writing lives in an environment with appropriate structure, quality instruction and adequate time to read and write. Every single year, she experiences the same problems that are obstacles in attaining the goals. Every year, she is faced with students that don't relish the idea of reading and writing. The solution is reading and writing workshop, which is a simple, flexible structure that allows her to teach all students the necessary reading and writing skills, concepts and strategies they will need while differentiating instruction. It's also a time where students are given time to read. With reading and writing workshop as an overarching structure, she has implemented Reading Units of Study in reading and writing to provide reading and writing instruction that aims to interpret common core standards in ways that build vibrant, sustainable learning communities among students.

Mrs. Gehman explained the essential elements of reading and writing workshop:

- **Mini-Lesson**: Mrs. Gehman pulls the students together to teach them a 10 – 15 minute mini-lesson to learn a new skill or strategy that will help them to become more expert readers and writers. Within the workshop structure exists the lesson framework for communicating necessary skills and strategies as well as ample time for students to practice them. The mini-lesson is the heart of the workshop and is comprised of a connection, teaching point and teaching activity. A connection is like a hook and contextualizes the day's teaching by connecting it to work that students have already done. The teaching point is the part that crystallizes what is being taught in that day's mini-lesson. The teaching point is done by demonstration, guided practice, explicit teaching or showing by example. The actual teaching is done in the form of demonstration, example or inquiry. During active engagement, students get to practice with the teacher and their partner what they've learned about in the mini-lesson. Towards the end of the mini-lesson comes the link where it is restated what children have learned in a transferable way so they can take it back to their independent reading and practice exactly what they learn that day. The mini-lesson ends with a similar mantra each day: "Today and every day I want you to _____. Off you go." Students know that this is the time to take their book boxes filled with text on their level and go and read in their spots. Students have time to read on their independent level and time to write essays and stories.
- **Independent Work Time**: During independent work time, students keep track of their reading and writing goals. Depending on the unit of study, this may be a time for students to meet in a group or with a partner if they are working on a project. When reading, students keep track of genres, books read, how long they read and number of pages read. This allows them to look back for trends.
- **Conferring**: Conferring is also an important aspect of workshop and this a time when the teacher provides individual instruction specific to the needs of a student.
- **Small Group Work**: Students also have consistent opportunities to work in small groups. Group time is full of exploration, active listening and making valuable

contributions to the group project. Students learn to divide and conquer to get a project completed.

- **Sharing**: Another aspect of workshop is sharing. Students take ownership of their learning when sharing. Sharing is when students practice with a partner or a whole group. Learning becomes rock solid as students explain how they applied the teaching point.
- **Vocabulary Acquisition and Word Study**: In 4th grade, district provided materials, word walls that they put in their books, research-based websites and authentic text are used in order to acquire new vocabulary words. This is done on a very consistent basis.
- **Read Aloud**: During read aloud, even the most disinterested, struggling readers engage.
- **Assessing Students**: Continuous assessment of readers and writers is essential and takes on many forms. Assessments include pre- and post-assessments, F&P records, teacher anecdotal records, district comprehension and writing assessments, 4Sight tests, PSSA scores and teacher collaboration. The teacher must find out where students are reading and writing in relation to the learning progressions that are provided in the Reading Units of Study. Mrs. Gehman explained how we know the program is working. Not only are her students clearly making progress in their reading and writing as evidenced by assessments but we also know it's working when students are bursting with enthusiasm to read and write on their own. She shared examples of reading and writing her students have done on their own because they wanted to and because they can.

Mrs. Usavage asked to go back to the PSSA data slide. Looking at the data diagonally to see how students progressed as they moved to each grade can be really meaningful. The growth of the students that were in 3rd grade in 2016 to 2017 looks very different than those from 2015 to 2016. It's just one data point but that's significant. Dr. Woodard agreed that following the growth of a specific cohort of students is important. The growth that we saw from 3rd to 4th grade from 2016 to 2017 was very impressive. Dr. Woodard explained that we routinely see some good growth between 5th and 6th grade. Our 5th grade scores have historically been lower and we rebound in 6th grade. Across the state, 5th grade scores are lower relatively speaking to the other grade levels. We think that the implementation of Reading Units of Study will help to increase our 5th grade proficiencies.

Mr. Boyer asked whether the units of study was piloted for 3 years. Dr. Woodard stated that this is the 2nd year. We had about 5 classrooms of 4th grade piloting it last year and this year we have about half of our 4th grade classrooms and about 5 or so 5th grade classrooms piloting it across the district based on level of interest by teachers.

Mr. Boyer inquired about how much training is involved to get people up to speed. He stated that it seems like a very effective pedagogical system. Dr. Woodard stated that Mrs. Schmitz will be discussing that topic.

Mr. Breece appreciates all that the teachers are doing to make this happen with reading because we have to improve our reading proficiencies and our mastery of reading. A society that can't read isn't going to be successful. For the PA Department of Education, an incremental

movement is 10% and it appears we have at least that from 2 years ago when we started the pilot. Based on this, Mr. Breece believes that the improvement has to do with the units of study. He believes as teachers make connections with the kids students will be compelled by their interests to master reading.

Mrs. Dennin asked if 120 minutes a day on the slide for ELA is correct. Mrs. Gehman stated that 120 minutes for ELA is correct. Mrs. Dennin asked Mrs. Gehman how she finds the time for one-on-one especially when there are so many different levels of reading and writing. Mrs. Gehman stated that after she is done with the mini-lesson students have a text that they have chosen on their level. It is not a time that she sits at her desk. She goes around and talks to each individual student and asks them questions about how they are doing and how they are applying the lesson. Sometimes she sees that students really aren't grasping what was taught so she will pull them into a small group to practice the skill. Every child gets met with individually on a regular basis. Mrs. Gehman stated that implementation takes time and she is thrilled to see some of the scores improving already.

Mrs. Schmitz stated that professional development is key because we are in a time of change. Not leaving any child behind means we need to drastically change reading instruction. Because there are all levels of reading in a classroom, we have to get away from mass instruction. That's where the Reading Units of Study comes in for teachers. We used to hand teachers a boxed curriculum for their grade. This did a fantastic job of teaching the students that were on grade level. But you had children that were advanced becoming very bored and you had children that couldn't do it becoming very frustrated and it resulted in stagnant growth. Over the years, teachers and administrators have learned that we need to do something different.

Mrs. Schmitz explained that the teachers have goals to move the students along in reading and writing. As a coach, her goal is to give teachers the confidence, the know-how and the finesse to get through this kind of rigorous curriculum. The Reading Units of Study curriculum was developed by Columbia University by teachers that are in the classroom every day. When it comes out of Columbia University, teachers have learned to listen to it because they know they are in the same trenches. It enables teachers to buy into it and believe in the structure. When they get the units of study kit, they don't get a grade level kit. In the kit they get an assessment book and they get a learning progression book that breaks down the strategies for reading fiction and nonfiction and all of the different skills that a child moves through and how they move through them. This enables teachers to look at a struggling student and assess what level they have for a skill. The entire progression for elementary is now at their fingertips in language that teachers can understand and students can understand. We have the roadmap now and can drill right into a child's needs. Students are engaged 100% of the time on something that's meaningful for them and that's the difference. We're able to put the power in the teacher's hands of not just knowing their grade level curriculum but the true learning progression.

Mrs. Schmitz shared test score results from 3 New York school districts. The first school did not use Reading Units of Study. The second school used it but did not have an aggressive professional development plan partnered with the Teachers College in place. The third school is what they call the core Teachers College and they are far outperforming the other schools. They have implemented the units of study and have fully embraced teacher professional development and collaboration. Teachers alone, isolated in the classroom, do not make the best motivators for

their students. Teachers that live the same rich reading and writing life that we are asking our students to do makes for exciting classroom teaching.

What Mrs. Gehman aims to do with her students, Mrs. Schmitz aims to provide for our teachers. We have read and talked about professional learning communities for a number of years here but it wasn't until this Reading Units of Study that we have seen a shift. We are a professional learning community not only within our district but within our larger community here in eastern PA. We have a team drive now with all of our teachers collaborating on the units of study. Mrs. Schmitz has never seen teachers share lesson plans and ideas like she has with the units of study. Teachers College offers the reading and writing workshops in New York and we always have a group of teachers attend. The Teachers College is also coming to Berks County via the BCIU in August and we have teachers signed up to attend. Mrs. Schmitz shared positive comments she has received from students and teachers regarding the units of study.

Mr. Boyer asked what the initial training time is for teachers for the program. Mrs. Schmitz stated it depends on the individual. For a teacher that is new to a workshop method, it's a structure adjustment. Many of our veteran teachers have already had the workshop structure so it's just kind of binding the structure. She explained that the reason we started slow with it is because we needed key people at all grade levels who had a good handle on it with the vision that the district had for it. Not a lot of the work can be done away from the classroom with the teacher. It's implemented with side-by-side coaching so we're doing a lot more visiting each classroom and recording Mrs. Schmitz in classrooms. The shared drive is filled with hundreds of videos of Mrs. Schmitz and Mrs. Gehman teaching so the experience can be shared with teachers. Training teachers virtually is a game-changer. We're doing a lot of summer professional development but we envision a lot of it being job-embedded within the classroom and coaching going on side-by-side so the students are right there and the teacher can quickly accommodate them and learn what to do as the next step.

Dr. Woodard shared that we have two full day trainings in June. The 1st one is for everyone who is going to initially begin with the materials next school year. The 2nd session is for those who have already utilized it for a year. Then training will continue with the job-embedded, side-by-side learning for realistically another 2 full years. Mrs. Schmitz added that our professional learning community days, 1-hour meetings and team meetings have also been very helpful. We're looking at places where we already have meetings and seeing how we can use those better to help with the training.

Mr. Boyer asked if parents are involved with this at all. Mrs. Gehman explained that each night she sends home a homework page that is provided within the units of study and it's an editable document so she can personalize it. She's also been able to speak about it at parents' night. So parents are aware that they are using units of study in her classroom. She asks the students to go over the homework page each night with their parents but because we've also implemented Eureka math this year, she tells the parents that as long as their student is reading it is okay if they don't do the homework page. Mrs. Schmitz added that what is nice about the homework page is that it gives the parents an explanation of what's happening in class.

Mrs. Dierolf asked if we still have traditional spelling tests. Mrs. Gehman stated that it's different for every classroom. Now that we are using more authentic texts we have gotten away from traditional spelling tests. As we come together in our cohorts, spelling is starting to be

much more of a question. In Mrs. Gehman's classroom, she does not have the traditional spelling list but she has vocabulary words that have the Greek and Latin root words and address the prefixes and suffixes that 4th graders need to know according to common core. Students are expected to learn typical 4th grade words that have those patterns in them. They practice them on websites interactively and with paper and pencil.

Mrs. Dierolf asked how students can read if they can't spell. Mrs. Schmitz shared that what we found with the traditional spelling test is that simply memorizing the word was not teaching true spelling. What we've found through research is that word patterns, word chunks and how words are formed are the skills of spelling. Our word study program uses words that students learn how to spell but they are not called out in a spelling test. Instead, they are given the words and asked to write sentences and spelling, grammar and punctuation are checked. So it is a more rigorous spelling test and lists are being phased out for something that is more authentic.

Mrs. Dierolf asked if inventive spelling is still acceptable. Mrs. Schmitz stated that it is acceptable in the grades where that is appropriate. Children do go through an inventive time period in their development as writers and learning how to spell. Dr. Woodard added that we refer to this as kid writing in kindergarten but we want them to attempt to use their knowledge of phonetics. It's not acceptable in 4th or 5th grade. Mrs. Gehman shared that one of the next things on the collaboration agenda with the teachers is spelling and vocabulary acquisition. She invited board members to call or come to her classroom at any time to continue the conversation.

Mr. Foose shared that he knows from watching his son's progression that he's seen his reading and writing vastly improve over the past couple of years. Oftentimes the teacher will point out different spelling errors for him to correct. He would like to know what resources are available to parents so they can support what teachers are doing in the classroom. Also, how do we guide appropriate selection in the libraries so students find books that are interesting but that are also challenging at their level? Mrs. Gehman shared that one of the things she has been doing is spend more time writing emails to parents so that in her newsletter and emails she can explain what is being taught. She shares reading levels so they can utilize Scholastic Book Wizard to find appropriate leveled books.

Mr. Breece asked what assessments we are using to measure spelling and writing. Dr. Woodard explained that there are quarterly writing assessments that feature different modes (informational, argumentative, opinion). Students are given a prompt and they need to write to that prompt. That's done later in the quarter after students have done process based writing. The word study piece is used for vocabulary and to see if a student can apply and generate words that incorporate those types of affixes. There are still some classrooms that use spelling lists but for the past few years we've been talking about how we continue to grow that. We need to keep in mind that spelling is a tool for writing.

Mr. Breece followed up by asking how we are measuring our progress on elementary writing skills such as extended writing structure. Dr. Woodard stated that they are measured on our quarterly writing assessments. It is also integrated into the PSSA with text dependent analysis and writing pieces. Teachers also look at written response journals on a regular basis for assessment. We use Pennsylvania rubrics for writing but conventions is only a piece of it. Conventions are only about 20% of how students are assessed even at the state level.

Mrs. Dennin stated that due to time constraints the 2nd part of the presentation would not be taking place.

Mrs. Usavage asked Dr. Woodard to tell the board what the future plans are for the Reading Units of Study. Dr. Woodard stated that beginning in 2018-2019 we will be implementing it across all 4th and 5th grade classrooms. We are dabbling in it at 3rd grade as well as a little bit of 2nd grade. Realistically, we'll be implementing it from 3rd on up and we're talking to middle school teachers to see if there is interest to pilot the program at that level next year.

Mr. Elsier thanked Mrs. Gehman and Mrs. Schmitz for coming out and informing the board and applauded them for being trailblazers in the district to pilot and bring something new that will help the students.

Mr. Breece asked if we were going to get into any future curriculum discussions this evening. Mrs. Dennin stated that we aren't able to get to the 2nd part of Dr. Woodard's presentation due to time constraints. At the next curriculum committee meeting, there will be a presentation on the ESSA and how that's being implemented and the committee will look at future curriculum.

Mrs. Dennin thanked Mrs. Gehman and Mrs. Schmitz for their presentation. Over the past 2 years, she has developed a great appreciation for instructional coaching and sees how important it is now. It seems like with this new program we are getting buy-in from staff and the teachers are going to be better teachers because of it. She also thanked Dr. Woodard for her leadership in bringing in the new curriculum. She is thrilled that our district is so innovative and willing to embrace change.

Public Comment Period

There were no public comments.

Announcements

Announcements were deferred until after the Finance Committee Meeting.

Mrs. Dennin adjourned the meeting at 8:12 p.m.