



West Irondequoit Central School District

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Curriculum and Instruction Update

October 22, 2021

Over the past year, we have shared with you our ongoing work to support our shift to Culturally Responsive Education (CRE). Last year in a communication to families, the following next steps were outlined to develop culturally responsive curriculum.

- 1) Create a consistent and clear understanding of CRE with staff, students, families and community members.
- 2) Create a multi-year plan in which we establish common components of CRE and then begin a process to review and revise curriculum to match those components.
- 3) Communicate our progress to build understanding and clarity within the community.

Progress on Goal 1: We have adopted a common definition of Culturally Responsive Education, which has been shared with all our staff. The definition comes from the NYS Culturally Responsive and Sustaining (NYS-CRS) Framework, page 6:

To be Culturally Responsive and Sustaining is to “create student centered learning environments that affirm cultural identities; foster positive academic outcomes; develop students’ abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; empower students as agents of social change; and contribute to individual student engagement, learning, growth, and achievement through the cultivation of critical thinking.”

We will continue to work to ensure this definition comes to life through our curriculum, instruction and learning environments.

Progress on Goal 2: In the creation of our [Strategic Plan](#), we were purposeful to use the NYS-CRS Framework as a guide, resulting in our multi-year Strategic Plan being aligned to our work to build more culturally responsive curriculum. This work, specifically, has already begun through our District Curriculum Council (DCC). Our first step is to create a common definition of curriculum, which will be shared over the next month with staff and families. After, the DCC will research and identify a common template, which will be aligned to

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research supporting culturally responsive curriculum. This work will be shared as it's completed throughout the school year.

Progress on Goal 3: While our major curriculum work will lie in the hand of the DCC as described above, we want to outline below the major work that will happen throughout this school year to support culturally responsive curriculum.

Local History Inquiry Lessons in 11th, 8th, and 4th Grades

Last spring, social studies teachers piloted inquiries in the 11th, 8th, and 4th grades. These inquiry lessons were co-created across the region, as well as adapted specifically for West Irondequoit students, and were in direct alignment with our pre-established curriculum.

Specifically, all three of these inquiry lessons were focused on ways in which our local region had been directly impacted by policies that promoted segregation, specifically redlining policies first established during the Great Depression New Deal programs.

After our teachers implemented these inquiry lessons, we provided students and the community with an opportunity to provide feedback through a survey regarding their learning experiences. We had 14 family members and 127 students (including [38] 4th graders, [78] 8th graders, and [11] 11th graders) respond to this survey. Of these student responses, 72% responded that this learning experience was rated between a 3 -pretty interesting and 4-very interesting (out of 4).

As a result of this feedback, we are excited to implement these inquiry lessons across the entire 4th, 8th, and 11th grades. We will incorporate adjustments from our instructional experiences last year and provide additional professional learning for our staff to ensure that our instructional approach is accessible and meaningful for all of our students.

Strong Voices Project Update: Library Diversity Audit, K-12

The K-12 Library Department is engaging in a diversity audit to determine the degree to which our libraries or collections within our libraries are representative of diverse identities, experiences, and ideas. To do this, our librarians are reviewing library collections to identify these elements within the plots and characters, as well as to review the diversity amongst authors represented as well. Guiding our work is the Culturally Responsive Report Card created by the NYU Metro Center. We have adapted this resource to suit our specific needs to ensure our librarians are calibrated in the evaluations. Our findings will then be used to make text recommendations for purchase. We will be applying for a West Irondequoit Foundation grant to fund these purchases.

Strong Voices Project Update: Land Acknowledgement Lessons

This summer, as a next step in our work to incorporate our Land Acknowledgement statement into the fabric of our district cultures, teachers from around the district came together to craft K-12 lessons to be delivered each year. We are thrilled to be delivering these to our students in October. Our intention is for these lessons to be delivered each year, building on students' prior knowledge and deepening their understanding of and appreciation for honoring our land's Indigenous heritage and connection.

Place based learning: Place based learning refers to the practice of teaching grade-level content in the context of local heritage, culture, geography, and issues that may matter to the local community. In other words, West Irondequoit students could be learning science concepts in ways that connect to West Irondequoit and/or the greater Rochester region. Living environment students could be tackling questions, like "Is Charlotte Beach safe to swim?"; Chemistry students could wonder, "How does the pesticide and fertilizer in our yards affect the water we drink?"; Physics students could be studying if there is a speeding problem on Cooper Rd, where many of our students cross to get to school.

Place based learning encourages us to make connections to community resources such as local organizations, leaders and families, drawing on the rich knowledge base of those who work and live where our students do. Consider environmental conservation efforts encouraged by the Helmer Nature Center or our local Citizen Science Project. Making such connections can help foster students' sense of belonging, agency and responsibility for the place and people around them, while helping them make sense of scientific phenomenon because it is directly related to their lives.

The Office of Instruction will continue research into place based learning and explore the possibility of small pilots across grade levels.

Reading Resources for K-4

This year, we will be piloting different resources as we work to select new reading instructional resources for the K-4 level. All of the resources we are piloting are aligned to both ELA standards and science of reading practices. This work is in direct support of our district wide shift to consistently implement culturally responsive instructional practices, based on culturally responsive curriculum. By building teachers' capacity and available resources to practice science-based fluency instruction, we are ensuring our students are receiving instruction that directly meets their literacy needs and will promote their growth to become fluent readers by the end of 3rd grade. Our goal for this pilot is to select resources for each grade level that:

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- Is comprehensive enough to ensure teachers have the resources necessary to effectively implement science-based literacy instruction that meets the learning needs of all students
- Is flexible enough to ensure that our curriculum can integrate ELA instruction with Social Studies when appropriate. This will promote effective skill transfer, as well as help build student background knowledge for non-fiction text, which will support comprehension skill development as well.
- Will be recommended to the Board of Education by May, with implementation to occur over the next two years.

Dr. Hunter Cohort

A K-12 representative group of teachers are engaging in a year-long professional development experience with Dr. Jevon Hunter, of Buffalo State, to create critical inquiry projects with their students. Participants will receive professional development regarding culturally relevant pedagogy and how to create meaningful and thoughtful inquiry projects to honor the tenets of high expectations, culturally competence and socio-political awareness.

Strong Voice: K-6 Read-Alouds

Last year, we selected one read aloud for each grade level to help facilitate discussion in classrooms about their classroom, their community and their world. This year, we will continue to expand our collection of diverse Read-Alouds across K-6 classrooms.

If you have any questions about our ongoing curriculum work, please reach out to the Office of Instruction via one of these e-mails:

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