

Belmont Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee/School Committee Meeting
February 5, 2021
Remote Meeting

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: December 15, 2021
TIME: 2:35 PM

Present:

- Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Chair
- Ms. Catherine Bowen, Secretary
- Ms. Evelyn Gomez
- Mr. Michael Crowley
- Ms. Tara Donner
- Mr. Alex Fick, Student Representative
- Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent
- Ms. Karla Koza, Principal Chenery Middle School
- Mr. Golden, Math Director
- 7th & 8th Grade Math Teachers

Agenda

1. Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 3:02 by Chair Prestwich.

2. Math Acceleration at Chenery Middle School

Janice Darias introduced teachers in 7th and 8th grade math and principals and listed the documents distributed to the subcommittee.

Documents provided to the Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee for the meeting:

- Minutes of the Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee on 10-17-19
- Minutes of the Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee on 11-27-18
- Grade 7 Math Course Enrollment by Race_Feb. 2021
- Grade 8 Math Course Enrollment by Race_Feb. 2021
- Guiding Principles_math decision-making
- High School Math Class Enrollment by Race_Feb. 2021
- MEMO 2020-11-13 from Commissioner Riley: Update on Gifted Education in Massachusetts
- Math Acceleration Thoughts from MS teachers
- Math proposals_2020
- Middle School Math Placement Process_presentation to School Committee_11-26-19
- Summary_math acceleration work_2020
- Gifted Education in Massachusetts final_report commissioned by DESE 2019
- Link to presentation to the School Committee on Nov. 26, 2019, begins at 5:58:
https://videoplayer.telvue.com/player/uClcIN88BHKHJoveFoaVN_8_5Tg72P0o/playlists/6555/media/528751?fullscreen=false&autostart=false&showtabssearch=false

Janice Darias noted goals of the National Council on Teaching Mathematics includes: Communication, collaboration, problem solving, self-management, agency, conceptual learning. Issues with the 7th/8th grade middle school acceleration program in Math include:

- 1) Budget and Resources - teams are at high at 130 students, with a goal of 100 students
- 2) Balance of teams - the accelerated math class effectively created a 3rd level of Math, disruptive to the team grade-level model which the district sees as also in alignment with Social-Emotional Learning goals; Belmont aligns with DESE MA Frameworks in Math:
 - a) 7th grade math is “Math 7” and “Compacted Math”
 - b) 8th grade math is “Math 8” and “Algebra 1”
- 3) In-class work vs other - approach for few exceptional math-focused student became a test-driven approach, rather than a educator-drive approach
- 4) Equity - district aims to have proportional representation in advanced programs of racially recognized groups, currently the percentages in advanced courses do not reflect proportional representation (High School Math Class Enrollment by Race_Feb. 2021.pdf)

Some discussion of parity with other disciplines, currently students at the high school level are not proportionately represented by racially recognized groups. Specialists - Math and ELA - in the early years would support students to achieve in the advanced courses in later years. The DESE 2019 report notes the drop in MCAS scores for 3rd grade students in Math to 6th grade, most notably for Black, Latino, and SPED students. The presumption is that more support for those early years would enable those high-scoring students to continue to achieve at that level.

Janice Darias reviewed the feedback from teachers and listed the opportunities for students who are accelerating at math. Educators Becky Moyer and Karla Koza affirmed the rationale for changing the acceleration program. Newly hired Math Director, Jonathan Golden echoed her statement; the [acceleration] program would not be helping us achieve the equity goals.

Committee members asked questions: Would the district recommend eliminating honors classes to address equity issues? What is the process for assigning students? What criteria is used?

Janice Darias noted that the equity audit will provide recommendations for any changes to course structures; instructional methods are being addressed to meet the needs of all learners with a focus on culturally responsive teaching; quarterly tests in middle school, recommendation of the teacher, and conversations with the parents are some of the tools used to determine placement. Brenton Lussier added that there is also a placement test on procedural mastery.

Some students want to be able to take Calculus as a Junior.

For lower grade levels they use a, “Math Workshop” approach, with some ‘push-in’ and some ‘pull-out’ services, overseen by Jessica DeFrancis; similarly for Social Studies. Parallel approach at high school level is “Social Justice By the Numbers”, a project-based, inquiry/student-driven, approach to subject material - one that builds on math foundation and social sciences. The district believes 2 levels of math at the middle school level is adequate.

Student Representative, Alex Fick spoke to the benefits he found in accelerated math as it previously existed, that it was a positive experience from a social-emotional perspective. He is concerned that

students would be held back from achieving and be forced to double on HS math courses, eliminating elective opportunities in their schedules. He did not feel pressured to advance, rather felt a comradery with his math peers.

Committee Member, Tara Donner spoke to the need to address the disparities in the curriculum, to look both individually and systemically; to account for the impacts on the larger group outside the small group that may be benefiting from the previous acceleration program; there may be other options to address the need. Committee Member Evelyn Gomez asked about potential for evaluating the program in advance of the equity audit report. Janice Darias said it was possible, resources would have to be focused on that, while addressing the placement process. She did not see “honors” as it is in the high school program as appropriate for the middle school student. Comparable districts have compressed leveling in middle school, or eliminated it wholly.

Educators added: Brenton Lussier - does not propose getting rid of all the levels of math; the third level is making more of a problem; supports honors in high school. Chandrika Vittal - the goals of a middle are different than the goals of high school, in the middle school they need to be supported with SEL, middle is very vulnerable.

Chair Prestwich took comments from the public:

Russel Mann - look at the data in the survey by Alex Fick; it doesn't suggest that kids are getting outside tutoring, the small class size is a result of a flawed placement process. Regarding equity, structural racism is a problem everywhere, I would like to see resources to identify black and brown students of all ages who would do well with these opportunities. Elimination of the opportunities is a cynical way to solve the problem.

Julie Gottselig - issues of class size, SEL, equity, adequate notification to parents - we could have a larger class of acceleration; she removed their child for 5th grade because she was inadequately challenged - both lack and removal presented SEL issues. Not providing opportunity in school magnifies the inequities.

Idith - without a replacement for kids who understand math better than others is not a solution; she advocates to not get rid of all the levels, make the placement process better

Tim Glick - is an 8th grade math teacher; does not see this as an effort to manage workload; he is focused on the 90% of kids who are not in the program.

Alice Liu - a Junior who was in the acceleration program, she self-studied to pass the placement exam; there were 20-30 students in her cohort.

Jeffrey L - understands that the new 7/8 school may have ways to accelerate, but what can be done for the students now?

Committee Member Mike Crowley expressed his high regard for Assistant Superintendent and the Educators, though he did not support suspending the program; closing off opportunities to doing challenging work is not equity; he would like to resume discussions for restoring the program, ensuring placement with an equity lens. Committee Member Gomez spoke to the issue of addressing years of inequity; how do we use the resources so more kids have access, and extra challenge. Member Donner

noted that research supports teams; best practice is about depth of curriculum and not breadth; acceleration not being the best way to challenge students who need it.

Committee members discussed the needs of students for advanced math learning, financial resources and budget priorities, parity with other disciplines and primacy of academics, and evaluation criteria in early years; to return to the previous version of the acceleration program or another acceleration version, or another potential approach. The majority of members recognized a need for the Administration to identify options for meeting the needs of our advanced math learners in the middle school, including potentially an accelerated math curriculum, and identifying the resources needed. As well, members agreed with the recommendation to continue with the 2020-21 program that does not offer the skip test for a level of math.

On a motion by Kate Bowen and seconded by Andrea Prestwich, the Subcommittee voted (4-0-1) to recommend, to identify and propose ways to challenge advanced math learners, and related resources needed.

On a motion by Andrea Prestwich and seconded by Evelyn Gomez, the Subcommittee voted (4-0-1) to recommend that an accelerated program be one of the options that the administration considers.

On a motion by Evelyn Gomez and seconded by Tara Donner, the Subcommittee voted (4-0-1) to recommend the Identification of resources that will support elementary students equitable access to participate in advanced learning, as they move into middle and high school.

3. Other Business

Approval of Minutes:

On a motion by Tara Donner and seconded by Evelyn Gomez, the Subcommittee voted (3-0-1) to approve the minutes of January 15, 2021 Curriculum and Instruction Subcommittee Meeting.

Andrea Prestwich abstained

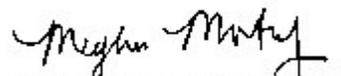
Asst. Superintendent Darias relayed that there was no new information on grading communications that she had to share.

4. Adjourn

On a motion by Tara Donner and seconded by Kate Bowen, the Subcommittee voted (4-0-1) to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 5:41 PM

Respectfully Submitted by:


Meghan Moriarty, Secretary