

Curriculum and Instruction Committee Meeting
Questions on the Middle School ELA Pilot
March 2, 2015

The middle school principals (Dr. Perry – Beck, Dr. Cafagna – Carusi, Mr. Guy – Rosa) delivered a presentation the C&I Committee regarding a proposal to transform English Language Arts (ELA) instruction in 6th and 7th grade to double periods. In order to accommodate for the additional instructional time for ELA, the proposal transforms World Language from a full year course in 6th and 7th grade to a ¼ year course, with Spanish being offered in 6th grade and French being offered in 7th grade.

There were approximately 40 members of the public in attendance (including district teachers, parents, grandparents, and students) many of whom spoke about the proposal. Some of the questions that were asked at the meeting are included below, with responses.

- 1. Please explain what moving math off team means and how or why that will be beneficial to this for next year.**

Moving math “off team” means that the math teachers will teach across teams rather than just teaching the classes that are assigned to the specific house/team/learning community.

- 2. So for the World Language classes, how much will you be able to cover – will the students grasp over the three year period over what they have gotten in the past?**

The intention, through curricular revision, is to provide the equivalent of level 1 Spanish and level 1 French in the 8th grade. 6th and 7th grade World Language experiences would be more introductory in nature.

- 3. Charts where you showed growth -- is the only difference the length of time spent or was the curriculum also different? How many variables were different?**

The English Language Arts curriculum is the same at all three middle schools. The variables that were changed structurally in the Beck pilot, were the amount of time that was provided to 6th grade students for their English Language Arts classes was doubled, structured feedback from teacher to student was a focus during the classes, and the teachers carried half the number of students on the rosters. There could be additional extraneous variables that are different between the three middle schools that were not accounted for as a part of the pilot program.

- 4. Are we hearing this is a done deal or that this is in the process?**

The presentation is the first formalized step in the process for the three middle school principals to present their proposal. This is not a “done deal.”

- 5. Have World Language experts been consulted in this process?**

The district World Language teachers were not involved in the preparation of the proposal, but they (along with other members of the instructional staff) will be involved moving forward.

- 6. What is the final impact on students who were involved in the Beck sixth grade English Language Arts Pilot? How have they benefitted and how have they performed academically?**

It is difficult to gauge the “final impact” on the students as the first ones from the pilot are only in the 8th grade currently. In terms of academic performance, as a cohort, they have appeared to maintain the gains from their 6th grade experience.

- 7. Where is the accountability to make sure that when students go to the high schools, that they take the next level of World Language, rather than repeating level 1?**

The current practice for selecting high school classes requires the 8th grade teachers to make a recommendation for placement for 9th grade. The 8th grade guidance counselors share the course selection documents with the 8th grade students who are then instructed to take the materials home to be signed by their parents/guardians. The ultimate decision for class selection is provided to the parent/guardian. The accountability on the part of the district is in the recommendation and in maintaining the fidelity of the process.

8. Is this proposal for all three middle schools?

Yes, this proposal is for all three middle schools.

9. Will Rosa remain an IB/MYP school if World Language becomes an exploratory in 6th and 7th grade?

Rosa is scheduled to go through an IB/MYP reauthorization process during the 2015-2016 academic year. If World Language is offered as a ¼ year exploratory, it may not meet the hourly requirements from the IB organization.

10. Offering additional time for instruction in ELA is desirable – can that time be taken from Advisory?

As the principals continue to meet and to expand the discussion regarding the English Language Arts proposal, the use of the time that is currently allotted to Advisory will be examined.

11. What happened to the work of the World Language Curriculum Committee from the 2012-2013 academic year?

The work of the World Language Curriculum Committee from the 2012-2013 academic year will be revisited as a new curriculum committee is currently being established. A posting went out in February requesting applicants to participate.

Points to consider that were raised during public comment, in response to the presentation:

- World Language instruction at the middle level provides a foundation to take higher levels and more advanced language classes in high school
- Second language acquisition is more effective when more time is spent studying the language
- World Language teachers teach grammar to students that supports students' understanding of English grammar
- Many National Merit Scholarship Semi-finalists area also in AP level World Language classes at the high school
- Students can find a love of World Languages in Middle School
- World Language has had a tremendously positive impact on a child with an IEP
- Students have had success, in college, securing jobs and internships as a result of second language ability
- Decreasing World Language instruction sends the wrong message
- Not all children like to read and requiring them to read more in school will make them not like school
- Not all students have liked the double period of ELA in 6th grade
- Consider making classes shorter instead of longer
- The middle schools need to be a supportive environment where students are encourage to participate in many activities and where they grow socially, emotionally and academically

- Please reexamine the impact of the Beck ELA pilot – how it was implemented, how the feedback was delivered, and the effect that it had on students
- Vocabulary that is learned in World Language helps to build English vocabulary
- Students have enjoyed and have benefitted from the trips to Quebec, having the opportunity to speak French with native speakers
- Students, and families, have benefitted from the 25 years of the French exchange program at High School East
- Many students are doing study abroad at the college level
- If we want our students to be competitive, we need them to have additional exposure to World Languages