



Curriculum & Professional Practices

Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury Road
Avon, Connecticut

Mission Statement

Our mission is to inspire in each student a joy and passion for learning and a commitment to excellence, personal integrity, and social responsibility.

Tuesday, October 22, 2019, 6:00 pm

Avon Board of Education Offices, Meeting Rm 1

Minutes

Attendance

Members Present: Jackie Blea, Debra Chute, Bogdan Oprica

Member(s) Absent: Jeffrey S. Fleischman

Administration Present: Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent; Dr. Donna Nestler-Rusack, Assistant Superintendent; Michael Renkawitz, AHS Principal

Others Present: Shirley Moy, Board Clerk; Jessica Buckle, APS teacher and administrative intern

- I. Call to Order
Committee Chair Blea called the meeting to order at 6:08 pm.
- II. Approval of September 3, 2019 Minutes
Ms. Chute moved, Mr. Oprica seconded, to approve the September 3, 2019 Curriculum & Professional Practices minutes as presented.
The motion carried 3-0-0.
- III. Communications from the Public
Shawn George, Avon resident and parent, addressed the Board regarding Mental Health Matters, a grass roots organization to help bring awareness to mental health issues and resources. Currently they are working on their webpage to become the “white pages” of mental health resources for the community. Ms. George asked that as the District is revamping the K-12 wellness curriculum, to consider the preventative needs and to give the teachers time to teach the life skills as part of the standard curriculum. Ms. George stressed the importance of teaching the fundamentals of life and coping skills early with younger students. Ms. George also suggested to make service a part of the high school education to help students develop a deeper purpose and to bring out the best in them.

Chair Blea moved, Deb Chute seconded, to change the order of the agenda and to address Item VII Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health Supports Update. The motion carried 3-0-0.

IV. Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health Supports Update

Dr. Carnemolla introduced the new high school ID badges, which all students are now required to wear. The back of IDs have resources to get assistance and encourage students that if they see something to say something as a way to help students who may be in need. Dr. Carnemolla thanked Principal Renkawitz for establishing a culture and climate at the high school to help students, so much so that a student sought out help for a student in another district. Mr. Renkawitz mentioned that communication would be sent to parents informing them of the new IDs and the requirement that students wear the badges daily.

The Superintendent informed the committee of how the concepts of Social/Emotional Learning would be rolled out during the November full day professional development to ensure consistency for all PreK to 12 staff. Dr. Rusack explained that an overview of the social/emotional framework has been created and shared on a common PowerPoint. During the PD, staff will be involved in behavior support plans, behavior intervention plans, how do you use them within the classroom, de-escalation strategies and self-regulation strategies. A resource bank is also being developed and will be introduced to staff. Dr. Carnemolla stressed that the full day of PD on this will help establish the climate necessary to have the most effective learning in the classroom. The administrative team will continue to look at the common definition of effective teaching and learning. The entire school district will still be focused on teaching and learning during the full day of PD, just different aspects of it.

Dr. Rusack added that Professional Development Evaluation Committee (PDEC) was recently formed to help determine what the professional development focus areas should be and the social/emotional area was requested.

The Committee asked how the District communicates the resources and resource contacts that are available. Dr. Carnemolla replied that contact information are internally posted at the school. Mr. Renkawitz also mentioned that the same information on the back of the badges would also be on the Mental Health Matters' website. The Committee requested that information be easily accessible regarding internal support staff available for students to which Dr. Carnemolla said that she and Mr. Renkawitz would have a conversation to ensure that happens.

V. Course Enrollments at Avon High School

Dr. Carnemolla reviewed with the Committee the Three Year AP enrollment comparison from 2017-2019. The report showed that the total number of AP classes being taken this year from last year is up 70 students. The Superintendent did not see any differences major enough for concern. The Committee discussed ways to encourage students to try college level courses, both AP and ECE courses, and stressed that supports be kept in place for students who may be extending themselves. The Committee also asked that percentages be added to report before being presented to the full Board.

Also reviewed was the Summary of AHS Course Enrollments which was created after the drop/add period. The data is limited as it does not track who the students are and why they changed courses or what course was taken in its place. The Superintendent added that no matter the level of the course, administrators are looking at processes to guarantee a commonality of experience for students.

VI. Course Proposal Recommendations

Dr. Carnemolla clarified for the Committee that there were some courses that were previously approved in May 2018 and others that were just approved at the last CPDC meeting. However, ECE Calculus I will not be discussed and will not be brought to the Board.

Dr. Rusack reviewed the courses being recommended which includes Civil Rights Movement as new legislation was passed to include Africa American studies; Spanish VI to allow students to stay in the CP track and keeps pathways open for all students; Percussion Ensemble which is a full year course to give all interested students opportunities to perform and is also is a feeder program to the marching band.

Dr. Rusack reminded the Committee that last May 2018 the following courses were approved but never brought to the full Board. Three ECE elective courses for English – Writing about the Unspeakable: True Crime Then and Now; Writing through Humor: Satire and Comedy; Writing through Our Times: Post 9/11 American Culture. Also included were ECE elective courses in the Social Studies Department on American Studies; European History; Human Rights. There were also two semester Theatre courses – Improvisation for the Real World and Introduction to Theatre.

Dr. Carnemolla added that the courses need to be approved to be offered but not all courses would be run every semester; courses are run only if the enrollment numbers warrant it. AP and ECE courses can be run concurrently at Avon and are not courses that are in competition of each other. These are the same class with the same content. Dr. Carnemolla clarified the difference of AP and ECE courses and how colleges accept these courses. The Superintendent also clarified that these courses, when approved by the Board, will be added to the program of studies, which is a timeless index of the courses offered to students at a specific given time. Dr. Rusack also added that the electives give students choices as to meeting the required four years of English; students were surveyed as to the topics they were interested.

The Committee expressed concerns about certain themes and the precautions that should be taken when students take these courses. Discussion included the content of books used in courses and the possibility of having parental permission for movies and for controversial books. Dr. Rusack stated that when the Board approves the curriculum, the sequence of the units, the standards and the books being used are also approved. Being considered is a comprehensive running list of all the books approved by grade so parents and students can see what text are used in the various courses. Alternative books are made available to students for any required readings. The Committee asked that the administration be mindful of how things/subjects are portrayed/described and that the District focus on themes that are more positive.

***Debra Chute moved, Bogdan Oprica seconded, to move the course proposal recommendations to the full Board.
The motion carried 3-0-0.***

Chair Blea reminded that this item be listed under New Business on the Board agenda. Dr. Carnemolla suggested that the course recommendations be sent out to the full Board well in advance of the Board meeting for their review.

VII. Primary Instructional Materials Recommendations

Dr. Rusack explained that the primary instructional materials are text being recommended for grade 10 and 12 ECE courses and she is seeking the Committee to open the 30-day public review. Text include: Atonement by Ian McEwan; Beneath the Scarlet Sky by Mark Sullivan; The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz; Hazards of Time Travel by Joyce Carol Oates; The Miseducation of Cameron Post by Emily Danforth; Salvage the Bones by Jesmyn Ward; Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel; The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini; Those Who Save Us by Jenna Blum; and Vox by Christina Dalcher.

***Chair Blea moved, Deb Chute seconded, to open the 30-day review period.
The motion carried 3-0-0.***

VIII. Enrichment Update & Gifted and Talented Identification

Dr. Rusack explained that annually in the spring, in 4th grade, students are tested and identified for Gifted and Talented. Students must exceed in achievement level in the Smarter Balance ELA and math and above all in all areas of knowledge and skills. Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) is also administered and students need to be in the 95 or higher. When a student is identified, a letter is sent to the parents asking if an OLSAT (IQ test) can be given. If 95% is met on the OLSAT then a PPT is held to determine eligibility. It is required by State statute for all students and once students are identified, the information is entered into PowerSchool and reported to parents. Students must be identified and reported to the State Dept. of Education annually.

Dr. Rusack also explained the MathQuest program for advanced math students in West Hartford and does not recommend Avon move ahead with this program as we currently have what may even be a better solution to address students of allowing student who are ahead in math to take the math level appropriate for them.

Dr. Carnemolla summarized that state law requires G&T students be identified, students must be reported to both the parents and the state, and the information maintained in their permanent records. Dr. Carnemolla made clear that what the state requires what the District has done in the past and what the District currently has in place does not prevent the District from doing more. The Committee continued the discussion of what can be done to identify G&T students that may not have initially been recognized to take the OLSAT.

Dr. Rusack spoke on the District's Enrichment for All model introduced in 2015. Programs currently include enrichment clusters in Thompson Brook School, which gives students opportunities to study areas of interest; Makerspaces at the elementary schools; Words

Master vocabulary program; and others. Avon currently has an enrichment coach for K-6 whose role is to work with teachers in how to enrich current curriculum and offer professional development and feedback. Also discussed were the courses available through John Hopkins University and virtual high school as well as limitations courses due to age restrictions.

Discussion was also had in finding the balance of students being given the opportunity to move ahead in courses such as in advanced math which allows 6th grade students to take math in the middle school and The Race to Nowhere. The Committee asked for recommendations of what can be done for younger students who are advanced and to come back with recommendations as to what the District is going to do to better identify students.

IX. Communication from the Public

Shawn George commented that she has a child who has been identified as Gifted & Talented but after receiving the initial notice, she has not heard anything else from the school. Ms. George also reminded the Committee that children's well-being matters the most and that though children may be academically ready for more advanced work they might not be socially/emotionally ready. There is a mental health component to bringing out the best in children. The way we communicate to the students and parents matters.

Lauren Magel, an Avon resident and parent, wished communication could be better to let people know the great things going on in the District.

X. Adjournment

*Chair Blea moved, Deb Chute seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 pm.
The motion carried 3-0-0.*

Minutes prepared by Shirley Moy, Board Recording Secretary

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jackie Blea, Curriculum & Professional Practices Chair

Jackie Blea, November 11, 2019

Minutes respectfully received by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary

Jeffrey S. Fleischman, November 11, 2019