

Minutes
Watertown Board of Education
Curriculum and Instruction Committee Meeting
Monday, January 27, 2020
Watertown High School – Lecture Hall

Members Present: Cathie Rinaldi, Chairman of Curriculum & Instruction Committee
Cindy Eastman, Committee Member
Janelle Wilk, Committee Member
Leslie Crotty, Committee Member

Members Absent: Josephine Cavallo-Rosa, Committee Member

Others Present: Tom Lambert, Board of Education
Rob Makowski, Board of Education
Jason Malagutti, Board of Education
Dr. Rydell Harrison, Superintendent of Schools
Lisa Fekete, Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Dr. Janet Parlato, Principal, Watertown High School

1. Convene Meeting

Ms. Rinaldi convened the meeting at 6:01 p.m. and turned the meeting over to Dr. Parlato

2. Review the Proposed 2020-2021 Program of Studies for Watertown High School

Dr. Parlato – The program of studies has several purposes that includes: to develop and continue strong core curriculum requirements, address legislative mandates, and provide interesting and varied elective courses. An important point is that elective does not mean optional; elective means to have choices. Some legislative changes starting with the class of 2023 include that all students must earn 1.0 credit of Health Education, they must earn 25 credits to earn their high school diploma and middle school students who take high school courses in middle school (Algebra I, Spanish I, or French I) earn high school credit for those courses taken in middle school. Some history points to show you are that with the class of 2015, 22 credits were required for graduation and have changed over the years to all the way of to the class of 2020 requiring 26 credits to graduate at Watertown High School. In that same timeframe, Watertown High School lost 6.4 FTE positions across the content areas. Mandated course changes now include Health & Wellness II and we will need another PE/Health teacher to cover all of the course sections. This teacher would be dual certified to teach in both areas. This course would include things like expansion of health and wellness topics including mindfulness, stress management, healthy life balance, substance use avoidance, understanding of common illness, and disease prevention.

New course choices will include Foods I and Baking and Pastry Arts I. This course will need the addition of one Family & Consumer teacher. We have a very beautiful and underutilized space for this course. We also have cleared the room with the fire marshal, building inspector and state fire marshal. One thing to note is that the only thing we can't do in this room is fry anything or produce grease. We are excited to offer possibilities to explore in these courses. Other courses that will be offered with no addition to staff are Horticulture and Music Technology. Horticulture will be the study of plant care, both indoor and outdoor. We have a greenhouse that is attached to a classroom in the science wing and is another area that is underutilized. They will also have laboratory experience with this course. Next is Music Technology. That is using digital equipment and digital production to create their own composition, beats and soundscapes.

We have been fortunate to be accepted to the Advanced Placement Capstone Diploma Program. That means we get to offer two more AP courses; one is AP seminar and that is in year one and then in the second year you offer AP research. It is very rigorous and a very carefully planned research project picked by the student and would run side by side with the capstone project the student would complete. In the end, you can either get a capstone certificate or a capstone diploma. This is an effort to expand the offerings for students that need intellectual expansions and can take on rigorous coursework. Next we are working on a dual program with Post University. The courses with Post start with Introduction to Computing and it provides them with specific instruction with computer programs such as Word, Windows, spreadsheets and presentation software. At the end of the course, they will have earned three college credits. The second course is College Writing and that will be combined with English III honors. While they are taking English II honors, the teacher will weave through the curriculum from Post and they will earn the Post credits at the end of the course. This gives them even more opportunity to get college credits at a discounted rate (\$300). Along with these courses, our UCONN Early College Experience will be added to Advanced Placement Literature and with that, students will have the opportunity to earn 4 UCONN credits for \$200 by earning a C in the course. It does need to be approved by UCONN.

We will be offering some classes for support. They are Academic Reading and Academic Math. Looking at students that are coming in middle school and seeing where their deficits are in either reading or math and then taking that class in 9th grade is intended to help them make progress and reduce the gap in their knowledge and skill. We are piloting math this year and looking at their scores in math testing in 9th and 10th grades and giving them the extra help that they may need.

A change to our school procedure may include it would look at our passing average. Currently at Watertown High School, the passing grade is a 70. If you look at the average passing grade at our surrounding schools in our region and in our DRG, only two schools have a 70 and most have either a 60 or 65. (There was a slide put up for showing all of the scores to the mentioned schools. A slide also shows what the College Board looks for in their high school GPA grading) The college board considers a passing grade to be 65. We are not in alignment with the national grading scale; this may tell us we are a little bit off. It is important to think of the graduation rate. The state expects a 94% graduation rate. Fewer of our kids are graduating because of our

70 passing grade where other schools are graduating more with a 60 passing grade. In 2019, Watertown High School had a 90.9% graduation rate with 19 students not graduating. If 8 more graduated, with us aligning us with similar towns, we could have a graduation rate of 95%. The hypothesis is that if we aligned with our DRG and surrounding towns, we may graduate more students, as reported by the state, which increases our district performance index, which then increases the way we perceive our district.

3. District Math Update

Ms. Fekete – This is a comprehensive approach to digging in with what is happening with math. We have put some processes in place with some information gathering sessions across a bunch of different stakeholder groups and then did a deep dive of the data to come up with some hypothesis on why our math student performance is what is currently and what can we do about it. Dr. Harrison and I did a co-process with TregoED called a SCAN to unpack their feelings on the math situations. We met with the high school math teachers, the student advisory council, the district administrators, and then a meeting with the middle school math teachers this week. What the process found was that it surfaced a lot of concerns, opinions and feelings around math. It is not one particular thing, but many layers. I took time to synthesize the information and there were clear patterns that emerged. The pieces I will share today were mentioned several times by the stakeholder group or were rated high by them. Things fell into one of these four categories: Curriculum and Instruction, Scheduling, Vertical Alignment and Math Culture.

The curriculum and instruction is a very traditional model. Instruction is algorithm driven with skills and packet and what ultimately happens is that students struggle to apply or transfer their skills to new problems. Pacing is a chronic issue while class content lacks rigor and relevance. Expectations for work in class so not appear to align with expectations on the SAT or testing. There is also a lack of a common curriculum or program guide or a primary resource is nonexistent at this point at the high school, and this accounts for a lack of common or rigorous experiences across classrooms. There are issues with depth, vertical and horizontal instruction, and defiantly pacing.

Going over scheduling, one thing we have found is that there is a lack of guidelines for instructional minutes from K-12. There is a lot of discussion around the block scheduling and not having math daily. It was an interesting conversation that we will continue to have. There is an issue with actually scheduling in the interventions. If you look at K-2, right now there is excellent tier II and tier III for language arts, but there is no tiered instruction for math. At Polk & Judson, there is no tier III happening at all and in 6-12, there is no tier II or III. When kids are struggling and we don't have interventions, that is where you will have the missing links. The middle school and high school do their due diligence with extra help, but part of the problem with that is that students compete with other factors during that time. That same time is uses for questions about core, to catch up students, or they need help in several subjects, extracurricular activities, or there are several students waiting for the same teacher. This is a big piece.

For vertical alignment, the instructional minutes vary. There is a lack of a common tiered intervention process and a clear process for criteria for course placement. There is a lot of confusion over course selection and sequencing. In particular moving from grades 5 to 6 or 8 to 9. They may be placed incorrectly in the advanced math lane and sometimes that may not be where they should be placed because they are lacking the prerequisite skills and may not be able to catch up.

Math culture is based on teacher and student high school scans and they had the same things to say. Students admitted that they are apathetic and disengaged. They struggle to find the relevance of the instruction, other than the grade. It was interesting to see how important the grade was. While they are pushing to be successful, they are sacrificing other things to get that grade. Teachers are frustrated; they feel that they are working hard but not seeing the results and have expressed the need for help and resources.

(There was a slide used to show the IReady scores) The first set of scores are from the fall (beginning of the year view), and when I come back in a few weeks, I will share the winter results. This first view is used primarily for placement and intervention. (Some correlations between the IReady and the SBAC were also put up on a slide)

Looking at the data, starting with John Trumbull, there are 8% of kids in tier I and 4% in grade 2. Here in lies the issue, if there is not intervention, there will be students that will have many more gaps and not be able to catch up. There is no math interventionist at John Trumbull. At Judson & Polk, there is some intervention there, but not tier III. There is no one to pull students out for that high level of support. Kids do come in in a little better shape each fall and that is because there is a little intervention happening. It is also important to note that John Trumbull started Investigations later than Judson and Polk. The SBAC scores you see are cohort scores. If you look at the middle school, you have no tiered support and are struggling there as well. For SAT math, if you look back to see what the 11th grade students in what they did on their 8th grade SBAC, the scores are almost identical. There are gaps, and unless you fill them in with intervention, they are not going to go away.

For action steps, the first would be to select a primary resource for high school math to give the teachers the resources they are looking for. It can help to move the traditional model of instruction to something more rigorous and relevant. It opens the door for professional learning opportunities and common language between the teachers. It will improve the alignment between classroom instruction, state standards, and expectation on high stakes testing. We also want to investigate for Swift to use the new primary resource for 8th grade Algebra I.

We are in the midst of creating a K-8 SRBI model with a 9-12 to follow. We are looking to create guidelines and processes that use that data to match students to intervention to have a common process. This will be supported by a K-8 common assessment calendar. We want to increase student confidence and improve math attitudes, better define how to use intervention blocks, early intervention at the elementary school, but also looking to at interventions K-5 with the addition of the SRBI coordinator to help with intervention with math. We also would like a math interventionist at the middle school for tiered intervention.

Regarding the pilot intervention for math at the high school, it was a homegrown pre/post test. We cherry picked some resources but we really feel that we needed something more structured.

IReady has agreed to give us some extra licenses so all kids that fit the criteria were given invitations to participate at the times the intervention was offered. We will use the information and testing from IReady to teach the intervention to the groups, and then in the spring, re-administer the IReady. Some of the students will receive intervention and some won't, but it gives us the opportunity to compare growth in a controlled group and it will tell us if our efforts are going down the right path.

Some further action steps on planning to achieve better vertical alignment include working with building administrators to identify schedule drivers, develop guidelines for required instructional minutes by subject, clarify pacing for tier I at all grade levels, continue to support Swift math teachers in implantation of Illustrative Math, refine the role of the two district math specialists to ensure quality and efficiency and work with math specialists and building administrators to evaluate course sequencing in math and clarify appropriate course selection and sequencing for students, parents and counselors from grade 6-12.

Some concluding thoughts...I feel that teachers really care and are working hard. It is not about one group or grade level with teachers, there are pockets everywhere we can fix with action steps. Students want to do well and feel engaged and the challenge is looking at all of these pieces to see what concrete actions steps we can have around fixing them systematically. It is time for us to collaborate, to look at the theories that are supported by data and put the action steps in place to improve tier I at all levels, make sure that we are offering tier II and tier III at all levels, look at our resources (material and human), provide time and focus professional learning and finally, analyze our advanced math lane to see what role that plays.

4. **Adjournment**

Ms. Rinaldi adjourned the meeting at 7:34 p.m.

She then called for a motion to adjourn.

Subject: Motion to Adjourn

Motion Presented by: Mr. Makowski

Motion Seconded by: Ms. Crotty

Motion Passed

Respectfully submitted by,

Mindi Davidson

Recording Secretary