

School Committee Report

April 5, 2007

Joe Makley, Curriculum Director

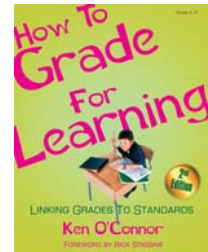
Andrea Hammond, Curriculum Assistant

Dear Jay School Committee members,

On March 23, a day of learning was held for Jay staff. Teachers at grades K-9 worked with the literacy mentors to strengthen their knowledge and skills for increasing literacy strategies across the content areas, in particular non-fiction (informational text.) This was a teacher-led training and work session involving most staff members, and was a component of the intensive two year literacy initiative underway (shared with three other districts through the Western Maine Education Consortium.) There were also two sessions held for Special Education staff, on CPR and RTI (response to intervention.) We contracted with a presenter to work at the high school with all staff on the transition to standards. I can't overstate the value of Donna Labbe's contribution as staff development committee chair to the success of these events.

I'd like to report further on the high school session:

First, some history... Jay High School teachers have been exploring the transition to standards for at least 6 years, and it is a point of contention in the building. I vividly remember my first exchanges with some of them. Right after arriving, I noticed one teacher had posted a detailed newspaper rant against the standards "fad" for his students. Another walked up to me and said "What you are doing isn't going to happen." This person was visibly angry, and had never met me before. So I began to understand there were strong feelings at Jay related to standards. The next thing we did was survey the staff, to get hard data, which confirmed that more learning had to happen about standards. We had a knowledge deficit, which was aggravating the trust issue. The first step was to create stipended lead teachers, so there would be a team to work with. This group was then given a reading assignment, Ken O'Conner's book, "How to Grade for Learning." This is currently the best book on standards-based grading and reporting. Discussions of this book occurred at the regular meetings, two chapters per meeting, of the JHS leadership team (department heads, John, Kenric and myself.) I also did staff training related to scoring and reporting for standards. In May of 2006, the Maine Assessment Consortium sponsored a two day presentation by Ken O'Conner at South Portland. Ken has been focusing on high schools, and this event was specifically for Maine high school teams. John and I attended with Julie Talmage, Kristel Anaszewski, and Sherry Hooker. These three became school resource people on standards. In June of 2006, all teachers were trained on how to enter standards-based grades in SchoolMaster. In November 2006, the Maine Assessment Consortium held another event for high school teams, this time in Waterville with presentations from three Maine High Schools who have successfully implemented standards: Foxcroft Academy, Mountain Valley, and Gardener. A team from Jay High School attended this, and requested that we hold a similar event at Jay in the near future. The consensus was that these presentations had made a significant difference in their understanding and acceptance of standards. The staff development committee agreed, and supported the move to set up a training day here for March 23, 2007. We contacted Heidi McGinley, of the Maine Assessment Consortium, to organize it. John, Kristel and I met with Heidi to clarify the goals, and discuss details. On March 23rd, the teachers began with a "nuts and bolts" presentation from Heidi. The second speaker was Mat Gilbert, principal of Mountain Valley High School. As it turned out, Mat was an alumnus of Jay High School, and had been taught by many of the teachers present. His narrative was a familiar one. Standards were seen as a top down initiative, pushed by the curriculum director and the superintendent against teachers' wishes. Teachers were making negative statements in the community, and implementation was hitting many snags. Finally, the school took charge of the initiative, asked for the "non-negotiables" and set about doing it in a way that would work for the school. The result is a functioning system of standards-based grading and reporting. That "tipping point" (described by Mat about MVHS) is the goal for Jay High School, where staff members will take ownership, make a contribution and help shape the final outcome. (It would be fair to say the lack of engagement and leadership by staff is the primary barrier to successful implementation of standards at Jay High School.) The March 23rd work day was a significant lever toward that "tipping point."



Other pieces are being put into place:

1. The “non negotiables” have been stated:
 - A. **The core curriculum is for everyone.** (Reduce low tracks, provide extra help and time and accommodations, but have the same assessments for all non-IEP students.)
 - B. **The grading methods are standards-based.** (Grade for knowledge and skill, using departmental syllabi and rubrics.)
 - C. **The focus of teacher planning is student learning.** (Teachers work and plan as teams, toward learning goals that can be measured. Teams interact to support core learning goals school-wide.)
2. A 2007 June institute is being planned for the high school, where a new model (committee structure) for shared leadership will be developed. It is hoped that school committee members and parents will assist, and that the new structure will involve students in decision making at the high school. This new structure would replace the department heads not re-hired in 2006.
3. The current Literacy Effort at grades 3-8 will be expanded to grade 9 next year. This will ensure that grade 9 teachers meet and work as a team, continue their professional learning, observe each other, and practice specific strategies to improve comprehension
4. Northwest Evaluation Association assessment will be implemented next year, replacing Terra Nova testing. It uses less instructional time, is computer adaptive (differentiates for student ability) and can be used to inform instruction (the results contain a breakdown by Maine standard and arrive in a timely manner.) This will support the English and math teams’ collaborative work with consistent data for analysis.