

Newtown Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut
Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee

Minutes from the Board of Education and Instruction Subcommittee held on Tuesday, December 22, 2020.

Also present Board of Education member Deborra Zukowski.

J. Vouros called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m.

J. Vouros moved to approve the minutes from the 12/8/2020 meeting.

M. Ku seconded the motion.

Public Participation: None

Presentation of Impact of Proposed 21-22 NMS Schedule on Delivery of Special Education Services

Maureen Hall, Special Education Supervisor for grades 5 through 8, reviewed the impact that the proposed new 21-22 NMS schedule will have on the delivery of special education services for students. M. Hall shared that the new schedule provides more opportunity for special education students to be included in general education classes and more time for related service providers to schedule services and to better group students according to needs. M. Hall reviewed all of the services currently offered at NMS. Next year, special education will also offer co-taught math and co-taught English language arts for the first time. M. Hall explained that the 25-minute Learning Lab block will be discontinued. That time had been used to work on study and organization skills identified on students' IEPs. Under the new schedule, instruction on those skills will be delivered during the resource room time which will now be a full 47-minute period. She stated that this will be a more productive and efficient way to provide that needed instruction.

M. Ku asked for a clarification as to whether all students would have resource room time. M. Hall explained that this is provided only to special education students who require that time in order to work on the goals identified on their IEP.

J. Vouros asked how many special education teachers would be needed to achieve the proposed co-taught model. M. Hall explained that there will need to be a case manager for each cluster for a total of six. This would require an additional two special ed teachers who would need to be hired. M. Hall believes that this staffing is adequate based on the number and needs of next year's NMS special ed population. She further shared that the case managers are primarily responsible for overseeing the implementation of the IEPs for the students on their case loads.

M. Hall shared that the co-taught math and English language arts classes are general education classes and offer special education students the opportunity to receive direct instruction from the classroom teacher certified in those specific areas while receiving the appropriate support from the case manager in applying the goals and objectives in that general education setting. When appropriate, this is a very successful model. However, she noted that some students may require more specialized classes and those would continue to be offered. She outlined the variety of benefits that the co-taught model provides to all students, both general and special education students, including the benefit of two certified staff members during the instructional period, more time in the unified arts classes, and an opportunity to

participate in world language. Special education students will also benefit from more time in the resource room and more flexibility for when related services are provided.

M. Hall explained that training and support will be provided to all teachers so that they can be successful in the co-taught model.

A. Uberti said that she had received additional questions from the sub-committee members and had provided the answers back to them in writing ahead of the meeting. She will be posting those questions and answers with the meeting minutes so they will be available to the public. She asked if there were any additional questions or points of clarification needed.

J. Vouros questioned whether the Reading curriculum that is currently delivered to general education students will be replaced by Lexia. A. Uberti answered that the Reading curriculum will be discontinued. One of the goals of the schedule redesign was be able to create a tiered intervention model where students would receive targeted intervention in their identified areas of weakness and also be able to move fluidly in and out of intervention as needed. Individual student intervention plans will be developed and these may or may not include the use of Lexia. This will depend on the student's learning profile and what has or has not worked in the past. The goal is to support students so that they can successfully participate in the grade level curriculum to the greatest degree possible.

J. Vouros inquired about advanced math classes. T. Einhorn stated that advanced math will continue to be offered for those students requiring it.

During the meeting it was decided that the proposed new schedule will be presented to the Board of Education at the January 5th meeting. In order to allow adequate time for Board Members to understand the schedule, A. Uberti will share the video links from the December 8th and 22nd C & I meeting in advance of the January 5th meeting so that Board members can have time to review the new schedule and have the opportunity to submit any questions prior to the January meeting.

M. Ku and J. Vouros agreed that, as subcommittee members, who have received the details of the new schedule, they will recommend that the new schedule be approved by the full Board.

Questions Submitted by C&I Subcommittee on the topic of the Proposed 20-21 NMS Schedule in Advance of 12.22.20 C&I Meeting; Answers provided by Tom Einhorn, Principal, and Jim Ross, Assistant Principal

Topic: Change from a seven period day to an eight period day.

Does this change mean that CORE teachers will now be teaching five periods a day, when in the past they had been teaching four periods per day?

Core teachers (Cluster) will be teaching 5 sections each day, as allowable by Contract. Previously they taught 4 periods and a learning lab.

Topic: World Language

The majority of students will still have the choice of both French and Spanish. Students receiving

intervention or who require a slower pace in a language will only be offered Conversational Spanish (CSPAN).

Will each world language teacher also teach one section of CSPAN or will a separate teacher teach all six sections?

Each World Language Teacher would teach one section of CSPAN.

Does World Language include both Spanish and French or does choice of language happen only in the high school? If the former, must every world language teacher be fluent in both languages, since there is one world language teacher per cluster?

The majority of students will still have the choice of either French and Spanish. Students receiving intervention or those who require a slower pace in a language will only have the option of Conversational Spanish (CSPAN). Our current plan is for the students taking French to be assigned to one Grade 7 Cluster or Grade 8 Cluster. The French Teacher would split these two Cluster Assignments with a Spanish Teacher.

Topic: Lunch

Did the time allotted for lunch change, i.e., was it always 26 minutes?

The proposed lunch period is 26 minutes as is our current lunch period.

Topic: Changes in Unified Arts

I remember there was concern about losing library/media time with the Reed schedule change. Has access to library/media classes changed in this schedule or is it considered "Comp Int" or "Tech Ed"?

Access to the LMC will not change with the proposed schedule. While some students have picked out books during Learning Lab, additional times have been created and alternative ways of getting books have been developed. For example the LMC is open before and after school. Teachers routinely send students to the LMC during class when resources are needed. Additionally, we have created an on-line book ordering system where books are delivered or available for pick up. We have also invested in online ebooks for students. Computer Integration and Tech Ed are completely separate classes from Library Media.

Has Unified Arts block #1 changed? And, was the change to block #2 solely the replacement of FACS with STEM and Middle School Academy?

Our current schedule has two Unified Arts Blocks for each student. There are a total of 12 UA Periods per 6 Day Cycle week. World Language has been moved from the UA Blocks and given its own period of the day (Moving from 7 Periods to an 8 Period day). This frees up three UA Blocks per cycle week - one has been allocated to Music, one to STEM and one to the Middle School Academy. As FACS sunsets, this allows more instructional time for Health, Tech Ed and Computer Integration.

Suggestion: Perhaps the proposed after school Cooking Club could be “cheffed” by senior culinary students and advised by a staff member. A PERFECT Capstone Segway.

This is a great suggestion, thank you.

Topic: Special Schedule Days

Clarify what happens on these days and how it is different from what is currently happening.

During the Special Schedule all classes will still meet following two 35 Minute Blocks of time. During one of the Blocks students will have the opportunity to meet in either in their music ensemble groups or one of the “Selective” Electives they choose or are assigned to. The other Block students will be on cluster for social emotional learning based on Second Step lessons.

Topic: Creating a Schedule

Are there different approaches to constructing a MS schedule (for example, block scheduling?).

We examined and created over 17 versions of different schedules. Many of the versions included Block Type Schedules. The proposed schedule best met our needs.

Which surrounding districts did you look at for schedules, and what did you see in that comparison?

We looked at schedules and spoke to staff from: Whisconier MS - Brookfield, Bethel MiddleSchool, Jockey Hollow- Monroe, Rochambeau- Southbury, Hillcrest Middle- Trumbull. Some schedules had ideas that were appealing to us and many had limitations similar to what we have been experiencing. None of the schedules we looked at offered everything we wanted to achieve. We believe that the schedule we have designed satisfies almost all of the needs we were trying to address with minimal downside. And it is uniquely ours.

Topic: Changing Enrollment

For next year, are we using the projected enrollment numbers from Prowda or the numbers from this year (I ask because I notice that enrollment is lower than projected, but on the flip side, the real estate market is up and we may have students who will return to the district when classes are back to normal)? And if we are off, how flexible can this be?

We referenced the current actual enrollment for Grades 6 & 7 along with considering the Prowda Projections. The proposed 5 Teacher Cluster configuration will be significantly more flexible and can accommodate the number of students that may increase or decrease over time.

Similar to my previous question, but over a longer term, will this schedule accommodate an increasing enrollment? Now that there are 5 teachers in a cluster, won't it be more challenging to add or reduce clusters?

There are always challenges with adding/reducing clusters. However, having 5 teachers on a cluster actually better accommodates for fluctuations in enrollment. We can accommodate 300 to 375 students without having to add or reduce clusters. See the example below:

Let's say we have 300 7th graders and we had an increase to 375 7th graders

300 7th graders: 100 students per cluster; 20 students per class

375 7th graders: 125 students per cluster; 25 students per class

Topic: Reading

What will a typical schedule look like for the 7th and 8th grade reading interventionists? How many students will he/she be supporting? What level of tiered instruction will they service?

Interventionists' schedules will need to be fluid based on student needs, but a typical day will look like the following:

4-5 periods intervention

1-2 periods meetings

1 period for lunch

1 period for prep

Please note that the Special Education students that currently receive Reading Support through our Reading Classes will be moving to an On-Cluster Support Model with their Case Managers. This will significantly decrease the overall numbers of students.

Currently there are 17 general education students in Grade 6 and 17 in Grade 7 receiving Intervention in Reading. This will allow those students to have individualized and flexible SRBI plans as is required by the CSDE.

Describe how Lexia will be used by reading interventionists.

Lexia PowerUp will be used in a blended learning model that includes a combination of students working independently online as well as teachers working directly with students offline. We recognize that it is essential that the interventionist is directly involved in the students' instruction. To this end, the interventionists will use the information gained by the independent online practice to monitor student progress and to target their direct instruction to the skill areas in need of support. An overview of the key components of PowerUp is included below.

An Overview of PowerUp:

- *Students access Lexia PowerUp through the Newtown District Portal.*
- *Targeted online activities and skill practice include direct instruction and immediate feedback.*
- *Each student has a weekly usage target of minutes and units that can be seen on the student dashboard.*
- *Students consult with teachers about their specific weekly goals and track their progress.*
- *Progress and performance are reported directly to us so we can provide direct instruction and support.*
- *Skill builders are also used for additional practice.*

Topic: Staffing

Will current staff members be teaching the Academy Course and STEM classes?

All new positions are required to be posted. However, it is likely that these positions, as well as the interventionist position, will be filled by reallocated internal staff members.

Assistant Superintendent Updates – Anne Uberti

There were no additional updates.

Public Participation: None

J. Vouros adjourned the meeting at 11:51 a.m.

M. Ku seconded the motion.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna Norling

THESE ARE DRAFT MINUTES AND ARE SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE.