**ELA/Language Arts Annual Review Meeting**

**February 9. 2015**

The ELA/Language Arts Committee met on Monday, February 9, 2015 in the GCMS Elementary School Library at 3:35 p.m. to discuss their curriculum, pacing, CCSS implementation, as well as any ideas or concerns that they had. Those in attendance were: Jenny Acree, Jenny Allen, Jeremy Darnell, Cortney Davis, Jill Gibson, Deb Hohulin, Justin Kean, Denise Kearfott, Gaye King, Mary Laughery, Zach Louret, Jenny McClure, KiLee Lidwell McFerren, Lisa Natywa, Erin Nuss, Tammy Pollard (Jenny Allen’s student teacher), and Sharon Pool.

**Kindergarten- Mary Laughery:**

Kindergarten’s Language Arts, Writing and Spelling are combined together with Reading and are incorporated in all subjects that we teach.  We introduce a letter and a sight word each week. All five sections of kindergarten are using Michael Heggerty and implementing Daily 5.   We are using a Common Core standard based report card and universal assessments to ensure all standards are being covered.

The kindergarten teachers voiced some concerns in the area of Language Arts. First, the developmental level of the majority of incoming kindergarten students is very low compared to the high standards of the Common Core.  Next, if class sizes are made bigger (example: by taking away a section of kindergarten) then not only is the developmental level low, but the class size will be too large for the necessary individualized attention. Finally, Daily 5 is not best for all Kindergarten students; especially those that are developmentally low or have special needs. For example, the students are expected to “read to self”, and some students are not able to do this yet.

**First Grade- Cortney Davis:**

Phonics- we love, love, love our new phonics program.  All four of us were trained this summer to use the program and have found it to be very beneficial to student learning.  We use the phonics patterns and trick words each week for our spelling words.  We still give a spelling test each Friday.  There is a phonics assessment every two or three weeks at the end of each unit.  It assesses our kids on vowel and consonant sounds, digraphs, glued sounds, suffixes, and blends.  We have only covered the short vowel sounds so far this year.  Long vowels will be introduced soon.

Grammar- we have worked really hard to incorporate grammar into our Reading curriculum based on the CCSS. We planned it out in our curriculum map and the pacing seems to be going well. We work on sentence structure, word order, statements, questions, exclamations, writing sentences, nouns (plural, irregular, and proper), days, months, holidays, verbs (present and past tense), contractions with not, adjectives, adjectives that compare, color words, number words, synonyms, antonyms, subjects/nouns, predicates/verbs, pronouns, and combing sentences. We do some grammar as a Daily 5 focus lesson and then others we incorporate in a Writing Workshop.

Writing- this is where we try and incorporate a lot of Science and Social Studies into our curriculum. The topics we focus on are animals (mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians), weather, transportation, insects, masks around the world, pioneers,

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*Davis, continued*

community helpers, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, sense organs, solar system, nocturnal animals. We read all kinds of books on the topic and then do a graphic organizer to establish our ideas before writing begins. The type of writing we focus on the most is informational, but we also cover explanatory, narrative, and opinion (persuasive) writing. We also do poetry the last unit of the year. We focus on two word poems, shape poems, and acrostic poems.

**Second Grade- Kristin Tarrant:**

In second grade, we are very happy with our new Fundations phonics program. It covers the Common Core Standards and builds on itself every lesson. We still see a need to review basic “trick words” from Fundations 1, so we are eager to see how next year goes, since those kids will come in with the same language and format that we have this year.

Grammar pacing is going well. As a grade level, we mapped out what standards we wanted covered in which quarter, so we can make sure that every student in second grade is learning the same standards at the same time.

As far as writing, we do work on writing during Daily 5, but we also have a second writing block to really cover the standards. We know that the students really need guided instruction for structure, especially when we are now focusing on writing paragraphs.

**Third Grade- Lisa Natywa:**

Spelling: we are still using the Spelling Connections text by Zaner Bloser. Each unit correlates with a phonics-based pattern/skill. We incorporate our spelling words into our Word Work choice for Daily 3.

Handwriting: we are still using our cursive books from Zaner Bloser as well. We are not requiring work to be done in cursive and use it more for "practice".

Language Arts: we use the McGraw Hill Language Arts textbook. Language is taught separate from Reading and Writing. We start with basic sentence structure, then nouns, then verbs followed by irregular verbs, after that we study adjectives and adverbs and end the year with adverbs and diagramming sentences if we have time. As a grade level, we'd like to see Language incorporated in our Daily 5/Cafe time. If we had time built into our reading block we could do a reading mini-lesson and a language mini-lesson each day.

Writing: We are testing Writer's Workshop out this year while still meeting our requirements for the different units we are responsible for. In the first quarter, we launched Writer's Workshop and focused on gathering ideas and writing all about ourselves. We have had the students do a lot of journaling. In the 2nd quarter we wrote personal narratives. This quarter (3rd) we are focusing on informational pieces. We will end the year with opinion writing. Our students also get 1-2 days of Work on Writing during our Daily 3 time where they get to respond to different journal prompts or add to class notebooks of different topics.

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*Natywa, continued*

Since the shift to Daily 5/CAFE, we feel that we are better able to incorporate spelling and writing into our reading time, but we'd like to discuss how we could incorporate language arts more.

**Fourth Grade- Zach Louret:**

We have a free writing time every day of the week. There is also a “Free Choice” period at the beginning of the school day, where students can select either free writing, read to self, or read to another for approximately 20 minutes. The Writing and Language standards are taught each day and worked in through a rotation period (mini lessons). Our rotation periods last roughly 30 minutes. We also have a Formal Writing lesson every Friday. My 4th grade team and I have changed/adjusted our schedule and Daily 5 rotation periods a number of times this year. We are using a WordWork booklet this year that asks students to practice their writing, context clues, and vocabulary recognition. I will bring an example to our meeting this evening for reference.

Our fourth grade team is still working on a concept or idea for next year’s vocabulary and word work activities. Our grade level has discussed Spell City, Words Their Way, etc. I have considered using a program called Write Traits for a few of my mini lessons this year. I enjoyed this writing program and it seemed to be very successful during my student teaching. The kids really enjoy our free writing periods and are very good at keeping a journal. My students have become more creative in their writing and are showing great strides in their structure. The fourth grade is very comfortable with our rubrics and what is expected of them.

As a 4th grade team-we hope to find a writing/vocabulary program that properly fits what our student’s need, along with being able to adapt when necessary. Our students have had to adjust to Daily 5 rotation periods being changed a number of times this year, but have shown great progress in their writing and Language Arts skills. Even though there are a number of things I am still learning and need to adjust for next year, I am confident that our grade level will be well prepared for next year!

When asked about teaching cursive writing, Zach explained that only one teacher teaches it and cursive is not required in the students’ daily work.

**Fifth Grade- Jenny Acree:**

I teach all of the Writing and Language standards to the 5th graders in Writing class. This is a 30-minute class 5 days a week. This is the first time that we have been able to do this. In the past- we incorporated writing into our reading block (it may have only been taught once a week) and our Language was taught a couple times a week from an ancient Language Arts textbook.

I am using a program called Write Steps this year, which incorporates Grammar in with the Writing. It is a research and Common Core-based program, which we were able to get for free for this year. I have seen MAJOR improvement in the student's writing skills and the grammar learned is carrying over and being applied to their writing.

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*Acree, continued*

The kids love to write and are becoming skilled and brainstorming, planning, revising, and editing. They are comfortable using rubrics and know what is expected before they begin.

As a 5th grade team- we hope that there is some way that we can incorporate this class next year even though the schedule will change with the addition of another section. It has been invaluable- we know that the 6th grade teachers will see a difference in all of the students' writing next year.

**Elementary Special Education- Gaye King:**

(Mrs. King teaches self-contained special education for grades 2,3, and 4.)

I have 3 grade levels to teach ELA to during a 90-minute period.  It is very challenging.  I have a group of 2 learning letter sounds and blending 3 sounds into a word.  I have a group of 3 reading at a beginning 2nd grade level.  I attempt to split the 90 minutes evenly, but it doesn't happen.

Each group has their own spelling words.  The younger group uses their 5 three letter words as their reading words and spelling words. For the older group, I pull their spelling words out of the book we are reading.  They become their spelling and vocab words.

For writing, with each group we do a weekend share.  I encourage the kids to tell me details in sentences.  I take notes.  Then I meet with the child to change the notes into sentences and the sentences into paragraphs.  The little ones trace over the words/sentences.  The older ones rewrite the sentences.

Thank God for books on CD.  We use them daily.  My kids struggle with any independent reading/work, but they have learned to use the CD player independently.

Both groups have specific to their level phonics books.  Independent work in this is very difficult, but is expected.

I follow the Essential Elements to the Common Core.  I also have IEP goals to meet by the end of the year.  I am using the Woodcock Johnson for testing/showing growth this year, which is administered at three different points during the year.  This change occurred because my children did not show growth or improvement with the MAPS or Aimsweb testing, and it was frustrating for both them and me to constantly have to see no improvement in learning.

**Elementary Reading Specialist- Deb Hohulin:**

Mrs. Hohulin stated that Evon, Tammy, and she go into the various classrooms to support what is being taught. While the reading specialists are not always in agreement with the method that is being used, they agree to disagree, and assist in whatever way the teacher requests.

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**Sixth Grade- Jenny Allen:**

Currently I plan weekly with Jenny McClure.  We discuss student concerns, upcoming units, and assessments.

The middle school LA team has met a few times this year to work on a writing rubric for argumentative, informative, and narrative for sixth grade.  The seventh and eighth grade will then take the sixth grade rubric and adapt it to meet their needs in those grades.  We just finished the argumentative one as a language arts team that covered the topic of social media, which really interested the students. Now we are working on the narrative rubric.  This has been very time consuming.

I just finished scoring my mid year assessments/quickwrite.  I did an item analysis to see how the kids did on the three standards I wanted to measure for 3 different types of writing.  I then compared it to the pretest I did at the beginning of the year (which I used the same three types of writing, just different prompts).  I shared this with the 6th grade team.  Then I give my list to Jenny McClure who works with 6th graders and writing during RTI to give her the students that are struggling.

Lastly, I do a monthly calendar not only for my co-teacher and myself, but also for keeping the class on track.

Concerning Common Core, I meet with the 7th and 8th grade LA teachers to work on our writing assessments.  We do this so the kids will be familiar with the way our rubrics look and the vocabulary.

I am meeting next week (February 10th) with Jenny Acree to see what she gets covered in fifth so that when they come to sixth, the transition is smooth.

I give the students a checklist before a given assignment.  The checklist is a guideline for them to follow that matches the rubric I am grading them on.  At the beginning of the year, the students create a one-paragraph essay. By the end of the year, they write multiple paragraphs.

**Concerns/ideas:**

A writing portfolio would be great in fifth grade.  When they come to sixth, I can then see what type of writer they are and what they struggle with. Mrs. Allen suggested that it might valuable at the beginning of the next school year to receive just one piece of fifth grade writing per student, so that Jenny can assess each student’s strengths and weaknesses.

I am losing more time than I expected with preparation for PARCC and prep work.  You are probably hearing that from many.

**Seventh Grade- Jill Gibson:**

This year in 7th grade we have focused on total implementation of the common core standards. Although it is a challenge, we are attempting it knowing that this is a work in progress. As a language arts staff, Mrs. Allen, Mrs. McClure, Mrs. Kearfott, and I have spent numerous hours revamping and revising the rubrics we use for evaluating informative, narrative and argumentative pieces of writing.  This has been a very time consuming process. I gave a pre-test writing prompt at the beginning of the year in

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*Gibson, continued*

August, and then after break in January, I gave a mid-point progress check. At the end of the year, I will be giving a posttest. I am hoping to see growth in all of them! Using “Quick Writes” has been very beneficial, as it helps in identifying student who could use RtI assistance.

Vocabulary and grammar have been incorporated during warm-ups as well as reflections on their writings. They have done presentations focusing on a timeline of their lives and on the American Revolution. In addition, the students have written argumentative essays related to topics in literature. The 7th graders have written short stories and compared and contrasted fiction and non-fiction writings.  Currently we are doing research paper and will do a zoo project incorporating the research done on these topics. Usually, research papers require about one month of class time. Group and individual work has been utilized throughout the year.

**Eight Grade- Denise Kearfott:**

Throughout the year we have continued working on vocabulary and grammar through warm-ups.  The spelling book has been used to review parts of speech, definition, and word parts.

We have also worked on speaking and listening, writing, and language.  Through the reading on The Cay and The Diary of Anne Frank, we have focused on literary terms such as: characterizations, setting, climax, conflict, etc.  Material has been researched and orally presented to the class. Usually, the research piece takes a couple of weeks of class time.

Writing has been addressed through completion of a research paper.  MLA format was used.  An oral presentation was given at the end of this project.  Visual aids were a requirement.  Examples that students used included: powerpoints, prezzi, posters, etc. The entire research component normally takes one quarter to complete.

We have followed Common Core Standards when planning activities.

**Middle School Special Education- Jenny McClure:**

I am currently co-teaching in one-sixth grade language arts class with Jenny Allen, one seventh grade class with Jill Gibson, and one eighth grade class with Denise Kearfott.  We plan weekly at each level focusing on common core curriculum, student concerns, and assessments.

I have one self-contained language arts class consisting of three sixth graders and four seventh graders.  I began the year using a great deal from Kelly Gallagher’s book, Write Like This, focusing on real-world writing.  The students have worked on narrative, informative, and argumentative writings beginning with single paragraphs and moving onto multiple paragraphs. They’ve also been journaling.  While writing we focus on such things as the hook, thesis, editing, revising, complete sentences, grammar, punctuation, etc.  The students have also used technology to produce, publish, and cite sources.

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*McClure, continued*

CCSS vocabulary words for 6th and 7th grade levels have been a focus as well.  The students guess the meaning using context clues and put them into sentences.

We are currently reading Knots In My Yo Yo String and applying CCSS such as vocabulary, writing a summary, using text support to answer questions and more.

The students have been involved with various speaking and listening activities such as a filmstrip presentation about important events in their life, as well as researching and presenting on The American Revolutionary War (seventh grade) and Egypt (sixth grade).

In December, we began using MobyMax twice a week as a warm-up for grammar.  This is a computer program that follows CCSS, assesses the student’s level, and keeps track of progress.

Future plans in this class include a research paper on an animal and a poetry unit.  The primary focus in this class has been to follow as closely with the 6th and 7th grades language arts classes while modifying at a level the students can be successful, yet challenged at the same time.

**High School- Angie Funk:**

The 11th and 12th grade English courses have developed rubrics for each of the three writing requirements. These rubrics are used in every level of English classroom from Senior Skills to APDC English. The majority of writing assignments are argumentative. Short, independent research projects are utilized to fulfill the informative writing requirements. The students have learned to increase the evidence-based writing that they do, and have become quite adept at it. Due to the time that the standards take, projects are no longer required in these courses, and the research is done in small amounts. Mechanics are taught in context as mini-lessons during the writing process. $3 Word Walls are used to collect vocabulary during reading and writing assignments.

CCSS has resulted in a slower pace in my classes due to the addition of supplemental non-fiction for each unit, as well as better and more differentiated instruction in the classroom. Because of the focus on writing, the value of the speech class is very evident, since it is the course that focuses the most on speaking and listening skills. All of the speech rubrics were redone and are being used by both of the speech teachers.

Pre tests & post-tests were administered first semester.  As a department, we need to have a discussion on the students' performance and make necessary adjustments. This information is also valuable in determining student identification for RtI as well as for admission to AP English.