Caldwell-West Caldwell School District
Family Curriculum & Instruction Night
Frequently Asked Questions
March 28, 2022

ELEMENTARY

LITERACY

Q(uestion). Why is the district using Guided Reading as a strategy?
A(nswer). As teachers of reading, it is our responsibility to examine research from multiple sources, consider the needs of our students, examine trends in data, know what is expected in the standards, and identify resources that meet the needs of our students. Learning to read is a different process for different students, and we need to be equipped to align our instructional approach to the needs of our students. In our current approach to literacy instruction, we provide students with access to grade-level texts through "read alouds," model specific skills and strategies that readers use in our mini-lessons, teach phonics using a multi-sensory and systematic approach with Fundations, and provide readers with individualized and small group instruction using strategy groups, guided reading, and other types of small groups. In our lower grades, we also have daily shared reading. Some students may be excellent decoders and need support with comprehension and we meet their needs by leveraging guided reading. Some students may be struggling with phonics concepts, and we do small-group phonics lessons with those readers. Some students may need a blend of phonics and comprehension, and we meet their needs in blended guided reading activities. It is our responsibility to consider the individual needs of our readers and implement the most effective instructional approaches and appropriately matched resources to meet each student's needs.

Our curriculum does not have a "single" approach to literacy instruction; instead, we have identified various materials to support readers. In addition, there is a lot of research around specific teaching practices and their impact on student learning. For example, providing students with specific, actionable feedback when reading is one powerful lever in having a positive effect on student reading. So while we need to be thinking about our literacy strategies and resources, we also need to focus on teacher practice as the pedagogical decisions a teacher makes - even two teachers using the same resources can yield different results.

One of our research points is our results from last summer's "SMART Summer Academy(SSA)." During SSA, students received daily guided reading instruction and had time to read independently. Every student who attended 4 weeks of our program grew at least 1 reading level using our TC Running Record assessment! For most of our readers, that equates to making 2-3 months of progress in just 4 weeks.

Q. Why is there no explicit vocabulary instruction at the elementary level?
A. Vocabulary instruction is very important! As texts become more complex, students need to have a greater command of vocabulary to access the content at different levels. Vocabulary instruction happens across the content areas - in science, math, and social studies - as well as in reading. Teachers provide students with vocabulary words and definitions (or strategies to figure out the meaning of words) within guided reading instruction; read aloud is another time where teachers introduce new words and terms; in mini-lessons, teachers provide readers with strategies for determining the meaning of new words.

Q. How is spelling taught at the early elementary grades?
Spelling is part of our daily Fundations instruction. Encoding - or using letter-sound knowledge and spelling rules - is one component of the Fundations program. In addition, students may be encoding during guided

reading during the word work portion of the lesson, and will also be monitoring and correcting spelling during the editing process in writer's workshop.

Q. Will you include any group projects or public speaking opportunities for students? Does our current curriculum allow for anything that would foster such 21st Century skills -- critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication?
A. Students work within cooperative groups in all academic areas, including special area classes. Group work is common during reading, math, science, and social studies. Various group projects are embedded into social studies, science, media, art, and PE classes. Speaking and listening standards are embedded in our ELA curriculum, and students have many opportunities for public speaking. Examples, where students practice public speaking, include reading published writing, defending positions on social studies content, and sharing projects with classmates. 21st Century skills are fostered throughout our curriculum. For example, students complete research projects, participate in cooperative learning, complete technology activities, learn digital literacy practices during media classes, apply critical thinking skills during lessons around historical events, analyze literature, and more.

Q. When does explicit instruction in answering constructed response tasks and the reading/writing connection occur? Are the students taught strategies to answer questions like this?
A. Constructed responses to reading can take place in guided reading, in our writing about reading units, and also during instructional read-aloud. We are revising our literacy block to enhance opportunities for students to craft constructed responses.

Q. What kind of training and extra support is being given to our teachers to help them with supporting a higher number of struggling students?
A. Much of our professional development (PD) this year has focused on reading instruction. Principals provide time each month for teachers to team and explore strategies to support struggling readers. Our PD sessions have also been focused on supporting teachers by expanding their pedagogical repertoire of teaching practices to include Guided Reading. In addition, our Academic Intervention team (our reading specialists) offers 1:1 coaching to teachers in reading instruction every Friday. Teachers are provided release time to work with the reading specialists to do work such as calibrating around assessment, analyzing instructional running records to plan for instruction, observing a modeled lesson, co-plan small groups, co-teach guided reading, or setting up intervisitations of other classrooms, etc. In addition, all primary and special education teachers have been trained in Phonics First, enabling them to differentiate phonics instruction for readers who need it. We have also purchased high-quality resources for small group instruction and continue to expand our classroom libraries so that all students have access to books at their level and within their interests.

MATH

Q. What is being done to address basic fact fluency standards?
A. New Jersey Learning Standards call for specific skills and math practices that build conceptual understanding. *Investigations* and our math curriculum are aligned to these standards. Some of the ways fluency is taught in *Investigations* is through gameplay, creating flashcards for arithmetic facts, and studying related facts (i.e. How can 2x4 help you solve 4x4?). We have two workshop slideshows from our *Families as Math Partners* presentations that address computational fluency and are hyperlinked here.

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Q. What is the rationale for the math unit assessments to be digital-only?
A. Math assessments for students in grades 3-5 are available via LInkIt! and also on paper. Students in grades 1-2 take all of their assessments on paper. Students in grades 3-5 enter their answers into LinkIt! and are also provided paper or paper copies of the assessments.

Q. **Why must students learn multiple approaches to solving math tasks?**
A. The standards - both the Math Practice Standards as well as content learning standards - call for students to have at their disposal a variety of strategies when solving problems. The purpose of having a command of a variety of strategies is to ensure that deep understanding is at the center of solving problems. Students can activate a strategy that makes the most sense based on the situation. For example, adding 49 + 17 might inspire students to turn it into 50 + 16. But adding 87 + 34 may be simpler to solve using the standard algorithm.

Q. **For grades 3-5 math assessments, can children get partial credit if their work on paper is correct but their final answer is wrong?**
A: The end of unit math assessments are multiple choice, and therefore partial credit is not offered. However, students are assessed throughout a unit in many different ways, such as through a standards-aligned observational checklist, work samples, classroom discussions, quizzes and performance tasks. In all of those other opportunities, student work and thinking can be captured even when the answer is not correct.

SOCIAL STUDIES & SCIENCE

Q. The social studies curriculum feels antiquated. Why are my students still learning about white male explorers in this day and age?
A. The New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Social Studies can be viewed here, and our curriculum is designed to align with the standards. The Age of Exploration is a period of history that needs to be taught with the complexity that existed to provide students with a multidimensional view of our world's history. As part of our Comprehensive Equity Plan, we also aim to ensure all practices, curricula, and interactions as a district reflect our values of community, equity, and inclusion. To that end, the social studies curriculum is revised like other subject areas to ensure alignment with all standards and curricular mandates.

Q. How frequently are science and social studies taught and are there any plans to increase the regularity of any STEM-related concentrations?
A. Our students have science and social studies two times a week for each subject. The instructional minutes increase as the students get older, and range from 30 minutes in kindergarten to 50 minutes in grade 5. Based on teacher feedback pre-pandemic about needing more time for science instruction, the minutes were increased. You can find our science and social studies units on the district website under the curriculum tab.

TECHNOLOGY

Q. How are our children learning tech skills now that we are 1:1?
A. Our district goal is to meaningfully integrate technology into all of our content areas within the next five years. We leverage the expertise of our media specialists and tech integrators to support teachers in finding

meaningful ways to integrate technology. Our media specialists and classroom teachers provide students with direct instruction and the application of technology within the classroom setting.

Q. Will there be any typing lessons? Are students learning cursive and handwriting?
Handwriting is taught as part of our Fundations curriculum in K-3, including cursive in third grade. We were interested in more opportunities to teach typing, so we brought in a trial subscription to a typing program this year called "Typsey." The subscription was offered to any interested classroom teacher. Based on feedback we gather from teachers, we will be considering adding it to our digital resources for our students.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Q. The forums that have been created for parents to "learn" the strategies in ELA and Math that our children have been working on are FABULOUS! Will these forums continue? And if we are unable to attend upcoming sessions like Family as Reading Partners on 3/31, is there any way to get the slides?
A. Yes! We are so thrilled to hear that you found our academic showcase supportive. We will look to host more of these sessions next year as part of the district's new Community Connections family series. We will link all the presentations to the flier and post them on the district website. You can view the math presentations here.

GIFTED & TALENTED

Q. What are the district's plans for supporting students who are above grade level in the elementary schools? Are there any plans to create a parent committee for families of gifted students? Is there a way that students could meet with other gifted students across the district on team building/problem-based learning exercises?

A. Teachers are the primary providers of enrichment as differentiation occurs within the classroom in all subjects. For example, in ELA, students have leveled books, are challenged through small group instruction, advancing questions, and book clubs. In math, students are challenged through open-ended tasks, games, and differentiated groupings and questions. In addition to differentiation within core content, our district offers:

- The Individualized Differentiated Educational Activities (IDEA) block, is an additional time in our elementary instructional day when students are matched with activities and learning experiences tailored to their individual needs, whether it's re-teaching, continued practice, or enrichment.
- We offer two educational enrichment programs, Primary Education Thinking Skills (PETS) for grades 1-2 and our Gifted And Talented Program (GAP) for grades 3-5. Led by our enrichment coach, PETS not only provides enrichment opportunities for all students but also helps to identify students who may be candidates for GAP. Using a thematic, interdisciplinary approach, the GAP curriculum stresses the development of creative and critical thinking skills and the application of these skills to real-life situations. The identification of advanced learners for this program is based on multiple measures of success, including aptitude and ability assessments, teacher/parent nominations, and student portfolios. You can read more about elementary PETS & GAP on our website.
- Our enrichment coach and GAP teacher will be sharing information in her April newsletter about opportunities for parent involvement as we continue to enhance our GAP curriculum through a survey and a virtual committee meeting. If you have a child in GAP, be on the lookout!

SECONDARY

ENRICHMENT & SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

Q. What opportunities will be available for enrichment at the middle school?
A. The primary provider of enrichment is the classroom teacher. Differentiation occurs within the classroom in all subjects. In ELA, students have access to leveled books and are challenged through small group instruction, advancing questions, and book clubs. In math, students are challenged through differentiated learning tasks, groupings, and advancing questions.

After the initial transition into middle school, students have the opportunity for advanced coursework in 7th-grade math. We will continue to review our student learning data to determine the need for further accelerated offerings in Math. The math supervisor, once hired, will review current programming and propose differentiated pathways at the secondary level.

Q. Does the middle school curriculum require adjustment based on assessment results? Why has guided reading been introduced at the 6th-grade level?
A. Additional resources and strategies have been included in the middle school program to support teachers in differentiating to meet our students' needs. The staff has been trained and provided time to implement guided reading as a new evidence-based strategy to target specific learning needs of students at a range of reading levels, allowing each student to have their needs met to progress. The entire 6th-grade team has partnered to assess our students so that teachers have up-to-date information about our students to inform instruction and reinforce the focus on reading in their classrooms with informational text.

Guided reading has been implemented at the 6th grade level as another tool to help identify students' reading levels, teach them through materials that are on their reading level to initiate growth, and support struggling readers who may need additional resources.

Q. What kind of training and extra support is being given to our teachers to help them with supporting a higher number of struggling students?
A. Professional development and progress monitoring of guided reading has been added as strategies to support teachers and students. In addition, a literacy instructional coach is being hired to provide ongoing job-embedded support.

MATH

Q. What are the math pathways for secondary students, and how can I learn more about the protocols for students seeking to take advanced courses?
A. At the end of each grade level students are invited to take a placement test for advanced course placement. The placement test is used along with grades, LinkIt, PSAT Scores and teacher recommendation to determine the best placement for the student. The placement assessments take place for courses at JCHS in the early winter and further information about the process will be shared with GCMS families in May. Please see the GCMS Math Course Descriptions and page 37 and page 63 in the JCHS Program of Studies for more information.

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<tr><th>GRADE 6</th><th>GRADE 7</th><th>GRADE 8</th><th>GRADE 9</th><th>GRADE 10</th><th>GRADE 11</th><th>GRADE 12</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Grade 6 Math</td><td rowspan="2">Intro to Pre-Algebra 7</td><td rowspan="2">Pre-Algebra 8</td><td>Algebra I Concepts</td><td>Geometry Concepts</td><td>Algebra II Concepts</td><td>Math Analysis</td></tr>
<tr><td>Algebra I</td><td>Geometry Or Geometry Honors</td><td>Algebra II Or Algebra II Honors</td><td>Precalculus Or Precalculus Honors Or Math Analysis Or Statistics</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Pre-Algebra 7</td><td rowspan="2">Algebra 1</td><td>Geometry</td><td>Algebra II</td><td>Precalculus Or Precalculus Honors Or AP Statistics</td><td>Calculus Or AP Calculus Or Statistics Or AP Statistics</td></tr>
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In addition to middle school communications, high school staff host Eighth Grade Parent Night, and the Supervisor of Guidance presents to the eighth graders course selection options for the following year. These presentations typically take place in mid-January prior to course scheduling in February. Math pathways and the readiness assessment are addressed during our presentations.

Q. Does the middle school math curriculum align with the elementary program *Investigations?*
A.The middle school adopted the *Big Ideas* program two years ago and created an aligned curriculum under the supervision of an expert consultant and administrators. This is the first year middle school teachers are implementing the curriculum in person. Both Big Ideas and Investigations apply the standards-aligned "CPA" (concrete, pictorial and abstract) framework to strengthen students' conceptual understanding. Staff continue to collaborate to ensure vertical alignment so students have a coherent experience in math instruction K-12.

Q. Are there any potential adjustments/reinforcements that the district is planning on implementing to address student math performance at the secondary level?
A.The district recognizes there are performance gaps in the math scores and adopted LinkIt to help the teachers uncover and address the learning gaps of students. Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, the 8th-grade and high school teachers have worked closely with a math consultant to help revise the curriculum and assessment to ensure alignment with NJSLS. The district has rewritten the math midterms and is in the process of rewriting the math finals to be more closely aligned with the NJSLS. Our teachers are also participating in inter-visitations to identify effective instructional practices that can be integrated into practice.

A Math Instructional Supervisor position was created to support curriculum alignment and development, resource acquisition, and job-embedded support for our 6-12 teachers. The 9th-grade students have the opportunity to work with teachers during their lunch through the SMART program to address gaps and provide

additional support. Varsity Tutors is a resource for students in need of additional support beyond the classroom instruction differentiated by teachers.

DATA-DRIVEN INSTRUCTION & RESOURCES

Q. What is the cost of LinkIt benchmark assessments and data warehousing platform? What are the advantages of using LinkIt over teacher-designed formative and summative assessments? A.Like many other districts, Caldwell-West Caldwell allocated funds from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) grant to partner with LinkIt. This year, about $21K was allocated for district-wide benchmark assessments to support teachers in monitoring student progress toward grade-level standards and in differentiating instruction to support all student learning needs in math and ELA. The platform provides greater opportunities for families to see student progress over time and for teachers to access standards-aligned tasks to inform instruction.

Both standardized benchmarks and internally designed assessments are important in identifying and meeting student learning needs. The district uses LinkIt to monitor progress toward standards and inform instruction since LinkIt benchmarks are predictive of student performance on NJSLA. Teachers use qualitative and quantitative internal assessments every day to drive instruction. This year, the high school teacher and learning goal centered around these formative and summative assessments; teachers reviewed and revised their midterm assessments to ensure standards alignment and will continue to do so with the finals. The use of various data points allows us to have a fuller picture of how our students are progressing towards mastery of grade-level standards and provide greater transparency and opportunities to communicate with families and identify meaningful interventions and supports.

21st CENTURY & SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Q. How is the middle school addressing the computer science, design thinking, and media literacy standards?
A.These standards are woven into numerous courses but are mainly addressed in the cycle classes of STEM 7, 8, and iSTEM and Media Literacy.

Q. Any plans to also see where we can strengthen our SEL initiatives with students, specifically getting their input and feedback on areas where they feel they need the most support?
A. The health curriculum at James Caldwell High School has always included topics that cover social and emotional development and well-being. Students are exposed to information related to forming healthy relationships, how to deal with stress around academic matters, and finding support for personal issues (i.e. preparing for exams, peer relationships, and loss and grief). These lessons also include sharing with students resources to utilize during challenging times.

The School Counselors of JCHS are available to students who are looking for additional support. The School Counseling Department includes four counselors to whom students can reach out to make an appointment or stop by during the day. Counselors keep their schedule open as much as possible during the lunch block so that students can come by without having to make an appointment. Additionally, we have a Student Assistance Counselor that students can access for additional support.

Regarding student feedback for SEL needs, we have surveyed students over the school year to determine how they are transitioning back to a more typical school year and assess what additional academic, social, and emotional support they need. We also sent a similar survey to parents for their feedback on how we can better meet the needs of our students. Additionally, we formed a Wellness Committee comprised of students and faculty to further identify the needs of our students. The committee is reviewing the student wellness survey results. From this survey and committee, we will determine what programming changes are needed to further support our students.