



Watertown Public Schools

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MEMORANDUM

To: Watertown School Committee
From: Dr. Theresa McGuinness, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment
CC: Dr. Dede Galdston, Superintendent of Schools
Date: August 14, 2017
RE: Summer Update on Professional Development

Overall, our dual central foci in the WPS are the *academic achievement and social-emotional growth of our students*. We are fortunate to have a supremely talented and dedicated staff, a strong and supportive administrative team, a pro-education community, and an active parent community ---all of which partner in educating our students.

Across the District, we are focusing on our persistent achievement gap in the WPS and re-exploring our practices. One research-based, effective way of doing so is supporting the structure of inclusive models in all schools. Educators at the secondary level, will appreciate their excellent keynote speaker on August 30th, Kathy Porcaro (<http://www.epsi-usa.com/staff.htm>), whose presentation is entitled, *Reaching All Students: Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners in the General Ed Classroom*. Ms. Porcaro will continue to work with the District, beginning at the high school level, providing ongoing professional development and job-embedded coaching on inclusive best practices, including co-teaching.

In cohering with our back-to-school theme of *Teaching & Reaching All Students*, at the elementary level our curricular focus is two-fold: **Balanced Literacy Revitalization and Numeracy** (Math-In-Focus). Other disciplines will be integrated, particularly under our literacy efforts. This summer, District and school administrators and Literacy Leadership Team members, met with our consultants to review data and design a coordinated plan to improve student growth and achievement via the support of our fine teachers. Below is a summary of this *ongoing* planning to date:

- As a follow up to the literacy updates in my Teaching & Learning - May 2017 newsletter, our 20-member **Literacy Leadership Team** is planning our K – 5 literacy goals in light of student assessment data and all the qualitative and quantitative data the *Literacy Steering Committee* collected from faculty last school year. We will continue our collaborations begun last Spring with experts from the Teaching & Learning Alliance (TLA), with the goal to support and ensure a **balanced literacy program within the next two years, across all elementary classrooms**.
- By using a research-based model of embedded professional development, educators will benefit from expert coaches and WPS teacher leaders this year. We believe that leveraging teacher knowledge and expertise is paramount. We also believe it is essential to distribute leadership among staff members to ensure representation, sharing in decisions, and to garner innovative ideas. To this end, we are increasing

authentic, formal opportunities for teacher leadership (18 *new* Math Teacher Leaders, various committee work, and as professional development facilitators).

- We are most fortunate to have two creative and experienced Curriculum Coordinators working alongside me in support of the staff and the curriculum: Allison Donovan as the *new* K - 8 Literacy/Title I Coordinator and Elizabeth Kaplan as the returning Elementary Math/Science Coordinator. Several teachers developed ELA Unit of Study this summer to share with colleagues this fall.
- Allison Donovan is designing a new Literacy webpage for staff and parents, that we plan to share mid-fall.
- Author of *The Ultimate Read Aloud Guide*, Lester Laminack (<http://www.lesterlaminack.com>), is our Pre-K - 5 keynote speaker on August 30, 2017. This speaker and his book, which will be gifted to all elementary classroom teachers, supports our Literacy Plan especially, the Reader's/Writer's Workshop model. When I saw him speak at a conference last school year, something th reading aloud removes the biggest hurdle a student faces = decoding to text

Some highlights illustrating our elementary curricula and professional development (PD) plans for the 2017 - 2018 school year include:

- Building on past PD, **all** grades 3 - 5 teachers and elementary principals will receive **coaching and PD on Empowering Writers (EW)** <http://empoweringwriters.com> beginning with a three-hour session on Thursday, August 31st entitled, *Expository, Opinion, and Response to Text*. (Pinterest ideas on EW for teachers <https://www.pinterest.com/explore/empowering-writers/>)
- **Empowering Writers II** - Follow-up, half-day workshop for all grades 3 - 5 teachers on October 18th
- The addition of **13 Learning Lab Classrooms** (including co-taught) at all three schools, whose teachers will be provided professional development, coaching, mentor texts, and serve as an open classroom for colleagues to observe/learn: (6) Hosmer - Grades 2, 3, 4, (4) Lowell - Grades 1, 3, (3) Cunniff - Grades 1, 3.
- A plan to design focused, **balanced literacy coaching cohorts**:

2017-2018	Cohort 1	Lab Teachers; All teachers, Reader's Workshop Reboot
2018-2019	Cohort 2	K-2
2019-2020	Cohort 3	3-5
- **Reader's Workshop Reboot I** - For all elementary educators for half of the day on November 7th
- **Reader's Workshop II** - For all elementary educators for the day on January 16th
- This coming year, there will be a renewed focus on our students' math achievement. Particularly exciting is the addition of 18 Math Teacher Leaders (one at every grade level in every school) and an elementary Math Coach. Their role is to participate in a District Elementary Math Task Force, which includes collaboration with the Elementary Math/Science Coordinator, the Math Coach, and the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching, Learning, & Assessment. These Math Teacher Leaders will facilitate grade-level meetings, provide professional development related to math, and attend outside professional development to relay information acquired back to their colleagues. This summer the Math Teacher Leaders began the process of aligning our current curriculum more closely to the State standards, as well as reviewing additional assessments. Our elementary Math Coach will be working with students in small intervention groups and forming close professional relationships with teachers by providing job embedded coaching, modeling, and overall support in the area of math instruction.

- **Math-In-Focus Grade Level Trainings** - All elementary teachers will have the opportunity to receive focused professional development in small grade-level groups from expert Math in Focus professional development providers.
- **Math in Focus Parent University** - Designed to increase parent engagement opportunities, all elementary parents are invited to an evening with Math in Focus professional development providers to learn more about the curriculum and how they can best support their child. This event will be on **Monday, November 6th at 6:30 p.m.** Location TBD.
- **Science** - *STEMScopes and Claim Evidence Reasoning* - Participants in grades 1-5 will dig deeper into the STEMScopes curriculum and learn more about the use of a CER prompt as a benchmark assessment.
- **FLES Update:** ¡Hola! In the 2016-2017 school year, all three elementary schools implemented the Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools (FLES) Program with much success. All students in Pre-K and kindergarten classes received Spanish instruction five days per week for 30 minutes each day. We are excited to be continuing this program for the 2017-2018 school year to include instruction in the first-grade. This school year, all kindergarten and first-grade students will receive Spanish instruction three days per week for 30 minutes.
- **Standards-Based Report Card Committee, Year II** - Continuing the study and planning begun last year, Committee members will develop themes/ideas that surfaced from our review of articles, the book (below), and several other local districts, with the purpose of better aligning report cards with the Massachusetts State Frameworks as indicated through the Common Core Curriculum Standards, across disciplines and grade levels. *More information to follow this fall.* The book we studied was, *Charting a Course to Standards-Based Grading: What to Stop, What to Start, and Why It Matters* by Tim R. Westerberg (2016). *The report from the Committee will be shared this fall.*
- **Social-Emotional Learning (Wellness) Committee** - Our purpose is to prioritize SEL in every school (starting with K-5, then 6-8). Last spring, a representative Roundtable met to begin the process of building a cohesive, SEL plan for our District, beginning at the elementary level. We (1) audited SEL practices/programs in WPS, (2) studied the newest research on SEL, and (3) mined and reviewed local MA school districts' SEL practices/programs. This coming school year, a broader team of constituents will entertain presentations from various vendors (the roundtable reduced the options to the best three for WPS), draft recommendations and vet these to the school and parent community on an ongoing basis. *The report from the Roundtable will be shared this fall.*

Some Secondary Summer PD:

- Buck Institute Training (Project-Based Learning) - *Secondary*
- Project Lead the Way Training (Green Architecture, Design and Modeling, Medical Detectives enrichment classes) - *WMS*
- Project Lead the Way Training (to expand offerings) - *WHS*
- Three special education teachers, one at each level (elementary, middle, and high) began Wilson Language Training in *Wilson Reading System*. As described on their website, <http://www.wilsonlanguage.com/programs/wilson-reading-system/>, "WRS is an intensive Tier 3 program for students in grades 2-12 and adults with word-level deficits who are not making sufficient progress through their current intervention; have been unable to learn with other teaching strategies and require multisensory language instruction; or who require more intensive structured literacy instruction due to a language-based learning disability, such as dyslexia." *WHS, WMS, Lowell*

Some Elementary Summer PD:

- **Math Curriculum Workshop** - Math Teacher Leaders and some other colleagues met for two half-days to:

- Participate in the Futures Protocol to craft a shared vision for our work together around math teaching and learning for the upcoming year and beyond.
- Examine, more closely, the state frameworks, including looking at major, supporting, and additional standards for each grade level.
- Create a scope-and-sequence at each grade level that more closely aligns Math in Focus to the state frameworks. This means some grade level chapters will be moved to different grade levels.
- Look at various benchmark assessments and math performance tasks that can be implemented and used for data analysis in the upcoming year.
- Receive the book, "What's Math Got To Do With It" by Jo Boaler for summer reading

(The participants will meet again in late August to plan grade level meetings in which they present their work to their colleagues.)

More updates to follow, early fall 2017.

Addendum A

A balanced literacy approach:

- Develops the competencies of all students using a variety of tools, materials, resources and strategies.
- Emphasizes the development of oral language, thinking, and collaborating as the foundation of literacy learning.
- Uses formative assessment to guide instruction and to determine levels of support needed for mastery.
- Provides **explicit instruction** of skills for problem solving and strategic thinking.
- Provides uninterrupted daily blocks of time for literacy learning.
- Meets *individual* literacy and learning needs.
- Is founded on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which means:
 - Multiple ways to acquire knowledge.
 - Multiple ways to demonstrate what students know.
 - Multiple means of engagement where student interests and abilities are used to motivate and challenge.
- Uses authentic, multi-level and cross-curricular material.
- Gradual release of responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student.
- Provides continuity in student learning from grade to grade.

Borrowed from: E1-54919_Booklet_BalanceLiteracy, Yukon Education Publication