

**CITY OF NORWALK  
BOARD OF EDUCATION  
CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 27, 2014**

ATTENDANCE: Michael Lyons, Chair; Michael Barbis, Sherelle Harris, Shirley Mosby.

STAFF: Dr. Manuel Rivera, Superintendent; Tony Daddona, Deputy Superintendent;  
Ralph Valenzisi, Director of Information Technology.

Call to Order

Mr. Lyons called the meeting to order at 7:45 p.m. and stated that Committee members were in attendance as listed above, and a quorum was present.

Presentation of K-5 Literacy Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Lyons stated that the meeting would be devoted to the curriculum presentation and recommendation for K-5. He gave an overview of the recent curriculum adoptions that have taken place with Go-Math and spoke about recent articles on concerns with Common Core implementation. He noted that Norwalk is way ahead of other towns and does not intent to put the brakes on CCSS implementation. He stated that March 18 is the earliest date that the K-5 LA curriculum modifications can be implemented is March 18, based on state guidelines with notice requirements.

Dr. Rivera presented the curriculum plan and recommendation entitled, PreK-5 Literacy Comprehensive Plan and Recommendations. (Note: as posted on the district website, link: [www.norwalkps.org/PreK-5 Literacy Presentation 2-27-2014%20FINAL3.pdf](http://www.norwalkps.org/PreK-5%20Literacy%20Presentation%202-27-2014%20FINAL3.pdf).)

He gave an overview of his goals and objectives and stated that much of the context in support of this recommendation is about the beliefs on the necessary skill set, knowledge and classroom climate. He stated that we need to move forward on this and the district cannot wait as student performance is at stake. He highlighted his rationale behind the objectives, as follows:

- Plan and deliver high-quality professional development
- Focus and establish district structures, roles and systems around literacy
- Engage and support parents at an unprecedented level
- Engage Norwalk's public libraries and community partners
- Provide common "assessments" in all schools
- Provide more access to after-school and summer school programs

Dr. Rivera explained that the plan includes a recommendation to go with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journeys as the primary English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum for K-2 with Core Knowledge (CKLA) as an optional alternative in one or two schools K-2 based on school proposal requests. He added that would include a recommendation to adopt Scholastic's Core Knowledge Classroom Libraries to create abundant independent reading libraries in every classroom.

Dana Johnson and Marjorie Brandt, members of the Steering Committee gave a demonstration of the interactive elements of the curriculum. Dr. Rivera fielded questions and comments from the committee members. Ms. Harris asked about the optional second curriculum, and Dr. Rivera explained that with a school proposal it could be a modified curriculum.

Ms. Mosby asked if parent feedback was consulted, and Dr. Rivera replied that they did not directly reach out to parent groups for curriculum evaluations, but many parents are teachers and they are very supportive of this recommendation. Ms. Mosby suggested that it would be looked at as experimenting on Norwalk's most vulnerable children, and if it doesn't work, the kids would never catch up.

Dr. Rivera clarified that it is not experimenting with kids; this is a program that has been implemented in schools in New York, Newark and elsewhere. He explained that there is a two-year study that met research design standards, and demonstrated that that program had greater success for kids that are new, and the kids over time did better. He added that this is more proven than those other ones on the list.

Ms. Harris asked about the Steering Committee and all the work that was involved with teachers and curriculum supervisors with their evaluations. Dr. Rivera explained that this was not in their top 3 and Journeys was the second choice and others favored CKLA, the curriculum that was then recommended. He added that this is a comprehensive program much beyond textbook selection. Dr. Rivera said books are actually low on the list of importance. He said that if asked to rank what has the greatest impact on student achievement, teacher quality is at the top of the list, and the critical importance of being able to engage your students, know your students, create the right classroom or talk about the critical importance of teachers in our schools and our leaders and what they need to know and be able to do. He explained that the systems and supports that have to be in place are going to have an accountability element.

Mr. Lyons explained that Journeys, is about half the price of Pearson, which had freed up money the optional use of CKLA by schools with justified proposals and money to pay for Scholastic's Core Knowledge Classroom Libraries, with \$1,000 worth of books in every classroom.

Dr. Rivera further explained CKLA would be offered as a pilot program for one or two schools. The curriculum requires more work on the part of teachers, but the research indicates excellent results with disadvantaged children. He added that third-graders would transition to Journeys or Expeditionary Learning.

Ms. Mosby said she thought the point of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was to have the children on the same curriculum, so when the kids will move on to the feeder schools they will all be on the same page.

Dr. Rivera replied that they're not learning something totally different, they're learning the standards--Common Core State Standards is what is going to guide all the learning that takes place. He explained that the materials might be different, but they will be learning the same skills, and right now as a district, because we have twelve schools that operate independently, we don't have that, we don't have consistency.

Dr. Rivera added in this kind of environment, where all eight cylinders are working together, we will have that level of consistency and standards.

Ms. Harris asked for a better understanding of the two-curriculum process. Dr. Rivera replied that all schools right now will adopt Journeys, not Core Knowledge. He outlined that Journeys is the city-wide recommendation; however, if a school chooses to submit a proposal to implement a different reading program on a pilot basis, he will review the proposal, and, in that one school, in lieu of Journeys could choose Core Knowledge.

Ms. Harris asked how this will have consistency with elements of differentiated learning. Dr. Rivera said he strongly believes in innovation, and this has had some promising results. He explained that these materials provide teachers to access the right resources and electronic methods. He said he particularly impressed with the manner in which (CKLA) has been constructed and how it builds knowledge systematically through its rich literature.

Mr. Lyons said he has been involved in the curriculum selection process for two years, and gave an overview of the process of analyzing the data. He described the bias that was present with Pearson and how volumes of research analysis show the two best programs are the ones that Dr. Rivera is recommending, and that carries a lot of weight.

Ms. Mosby asked for the documentation of the research study and stated that she is capable of doing her own research and analysis. She asked for copies of the studies, and Mr. Lyons replied absolutely he would provide copies along with back up information on the presentation.

Ms. Mosby said, but this is a very big step, and we need to make sure that all children are going to benefit from this. Dr. Rivera said that's why you hired him, to bring his best expertise, and that's what he has done. This is the best you're going to get, we have studied this, and have gone over this over and over again, and he is excited about what has been shared tonight. He added there's a lot here to execute that and to do that well is going to fundamentally transform what we are doing with K-5 literacy. He asked the Committee to be supportive of this direction because it's the way to go; this is his recommendation to the Board.

Mr. Lyons complimented Dr. Rivera on the proposal and stated that it is far better than anything he has seen. He added that the comprehensive plan begins with adopting a literacy policy, with the highest of expectations.

Adopt Notice of Intended Change of Textbooks  
in Accordance with K-5 Literacy Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Lyons explained that according to state statues, there is a requirement to have a public notice of intent to change textbooks approved one meeting prior to the adoption vote. He suggested there be a motion to forward to the Board the following notice to be placed on the March 4 BoE meeting agenda, with a vote on the textbooks and curriculum adoption to be held at the March 18 BoE meeting:

He reviewed the recommendation as follows and read the suggested motion for the notice of intended change of textbooks:

Approval of recommended K-5 curriculum and the adoption of the following:

- (1) Houghton Mifflin Harcourt “Journeys Common Core Reading Program” for Grades K-5;
- (2) Scholastic “Core Knowledge Classroom Libraries” for Grades K-5;
- (3) Amplify / Core Knowledge Language Arts program for Grades K-2 and Expeditionary Learning reading program for Grades 3-5.

Ms. Mosby clarified that this would not be to approve the curriculum recommendation, and Mr. Lyons replied that it was a notice of intent to move the process forward in line with state guidelines of notice.

Mr. Lyons noted that the Power-Point Presentation will be given to the full board at next week’s BoE meeting on March 4, 2014.

**\*\* MR. BARBIS MOVED TO APPROVE AND FORWARD TO THE BOARD THE FOLLOWING NOTICE TO BE PLACED ON THE MARCH 4 BOE MEETING AGENDA, WITH A VOTE ON THE TEXTBOOKS TO BE HELD AT THE MARCH 18 BOE MEETING:**

**NOTICE OF INTENDED CHANGE OF TEXTBOOKS – ADOPTION OF:**

- 1. HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT “JOURNEYS COMMON CORE READING PROGRAM” FOR GRADES K-5;**
- 2. SCHOLASTIC “CORE KNOWLEDGE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES” FOR GRADES K-5;**
- 3. “AMPLIFY/CORE KNOWLEDGE” LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM FOR GRADES K-2 AND “EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING” READING PROGRAM FOR GRADES 3-5.**

**\*\* MS. HARRIS SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED WITH THREE VOTES IN FAVOR, ONE OPPOSED (MOSBY) AND NO ABSTENTIONS.**

Adjournment

**\*\* MR. BARBIS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Marilyn Knox,  
Telesco Secretarial Services