RISD Elementary Board Report

November 6, 2018

ELA

As I reported last month, our curriculum for ELA is in serious need of an overhaul. We are seeing pretty significant gaps in student learning due to no scope and sequence for the ELA curriculum. That is, we all know what we SHOULD be teaching (through the common core standards), but what we ARE teaching differs from grade to grade. This is not an uncommon occurrence, as I told the faculty and staff recently, when a school I worked at did vertical and horizontal alignment of the high school curriculum, we quickly learned that no one was teaching the Holocaust. We all figured the “other grades” were covering it. But with a solid vertically aligned scope and sequence, this problem went away.

Our teachers also realize that many schools have already done this work, and that much of what we are already doing is awesome. We are working to look at ways to make this process less arduous, and I think we may have a solution.

We are going to utilize the form on at the end of this report to capture what students are supposed to know and be able to do in each grade, coupled with what programming we are utilizing to make this happen.

THEN, we are going to look at different programming out there to see what gaps we need to fill. We have started vetting some new ideas regarding programming out there in order to see what we may need to purchase to align our curriculum.

We are looking specifically at:

Wit and Wisdom

Lucy Calkins Reading Units

EngageNY Curriculum (New York’s reading curriculum – free online, books must be purchased)

Fundations

Handwriting without Tears

Fountas and Pinnell Units of Study (Phonemic Awareness)

Words their Way (Spelling)
Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a systemic, continuous-improvement framework in which data-based problem-solving and decision making is practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students. Both Response to Intervention RTI and Positive Behavioral Instructional Support/PBIS are examples of multi-tiered systems of support.

What is RTI (Response to Intervention)?

RTI was an earlier version of what has now evolved to become the MTSS. It used a scientifically based research to provide students with the latest curriculum and programs to provide remediation options to the classroom curriculum.

What is PBIS?

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a State-wide effort designed to help school teams form a proactive, school-wide, systems approach to improving social and academic competence for all students. Many schools in Vermont are engaged in using this formal system of positive behavioral supports in their schools. We are using the ROCKS program at both elementary schools in an informal version of PBIS.

What is MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support)?

The second generation of RTI, MTSS is considered a comprehensive, systemic approach to teaching and learning designed to improve learning outcomes for all students through the use of scientific, research-based differentiated and intensified assessment, instruction and intervention.

How can families be involved?

- Maintain positive home-school relationships
- Communicate and collaborate with your school regularly on your child’s progress in the curriculum
- Learn and understand the RtII model and how it impacts your child.
- Parents/families to participate in goal setting, intervention development, monitoring of progress, and evaluation of their child
- Parent input is critically important to integrate into each tier of intervention

One of the ways that we are assuring supports for all students is through our new “push in” intervention system. In the past at both elementary schools, students have been “pulled out;” thus, only a few of the students have access to intervention. In our new and improved model, Mrs. McGrave, Mrs. McGowan, and Mrs. Winchester are “pushing” into classes - allowing for more professionals working in classes - and doubles the amount of direct instruction students are receiving. This work is happening in “centers”.

What are the benefits of literacy centers?
1. They can be easily adjusted to target different literacy skills

“Literacy skills” is really more of a blanket term for several different skill sets, including reading, writing, listening, fluency, and vocabulary. Setting up literacy stations allows you to creatively weave these skill sets together so that students can apply their learning to access new texts and complete different reading activities.

For example, setting up a station so that your students participate in paired reading allows you to touch on listening and fluency skills simultaneously. Or, you might have your students read independently, then write a brief summary of the key plot elements, characters, and setting of the story. You may also consider creating different leveled activities available at each station for students of varying abilities to access. Use different colors to discern between each one and coach students to seek out the appropriate color when rotating to that station. It’s easy to switch things up day to day, and versatility in your literacy station activities will keep students engaged and focused on working toward the skills they need to develop.

2. They can be organized to fit your classroom

There is no set formula for literacy stations—you can set yours up to accommodate your unique classroom and student needs, making them relatively easy to manage and organize. Literacy stations can be portable, where you set them up in a different location each day; temporary, where you only set one up if your class seems to be struggling with a particular lesson; or permanent, where they exist in designated areas within your classroom. Once you’ve defined what kind of literacy stations you want to have, you can then tailor them to your students’ specific needs, and provide materials accordingly. As a part of a station-rotation model, you may even set up your literacy stations so that they can accommodate several different types of group activities in one day. The choice is yours. Just be sure to set specific expectations for your literacy stations to ensure your students are taking part in their upkeep and organization.

3. They encourage student collaboration

Literacy stations allow you to break your students up into small learning groups, which offers a great opportunity for students to develop stronger bonds with one another, and build effective social skills. Students learn to hold themselves accountable for their own work and actions, while also coming to understand situations where it is appropriate for them to ask their peers for help, or offer assistance if they see a classmate struggling.

Activities such as reading aloud in small groups and holding group discussions after finishing a book teach students about exchanging ideas while also promoting reading comprehension.
Taking turns within a literacy station group can also help boost students’ confidence by giving them a smaller, more intimate setting where they can express themselves, ask questions, and share their thoughts about a lesson or story with their peers. Better yet, these interactions can build relationship foundations that continue to develop outside of the literacy station, and help your classroom function better during other group-based projects, assignments, and lessons.

4. **You can integrate technology into literacy centers**

In this day and age, literacy skills have come to include media and technology skills as well. Literacy centers are a great way to integrate technology into your lessons, whether it be through online literacy programs that have students type out responses to readings with a word processor, or using computer programs to build slideshows or presentations as a group. This is especially useful for classrooms seeking to integrate more technology into their everyday lessons. You’ll be amazed at how many literacy-based programs and activities exist online that will help your students develop stronger reading skills.

5. **Literacy centers allow student choice**

One of the best things about literacy centers is that they allow for students to exert some control over their educational experience. Not only does this help to keep things feeling fresh, but also helps students build confidence by giving them some responsibility in the classroom. A great example of how to offer this kind of student agency is by allowing students to choose which stations they wish to work on in a given day or where in the classroom they wish to complete their work. These little freedoms help students feel they are more involved in their own learning process and can stimulate engagement as a result.

We are excited for December Assessments, which will hopefully demonstrate that this new model is effective.

**% Intervention and Extension**

How are we handling MTSS/RTI in the upper grades? By our new and improved and VERY (mostly) popular Intervention and Extension block.

Students were able to choose among several fun options and also have the ability to work on specific skill areas in math and literacy.

Fun options include:

- PE/games
- Reading to elementary students
Volunteering in PK, K, 1
Theatre
Comic Strips
Genius Hour
Math games

Kids are enjoying the extra student choice and voice in their educations, and I am so appreciative to the % team for making this a reality!

**Sensory/ Exercise Space/ Speech Needs**

We are leading the charge in helping students with their vestibular stimulation during the school day! At each elementary school, we are working to build sensory/exercise/OT rooms for students to work in/ take breaks.

Our students have some difficulty with their vestibular systems (sensory systems). This is not simple an RISD issue - this is an epidemic in our country (excuse what seems like hyperbole). Students are struggling and needing more exercise and more grounding of their bodies. These rooms/spaces are helping our students so much, and with more access to these rooms (& more money to fund them), we will have some great and healthy students.

The same goes for our speech needs! We have many students with both language issues and articulation issues. One of the ways that we can combat this is to have regular education students have access to Tier One/Two supports in both OT and Speech. You will be hearing more about this during budget season; however, it is important to see the way that these basic functions impact daily learning and learning acquisition.

**Social Emotional Support**

*EST*

Our new EST system is working really well! Students are being referred at a district level, and our team is comprised of Administration, Health Professionals, Special Educators, Behavior Specialists, Guidance Counselors, and a School Psychologist. We have written 11 EST plans and are seeing some great gains of students on plans. It has been a very productive and wonderful use of time - and we are making great connections between schools and students.

*We R HOPE*

A giant “shout out” to WE R HOPE - which has been a very successful new program at our schools. Both elementary schools have waiting lists for the program, and we are seeing students able to function at a much higher level when they have been previously struggling with anxiety. In addition, I have been very pleased with the level of communication from Sean Perry and Kyla, the counselor who works in our buildings.
Faculty and Staff Appreciation

I just wanted to comment on the high level of professionalism, teamwork, creativity, and child advocacy I have seen from the staff at both elementary schools. Our students are very fortunate. We have had a lot of changes this year, and our staff continues to work diligently to provide what’s best for kids.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to work in this district.

Respectfully Submitted,

Julie Donahue

RISD Elementary Principal