



WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

English Language Arts & Literacy Curriculum Review Report

January 2020

English Language Arts & Literacy Curriculum Review Report

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Review Committee

During curriculum review processes, the Westwood Public Schools makes an effort to ensure thoughtful representation on the review team of individuals with different roles and perspectives from each of the schools and grade levels. The following team members contributed to the 2018-2019 English language arts review process.

Aprile Albertelli, *Preschool Director*
Allison Borchers, *Assistant Superintendent*
Helena Bresnick, *English Teacher*
Donna Cantarella, *Librarian*
Jen Child, *Reading Specialist*
Leanne Cofran, *Grade 3 Teacher*
Katherine Egan, *English Teacher*
Aishleen Flanagan, *Dean of Students*
Kathy Giugliano, *Parent*
Dee Graichen, *Special Education Department Head*
Kate Holmes, *English Department Chair*
Jenna Iden, *English Teacher*
Joe Lawlor, *Curriculum Coordinator*
Karlyn Lazazzero, *Science Specialist/Coach*
Ares Leitao de Graca, *Student*
Marisa Olivo, *Humanities Department Head*
Rena Rizzi, *Grade 4 Teacher*
Diana Robbins, *Reading Specialist*
Marcia Uretsky, *Literacy & Social Studies Coordinator*
Kathleen Whelan, *English Teacher*
Angela Wilson, *Instructional Technology Coach*

B. Review Cycle and Goals

The Westwood Public Schools has an ongoing curriculum review and development cycle so that each curriculum area is examined every six to eight years. Through this process, curriculum review teams comprised of teachers, administrators, and parents review our curriculum, research best practices, review educational literature, and examine learning standards in order to make recommendations for program improvement. Teams of teachers work during department meeting times and during the summer curriculum development process to implement the recommendations and design curriculum.

The English Language Arts review began last school year. This year, the team will issue its recommendations and begin the process of identifying program resources, writing curriculum

and developing curriculum maps with the goal of implementing recommendations as soon as next year. A chart including the upcoming curriculum reviews appears below (Figure A).

Figure A: WPS Curriculum Review, Development and Implementation Cycle

	Review	Recommend/Develop	Implement
2018-2019	English Language Arts SEL		Science, Technology & Engineering
2019-2020	History, Social Science and Civics Wellness	English Language Arts SEL	
2020-2021	Library Media Performing Arts	History, Social Science and Civics Wellness	English Language Arts SEL
2021-2022	Mathematics Visual Arts	Library Media Performing Arts	History, Social Science and Civics Wellness
2022-2023	Foreign Language Instructional Technology	Mathematics Visual Arts	Library Media Performing Arts
2023-2024	Science, Technology & Engineering	Foreign Language Instructional Technology	Mathematics Visual Arts

C. Curriculum Review Process

Every review process involves visioning, conducting an internal scan in order to understand the impact of current programs and practices, investigating promising approaches and resources used in other schools and districts, researching best practices, and generating recommendations for improvement.

During the 2018-2019 English Language Arts and Literacy Review, the review team conducted several rounds of vertical learning walks--daylong sessions for educators with varied roles to observe instruction in elementary, middle and high school classes firsthand. Team members also looked at assessments (both local and state), compiled information about whole class and choice texts as well as teaching resources (off the shelf curriculum), visited other schools, examined literacy instruction in other content areas (math, science, social studies), considered the implications of new state regulations about examining curriculum materials for bias and stereotypes, analyzed the extent to which SEL competencies are explicitly taught within

ELA/literacy lessons, and looked into the resources used for replacement curriculum in substantially separate classes.

After these investigations, subcommittees met during the summer to begin drafting recommendations. These draft recommendations were refined by the full committee in September and October and further revisions were made by the vertical leadership team in November and December.

D. Vision Statement

Early in the process, the team developed a draft vision statement that was refined over several sessions. This vision is designed to reflect the results of a strong English language arts and literacy program.

Students in the Westwood Public Schools are curious readers, critical thinkers, careful researchers, thoughtful listeners, effective writers, and powerful speakers.

They explore, question, and analyze texts that represent diverse voices and experiences.

They collaborate to share insights and discover new ideas.

They speak and write to shape their lives, their communities, and their world.

They use their developing skills to inform, persuade, create, and inspire.

This vision works in concert with the broader vision for Westwood students as stated in the district's strategic priorities outline:

*Graduates of the Westwood Public Schools are skilled, confident, curious, and kind:
excited for their futures and ready to contribute to their communities*

E. Recommendations Overview

The review team generated specific recommendations in response to the various findings that surfaced during the review process. Several major themes emerged that are worth noting here. First, alignment of curriculum goals, materials and vocabulary was identified as a key issue for the elementary schools and middle school. The alignment concerns were both horizontal (teachers of the same grade level are not consistently teaching the same content/skills) and vertical (there are gaps/inconsistencies from grade to grade that prevent kids from building skills from year to year). While the high school demonstrated strong internal horizontal and vertical alignment, team members identified the need for adjustments so that students' writing skills are better aligned to the new state frameworks.

A second major theme related to text selection. "Mentor texts" (full class texts used at the elementary level as models), required reading in later grades, and choice texts do not always reflect the rich diversity of the community, state, nation and world that our students inhabit. The team noted that when faced with the task of selecting texts, there are many high quality options to consider that are written by diverse authors and that include diverse characters. One additional challenge noted at the high school level was that of providing students with

opportunities to read contemporary, diverse authors alongside classic texts with universal themes that have stood the test of time.

Complete findings and recommendations appear below.

District-Wide Findings and Recommendations

Finding	Recommendation
1. ELA curriculum is not fully vertically aligned in a way that allows students to build knowledge, proficiency, and mastery.	Create dynamic curriculum maps outlining standards, essential questions, learning objectives, core texts, curriculum resources and common assessments for each grade level.
2. Instructional strategy (e.g., writing instruction) varies from classroom to classroom and is not fully aligned with current best practices.	Provide professional development and coaching around current best practices for all elementary classroom and secondary ELA teachers.
3. Students have inconsistent opportunities for reflection and transference of developing skills and understanding to new situations.	Provide students regular, ongoing opportunities for reflection and goal-setting.
4. Instruction in fundamental ELA competencies, including spelling, handwriting, grammar, mechanics, keyboarding, etc, varies greatly from classroom to classroom across the district.	Create specific grade-level expectations for instruction in fundamental competencies (handwriting, grammar, mechanics, spelling, keyboarding). Ensure coherent trajectory of grammar practices from K-12, including common language within and across grade levels.
5. The majority of core/ full classroom/mentor texts lack diversity of people and cultures (i.e. gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, ability, class, ethnicity, etc.)	Work with librarians and other key staff to diversify core texts and choice texts so that every student has the opportunity to see themselves and the wider world in their reading. • Solicit list of possible titles • Create a reading group to read and review potential texts. • Share recommended texts with specific grade level educators.
6. Explicit speaking and listening instruction is inconsistent across grade levels and individual classrooms.	Provide explicit instruction in speaking and listening (both within groups and in public presentations), and integrate opportunities to assess speaking and listening.
7. There are under-utilized opportunities within the curriculum to support SEL competency development.	Select texts and design lessons that purposefully incorporate SEL instruction.

PreK - Grade 5 Findings and Recommendations

Finding	Recommendation
1. Curriculum and resources vary between classrooms and from grade level to grade level.	Adopt and implement specific Teachers' College Reading and Writing Units of Study. Create an elementary ELA leadership team across the district to develop a curriculum map. Create a two-year implementation plan.
2. Teachers use a range of formative/summative literacy assessments, some very cumbersome, the approach to scoring assessments varies and data is not consistently used to guide instruction.	Identify efficient and effective common assessments and provide time and professional development for grade-level teams to work on common assessments and calibrate scoring.
3. There are underutilized opportunities for students to develop and use literacy skills in other content area studies or to engage in meaningful interdisciplinary work.	Provide time and professional development for SS, Science, Math, SEL, and ELA curriculum leaders and grade-level teams to share common language and strategies for reading and writing across content areas. Explore options for integrating ELA units with social studies or science content.
4. Teachers struggle within the constraints of current classroom schedules to both meet the demands of curriculum frameworks and support students' developmental needs for flexibility, choice, and play.	Develop a philosophy and model schedule that supports the time needed to implement the ELA and other core curriculum while providing flex time for SEL, exploration, play and choice.
5. Instruction in learning center and resource room programs is not consistently aligned with classroom-based instruction.	Provide time and professional development for special education staff to learn ELA curriculum and curriculum-specific vocabulary and to adapt instruction in order to meet students' needs.

Middle School Findings and Recommendations

Finding	Recommendation
1. Curriculum and resources vary between classrooms and from grade level to grade level. Not all curriculum is aligned with state frameworks.	Determine where there are gaps in terms of alignment with standards and/or issues with grade-to-grade alignment, and revise as necessary.

Finding	Recommendation
2. There is not a consistent model/schedule for literacy intervention.	Use a universal, common screening program (Star360) to identify students in need of support, and create a consistent model for intervention cycles. Provide PD on best practices in push-in reading and writing intervention in ELA, social studies and science.
3. Instructional model most often used by teachers is geared toward full-class texts and lessons.	Collaborate to create and implement workshop style lessons that fit within the constraints of the current class period structure. Investigate options for block scheduling and support for teachers adjusting to planning in a new time frame.
4. Literacy skills are approached very differently, or not explicitly taught at all, by teachers in other curriculum areas.	Provide professional development on reading and writing instruction for all staff. Provide time for ELA teachers to collaborate with colleagues, especially with the Social Studies, Special Education, and Science team.
5. Students are able to reach proficiency on the MCAS by high school despite the dip in scores in the middle grades. In particular, there is a notable achievement gap between students with mild/moderate disabilities and those without.	Examine student work to identify areas of weakness and adjust instructional practices as needed. Institute regular grade-level department planning time that includes special educators to discuss the curriculum and skills being taught.
6. In addition, instruction in learning center and resource room programs is not consistently aligned with instruction in grade level ELA classes.	Institute regular grade-level department planning time that includes special educators to discuss the curriculum and skills being taught.
7. When students are given opportunities to choose texts, they are more invested.	Integrate opportunities for students to choose texts when possible in grade-level curricula.
8. Students are not consistently applying literacy skills and strategies from year-to-year.	Use consistent grade-level appropriate instructional practices, tool and language. Construct assignments that connect and extend skills learned from the previous year, (e.g., an end-of-year reflection letter to be written to the student's next grade level teacher)

High School Findings and Recommendations

Finding	Recommendation
1. Some curriculum lacks diverse types of writing assessment; there is an abundance of synthesis and a lack of argument and narrative.	Integrate more diverse types of writing assessment. Provide professional development time to research, create, and integrate new curriculum that includes diversity.
2. With the exception of sophomore and junior final projects and some senior electives, the curriculum lacks student choice.	Integrate more student choice - both choice of text and choice of assessment. Provide professional development time to research, create, and integrate new curriculum that includes student choice.
3. New Advanced Placement Literature and Language course frameworks and rubrics are now being implemented.	Review new AP Frameworks and Suggested Resources, and integrate them appropriately into the existing curriculum.
4. As curriculum is adapted, changes are not always shared across the department and reflected in curriculum maps.	Maintain course "scope and sequence" documents and ELA Curriculum Overview document as changes occur. Provide regular professional development time for grade-level teams to share out and cross-check course happenings.
5. Most current assessments use holistic rubrics, which provide an overall score based on students meeting certain criteria.	Investigate analytic rubrics in order to provide the most effective feedback
6. Teachers struggle to provide time for in-class writing, conferencing, feedback and other key elements of instruction within 47-minute class periods.	Explore schedule options that allow for longer blocks of instructional time.

For each recommendation, the team identified a lead individual or team, articulated a timeframe, and spelled out any potential impact on resources. A table including these details appears in *Appendix A*.

F. Timeline

Some of the work to address recommendations has already started. This timeline begins with summer 2019 and the work that led up to the finalization of recommendations.

Summer 2019

- Preliminary mapping of current curriculum and identification of common instructional vocabulary for middle school ELA.
- Planning for implementation of new writing assessments and data analysis tools at elementary.
- Revision of 9th, 10th and 11th grade curriculum maps.

Fall 2019

- Analysis of 2019 MCAS performance grades 3-10.
- Pilot of reading screening tool in grades 6 - 8 and intervention support for qualifying students.
- Introduction of new writing assessments and expectations for elementary grades.
- Professional development sessions to help elementary teachers calibrate assessment scoring.
- Completion of review process and drafting of recommendations

Spring 2020

- Planning for 2020-2021 professional development, including:
 - Literacy skills across the curriculum
 - Best practices in writing instruction during ELA classes/dedicating writing instruction time
- Identification of common units of instruction and planning for 2-year rollout in grades K - 8.
- Development of a philosophy and initial models for instructional time allotment at elementary schools.
- Initiation of middle school schedule redesign.
- Exploration of analytic rubrics for evaluation of high school writing

Summer 2020

- Continuation of PD planning for 2020=2021
- Development and mapping of initial curriculum units for launch in 2020-2021, including focus on speaking and listening skills and SEL
- Planning for integration of new AP frameworks, suggested resources and rubrics into AP Literature and AP Language courses
- Creation of analytic rubrics for student writing assessment at the high school

School Year 2020-2021

- PD in writing instruction for elementary teachers, middle and high school teachers, and special educators
- Supported implementation of new reading and writing units in elementary and middle school
- Implementation of analytic rubrics for student writing assessment at the high school

Summer 2021

- Development and mapping of remaining curriculum units
- Development of grade level expectations for fundamental competencies (handwriting/keyboarding, grammar, mechanics, spelling) and planning to support instruction in these areas.
- Planning for PD in literacy skills across the curriculum

School Year 2021-2022

- Implementation of remaining reading and writing units in elementary and middle school
- PD in literacy skills across the curriculum
- Begin exploration of alternate high school schedule options

Summer 2022

- Review of curriculum developed to date and assessment of the impact of changes.
- Planning for PD on student reflection and goal setting
- Initiation of integration of curriculum maps with other core content areas

G. Conclusion

In wrapping up, it is important to note that Westwood Public Schools students are graduating with very strong literacy skills. WPS teachers and instructional support staff are committed to providing high quality instruction, and this shows in students state assessment scores, AP and SAT scores, and college acceptance rates. In addition, the schools receive informal feedback from graduates indicating that they feel very well-prepared for the demands of college writing.

Recommendations made by the team--particularly those related to alignment and integration with other content--are designed to help students build skills from grade level to grade level more easily and to help them see meaningful connections between their learning in literacy/English language arts and other learning that takes place both in and out of school.