

# Curriculum & Instruction Committee Meeting Notes

Monday, February 6, 2012, 10:30 AM

Attending: Board Members - Ray Tai, Barbara Garrity, Chiung-Yin Cheng Liu, Phyllis Pascucci  
Administrators – Mary Beth Currie, Susan Alston, Barbara Duncan

## Items for Discussion/Reports

### 1. Readers/Writers Workshop – Mrs. Susan Alston

- Ms. Alston (Supervisor of Humanity and Language Arts) joined us to discuss the Readers/Writers Workshop program at VS and IH. We discussed all aspects of the program and issues, and agreed that the problem is less in the program itself, but in communications and also in training/implementation.
  - i. This program has been in place in VS for several years, and has been well received in general. Last year's 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, on whom we could collect a full year's data for the first time, showed evident progress (such as the average reading level raised higher than average). The full report is available on the Humanities and VS web-sites. One key communication component is the weekly classroom newsletter which keeps the parents informed about the program, so parents not only understand what is going on, but also be better able to help their kids.
  - ii. However, there's no weekly newsletter in IH. Furthermore, as the pupils progress to higher grades, less student work is being sent home with kids. E.g., while the teacher is working with a kid individually on his portfolio, the drafts go through much iteration, but that is not visible to the parents. Also some kids talk to their parents about what they have been doing in class in great detail, but others just don't.
  - iii. Spelling/Vocabulary/Grammar/Writing is surely still an important part of the LA program. The companion Writers Workshop is meant to address that. However, in order not to make too many changes at the same time, the strategy is to introduce the Readers Workshop first, and then the Writers Workshop after the Readers Workshop has been successfully implemented. For this transitional period, the teachers are covering spelling, vocabulary, grammar and writing with the existing programs. However, improvements are still being made. E.g., *Wordly Wise* has been replaced by *Words Their Way*, which is highly recommended by Teachers College of Columbia University. Many parents are familiar with *Wordly Wise* and love it. However, research shows that the more effective way to build working vocabulary is through context learning, root analysis, prefixes, suffixes, and word pattern recognition. *Words Their Way* is designed based on that approach (as opposed to the memory based approach of *Wordly Wisely*, which is good for preparing students for vocabulary tests, but not for application to their practical reading comprehension and writing.) Unfortunately, this may not have been well communicated or explained to the parents. Thus some parents have the perception that teachers are not doing vocabulary since they don't see word lists anymore. Writers Workshop is a parallel to Readers Workshop and is easy to implement as a parallel. A few teachers who have been using Readers Workshop have been able to incorporate components of Writers Workshop into their writing instruction because of the parallels.
  - iv. Readers Workshop is part of the Language Art curriculum. All the strategies and methods taught in Readers Workshop are designed to meet the new Common Core State Standards. Each grade has separate reading and writing curriculum guides which were written by our teachers. The curriculum writing teachers took the knowledge, format and recommendations from Readers Workshop by Columbia University, then planned our own curriculum which all teachers are following daily through their own lesson plans. The Writers Workshop will be similarly implemented when it is introduced.

- The team reached consensus on the following remedial actions (some of which are already in place):
  - i. Ms. Alston now has a satellite office in IH and has been there daily, supporting the teachers in real time. She joins teachers' meeting and planning sessions, and often visits classrooms.
  - ii. Had training last year and this fall; one training session for IH teachers on 2/1; will conduct another one in early March.
  - iii. The reading specialist will publish grade level newsletters on Readers Workshop when a new unit is being introduced. The newsletter will include what students have learned during the preceding unit, and what will be introduced in the new unit. This will help parents understand what the focus is and what activities will be involved. It will also inform the parents on how grammar/spelling/writing/vocabulary are woven into that learning process.
  - iv. Consider being more flexible about reading homework time. E.g., instead of requiring x minutes of reading daily, maybe y minutes in total per week spread among at least z days would allow the kids to skip reading at home occasionally when they are busy with other homework or activities.
  - v. Encourage teachers to increase parental involvement by sending home draft and finished work more frequently.
  - vi. The use of post-it notes is required and recommended since it helps students practice and review the strategies they learned at Reader workshop. The number of post-it notes used may not be counted as part of grade.
- C&I will continue to monitor the program and review the progress periodically.

2. Summer Academic Enrichment Program

- The Summer Academic Enrichment Program book was reviewed. The committee suggested some changes and recommended approval at the next board business meeting.

3. 2012 Holmdel Summer Sports Camps

- The Summer Sports Camp Program book was reviewed. The committee would like to invite Randy (Supervisor of Physical and Health Education) to our next meeting to help clarify some questions and also report on the Athletic Handbook status.

**Items for Approval**

1. Donations

- a. A monetary donation from the Holmdel Schools Music Association (HSMA) to be shared by all four schools equally. \$6,370.75
- b. A monetary donation from the Ilvento family for the Holmdel High School Wrestling program to be used for new signs in the wrestling room. \$750.00

**Items for information**

1. Next Curriculum Committee meeting is scheduled for March 13, 6:00 pm. at Satz.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ray Tai