

Teaching & Learning Updates

January, 2018

1. Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten Information Night – WPS is hosting our annual Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten Information Night, tonight, Wednesday, January 10th, 2018 from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. at our three elementary schools. Parents/guardians of children entering Pre-Kindergarten and/or Kindergarten in the fall of 2018 are invited to attend this informational meeting. Thereafter, Pre-K registration will take place at the Early Steps Preschool beginning Monday, January 22, 2017 and Kindergarten registration will take place from 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. at the Registrar’s office, Phillips Building, Room 205, 30 Common Street, not at the elementary schools on the following schedule:

a. Wed. Thurs., Fri, January 17, 18, 19 for Cunniff School students b. Wed. Thurs., Fri, January 24, 25, 26 for Hosmer School students c. Wed. Thurs., Fri, January 31, Feb 1, 2 for Lowell School students d. Additionally, there is one evening registration scheduled at 30 Common St. on Wednesday,

January 31st from 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. for all three elementary schools. In preparation for registration, parents/guardians are encouraged to have registration packets completed (information and packets can be picked up at your child’s school or downloaded from the Watertown Public Schools website @ <http://www.watertown.k12.ma.us>)

2. WHS Guidance Night, An Evening of Workshops for Students and Families - On Wednesday, January 17th

from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m., the Guidance Department will be hosting Guidance Night, An Evening of Workshops for Students and Families. During this evening, students and families will be able to rotate through three different workshops focused on a variety of different topics (stress management, study skills, college application process). If you are interested in attending, please complete this short survey to help us plan the schedule of workshops for the evening. (Please note - you are welcome to attend even if you do not complete this survey, we are just working to finalize the number of offerings and timing of the workshops.) For questions, please contact our WHS Lead Guidance Counselor, Adrienne Eaton @ adrienne.eaton@watertown.k12.ma.us

3. Project-Based Learning (PBL) - PBL is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge. At WPS, nearly 30 middle/high school teachers attended a 3-day summer institute on Project-Based Learning (PBL) facilitated by folks from the Buck Institute for Education (BIE) in- district. Check out this blog to learn a little more about PBL @ BIE by clicking this link: [Project-Based Learning Blog](#)

4. Learning & Leadership Course Offerings – Next Tuesday, January 16th, our entire district will participate in professional development (PD) thus, there is no school for students. This rich PD day includes the following:

a. PreK & Preschool will attend full-day Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training b. K-5 teachers will continue with their focus on literacy by attending a full-day Literacy PD

opportunity with our Teaching Learning Alliance consultants c. Our grades 6 - 12 staff & K-12 IAs will attend two, 1.5 hour morning PD sessions from the

offerings listed here, and the afternoon will consist of school-based collaborations (e.g., grade- level, department-level, co-teaching, data analysis, curriculum map review, PLTs).

5. K – 5 Standards-Based Report Cards (SBRC) Planning Sessions – A representative cadre of lower elementary educators, math coach (Eleftheria Bourtzinakou), elementary curriculum coordinators (Elizabeth Kaplan,

Allison Donovan), and assistant superintendent of teaching, learning, and assessment (Theresa McGuinness) recently met to continue the process of creating a standards-based report card, starting with kindergarten and first-grade. More information will follow late spring.

6. Learning Walks at Lowell School - The District Leadership Team, composed of school and district administrators/coordinators, began conducting Learning Walks this week, starting with a visit to Lowell School. The purpose of these Learning Walks is to provide the Leadership Team with the opportunity to develop a collective understanding of what effective teaching and learning looks like in all Watertown schools. We know that we have excellent instructional practices occurring in each school, yet little opportunity for cross-building sharing. Learning Walks provide building-based administrators with the rare opportunity to learn more about the successful practices in schools other than their own.

7. A Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum will be introduced at the elementary schools during the

2018 – 2019 school year. In today’s ever-changing global economy, preparing students for life after graduation must extend beyond academics. This 2015 Rennie Center Report looks at ways Massachusetts school districts can help students cultivate social and emotional skills like grit, persistence, empathy and good decision-making. To this end, we’ve begun gathering feedback from all folks in the WPS community (students, staff, families). In order to get some baseline data on stakeholders’ thoughts, experiences, and feelings about Social/Emotional Learning and school climate, the SEL Team (8 teachers + 7 administrators) created a survey through Panorama Education (a Harvard-based program) for the Watertown Public Schools. Staff members, PreK-12, were surveyed in December, student surveys (grades 3-5, and grades 6-12) will take place this month, and a Family/Parent Survey will be emailed later this month. When you receive that email, kindly take 10 minutes to share your thoughts with us.

Thanks

WPS Partnership – We were invited by Harvard’s Graduate School of Education (HGSE) to work in a strategic partnership with Harvard’s Reimagining Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools Project (RIDES website) to develop an equity narrative for the WPS. As the Superintendent shared in her Entry Plan at Monday’s School Committee meeting, last spring, Lee Teitel, a professor at HGSE, contacted the Watertown Public Schools about forming a strategic partnership around issues of equity in schools. This partnership provides WPS with facilitated support to examine a framework to promote equity in our schools in a systemic and focused way. When thinking of equity, we are speaking of providing all students with what they need to be successful in our schools regardless of their racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic background or their disability status. This work focuses on identifying current practices that promote equity, examining the data for disproportionality, and embedding equitable practices into the strategy development process. When examining the data collected during the Superintendent’s

over 75 individual and group interviews with key constituencies of the Watertown Public School community, it became evident that there is both an expectations gap and an achievement gap within our subgroups, particularly in the larger high needs subgroup that contains students receiving special education services, English Language Learners, and economically disadvantaged students.

Below are a few photos of our November 7, 2017 professional development day when we spent the morning collaborating with staff around equity in Watertown's secondary schools.

Themes that emerged from staff feedback included: - A sincere interest in promoting equity and fairness in classrooms/District - Enjoyment of having open conversations with colleagues about systemic issues (equality and inequality) - Interest in getting to know new and different people on the faculty - Need for further education about diversity v. equity - Strong interest in data-based inquiry - An interest in continuing the (at-times uncomfortable) discussion about racism - A strong desire for this to be a continued collaborative process - Multiple comments of appreciation that our protocols/structure during the morning sessions brought people together with different perspectives that often don't have that opportunity to dialog with during the regular day-to-day routines

Dr. Lee Teitel, HGSE

WMS and Primary Source recently hosted a film screening and discussion of *Our Mockingbird*, a documentary about two demographically different high schools in Birmingham, Alabama that collaborated on a remarkable production of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The film raised powerful questions about race, class, segregation, and justice, then and now. The evening featured a filmmaker Q&A, panel discussion, and preview of classroom activities from the curriculum guide. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is part of our 9th- grade English curriculum. For more information about the

Elementary, Math in Focus Parent University Elizabeth Kaplan, K – 5 STEM Coordinator

film, visit www.ourmockingbird.com

WPS New Elementary Schools Visioning Session – December, 2018 We are so excited and grateful to join with students, educators, families, and Watertown community members to begin envisioning what teaching and learning might look like in new elementary schools

where every child, in every classroom (or flexible space), thrives academically and social-emotionally, every day! As Dr. Galdston shared at the recent school committee meeting, during the elementary school building project visioning sessions held in December, a group of over 50 stakeholders were asked to complete a ‘Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Goals’ exercise using the lens of new school buildings. When discussing opportunities and goals, several priorities emerged across all of the teams working on the exercise. These included: spaces that allow for both large group and small group instruction; opportunities for hands-on authentic learning experiences; spaces that allow for easy integration of all students; areas that promote collaboration; and green space that can be utilized as outdoor classrooms, just to name a few. One of the other priorities across the groups was the need to make our buildings more community-centered, fostering intergenerational educational experiences in our elementary schools and providing ample opportunities for accommodating community-related events. Stay tuned for multiple opportunities for planning and teamwork around this outstanding opportunity for WPS.

For your planning purposes...

1. No School – Monday, January 15th in observance of Martin Luther King Day 2. No School – Tuesday, January 16th – Full-Day Professional Development for Staff 3. WHS Midterm Exams – January 23 – 26 (1/2 days for students)

That’s all for now, folks!

All the best, Theresa

Theresa McGuinness, Ed.D. Assistant Superintendent

Every Child...Every Classroom...Every Day