

Regular Board Meeting – April 17, 2007

SUBJECT: K-8 SOCIAL STUDIES AND READING CURRICULUM UPDATE**SOCIAL STUDIES**

Following the recommendations set forth by the Social Studies Learning Team in fall 2005, curriculum maps, calendars, lessons, and assessments have been developed and implemented in grades K-8 aligned with Illinois Learning Standards and research-based, best practice. Professional staff development has been conducted with classroom teachers in K-5 and social studies teachers in grades 6-8 and will be completed in May, 2007. Our consultant, Anne Reichel, has focused on balancing types of assessments including traditional multiple-choice and short-answer items with multiple-intelligence assessments this year at OOJH. Teacher-leaders in grades K-5 emphasized concept-based learning using essential questions at each grade level. The strands of political science, history, economics, geography, and social science were developed through multiple-intelligence teaching strategies including experiential exercises, visual discovery, writing for understanding, problem-solving, response groups, and traditional skill building. These strategies have been effective in improving learning for the most advanced students as well as students who have not had a rich background of experience or are English language learners.

The utilization of technology including *United Streaming* video-clips and web sites enhanced the curriculum by reinforcing concepts and presenting rich, visual images to assist in understanding and remembering concepts. K-8 teachers began to integrate reading and writing with the new social studies program. Genres of literature with social studies concepts were introduced during the “read aloud” session of the balanced literacy program including poetry, biographies, and reference texts in K-5. The social studies text was utilized during “shared reading” time to practice strategies including summarizing, questioning, and inferring in K-8. Writing and discussion exercises during “independent practice” were incorporated to encourage development of critical thinking skills. Students were required to demonstrate their understanding, higher-order thinking skills, and new vocabulary in multiple forms including debates, essay writing, individual and group presentations and projects, music, art, non-linguistic, and kinesthetic representations. Note-taking, organization of work, and study skills were developed through the completion of an independent student notebook throughout the year.

Finally, social skills were developed and reinforced through cooperative activities in mixed-ability groups, assignment of roles and responsibilities as a member of a team to complete a task, and problem-solving relating to good citizenship in the classroom, school, community, the nation, and the world. The curriculum has been posted on the intranet and will be an important resource for our new teachers and veteran staff. As part of our focus on assessment next year, student artifacts will be evaluated and examined from social studies to ensure that students understand the concepts and are able to demonstrate the ideas in multiple ways.

READING

The Reading Learning Team, formed in the fall of the 2003-2004 school year, developed a set of recommendations which have guided all components of professional development in reading for grades K-8. After a successful pilot by the Reading Implementation Team (RIT) members in 2004-2005, all K-5 classroom, special education, and gifted teachers completed training over the last two years with our consultants, Frania Watrous, Cathie Elsbree, Gretchen Courtney, and our district's Literacy Coach, Stacey Woleben. New teachers received additional support as a group after school from RIT leaders during eight sessions throughout the year. Language arts and special education teachers at OOJH began focused training last summer which continued monthly during the year in preparation for implementing all strategies in 2006-2007. The year began with an individual diagnostic evaluation using the DRA, Flynt-Cooter, or MAP assessment which assisted the teacher in placing the student in an appropriate guided reading group in K-5 or selecting appropriate reading materials for novel and independent reading in grades 6-8.

"Reading Actively" assessments were developed and utilized to evaluate the understanding of each student in relation to the six comprehension strategies during the year. At OOJH, students were administered a pre-test to ascertain where the student was on each strategy continuum. In grades K-5, assessments were scored and discussed during professional development sessions on selected Mondays throughout the year led by RIT leaders. Recordkeeping included reporting performance on an Excel spreadsheet for each grade in K-5. Strategies for improving performance were addressed during released time by grade level. Other components of the balanced literacy program taught by the teachers, including development of word recognition skills, vocabulary, fluency, and multiple genres, were supported by reading teacher assistants in the elementary buildings who reinforced skills one-half hour each day in each class. At OOJH, a Remedial Reading and Math Intervention (RMI) program assisted students needing additional support. Information regarding the reading level of the student and performance on the formal and informal reading assessments were shared at conference time with parents, and MAP performance results were mailed to parents in the fall and will be mailed again in the spring.

In K-8 next year, the emphasis will be on developing the higher levels of each comprehension skill in conjunction with writing the extended reader response which requires our students to articulate the important ideas, implied meanings, and themes in texts that are read. Reading support will be continued and increased, especially at the primary level, to assist those just entering school.

SUMMARY

During the past two years, the revision and implementation of the reading and social studies curricula has been a primary focus of professional development efforts. Both content areas have involved a significant shift in theoretical foundation, teaching strategies, and student understandings and performance. The changes are still in their initial stages and will require additional years of reinforcement which will be provided by administrators, instructional coaches, teachers, and periodic consultants. Our deepening understanding and application will be fostered by continued analysis of informal and formal assessments which will be our focus over the next several years.