

FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

501 Kings Highway East
Fairfield, Connecticut 06825



Phone (203) 255-8392
Fax (203) 255-8273

TO: Board of Education

**FROM: Michael Rafferty,
Curriculum Leader for Language Arts Preschool-Grade 5**

DATE: June 8, 2012

**SUBJECT: Questions Asked by Board of Education Members as Related to the
Proposed Language Arts Curriculum**

1. The Common Core State Standards focus on rigor, focus, and coherence. I see where the teachers have opportunities for rigor and focus, but how would you describe the coherence?

We have started a process of mapping texts and tasks from K-5. This will involve identifying areas of coherence horizontally across a grade and vertically across the elementary years. As you can see in Figure 1, the implementation task we are embarking on is enabling us to expose students to a variety of genres and thinking. This will be shared with the middle schools and the Secondary Curriculum Leader for English/Language Arts.

Figure 1 Mapping Text and Thinking

Interactive Read Aloud Planner Grade 3
Month: September

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| Topic: Story elements F & P Thinking Category: Searching for and Using Information | Book 1 <u>One</u> by Kathryn <u>Qtoshi</u> | Book 2 <u>Two Bobbies</u> by Kirby Larson | Genre: Fiction & Narrative-Nonfiction |
| Written Response: Did you like this story? Why or why not? What is a problem in the text that you are reading? | | | |
| Topic: Story elements F & P Thinking Category: Searching for and Using Information | Book 1 <u>The Great Kapok Tree</u> by Lynn Cherry <u>When I was Young in the Mountains</u> by Cynthia <u>Rylant</u> | Book 2 <u>The Water Cycle (Time for Kids)</u> | Genre: Narrative & Informational Text |
| Written Response: How is the setting important in this book? What is the setting of the story? Give details to support your answer. You can look for information like this ----- so you can understand where and when the story takes place. | | | |
| Topic: Big idea/author's message F & P Thinking Category: Inferring (Beyond the text) | Book 1 <u>One</u> by Kathryn <u>Qtoshi</u> | Book 2 <u>Snowflake Bently</u> by Jacqueline Briggs Martin | Genre: Fiction & Biography |
| Written Response: _____ makes me think that the writer is really trying to say _____. What is the theme of this story? What lesson does _____ learn in the story? | | | |

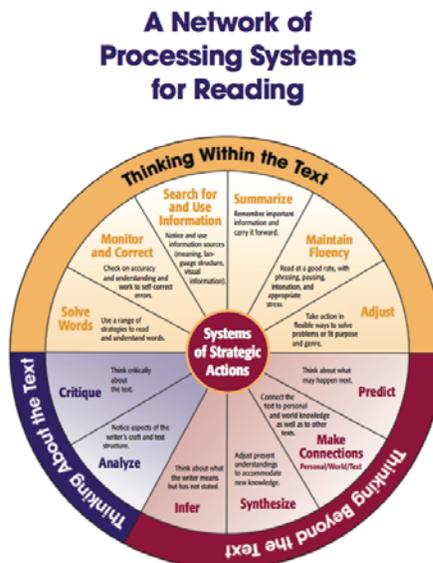
2. With the Early Childhood Center preschool, the Burr preschool, and the two that are part of the consumer science course at the high schools, why aren't they all held to the preschool curriculum?

The Fairfield Public Schools has one preschool program at two sites: the Early Childhood Center and Burr Elementary School. The Language Arts curriculum will be implemented by certified teachers at both of these sites. The focus of the High School Early Childhood Classes is on preparing the high school student in preparing them for the care of children. It is considered a lab, with the focus on "the student as teacher". Our Early Childhood Preschool program is only one part of the Early Childhood class for high school students. It meets only 3 hours/day for 2 days a week.

3. In what way does this curriculum ensure that each student is pushed toward increasing text complexity? WHAT our students read is as critical as WHAT they can do with it. What tools are teachers getting (via professional development or the implementation manual) for being able to construct different scaffolding as tools for the students to grow?

Regarding text complexity, this spring we started professional development on the use of interactive read aloud (See Figure 1) to enable students to navigate rigorous text. This instructional technique allows teachers to scaffold rigorous reading and thinking as a class. This process, along with additional scheduled professional development across the upcoming years, will better equip our teachers to teach students how to navigate more rigorous texts. Regarding students' ability to read critically, instruction will center on the continuum of comprehension as can be seen in Figure 2. This, partnered with our improved progress monitoring system, will allow us to constantly monitor the text levels our children are exposed to and how to constantly push for self-improvement in text and thinking.

Figure 2 Comprehension Continuum



4. How does this curriculum ensure more sustained exposure to expository writing? (the skill as well as concentration and stamina)

Each year the curriculum includes dedicated units of study in grades K-5 that are devoted to expository writing. Additionally, we are mapping a more robust calendar of student writing about reading which is one form of expository writing. For example, we created a sequence within the curriculum that enables our students to go from writing book reviews to writing literary analyses. This mapping involved the middle schools. We have also begun the process of making curricular connections among the Language Arts Curriculum, the new Linking Learning Curriculum, and Social Studies units and topics.

5. How does this curriculum establish the prior knowledge that later grades will call upon?

The entire curriculum is based on the notion of building upon prior knowledge. For example, students use what they know about phonological awareness to move to phonemic awareness and then to phonics. Their prior knowledge about retelling in Grade 2 enables them to move to summary in Grade 3. Exposure to common texts in interactive read aloud will allow students to make connections between previous read texts and new texts. In writing, we have designed a series of units across Grades 3-5 to go from book reviews to essays to literary letter to literary analysis.

6. How are any components of the curriculum explicitly tied to our science and social studies curricula?

All the skills and strategies taught in the Language Arts curriculum enable students to access the content in math, science, and social studies. During the curriculum mapping process, we select texts that expose students to topics and thinking that link to areas in the Science and Social Studies Curriculum. For example, in Grade 3 students engage in a directed reading and thinking activity (interactive read aloud) during the Language Arts block that is directly linked to the study of the water cycle in the Grade 3 Science Curriculum.

7. The parent survey was a great idea but did not result in much feedback. The parent focus group had a lot of input; how is any of that reflected in this curriculum?

The standards are the foundation of the curriculum. The parent focus group was most interested in consistency and increased rigor. The parent focus group provided feedback in the following areas that will be incorporated in our implementation:

- texts students are exposed to in reading
- common spelling lists
- continuum for grammar instruction

8. Has any of the elementary school data team work contributed to forming this curriculum and setting of priorities?

The District has only recently embarked on data teams. Therefore, the impact of data teams was not connected to the writing of the curriculum.

9. What curriculum ideas were piloted and found not to work?

We did not pilot the curriculum but used teacher feedback to alter and change the implementation guides. Teachers in Grades 3-5 decided that *Launching the Reading Units* were too long and that our students needed less time to build routines and structures. Therefore, we restructured it so that students could go deeper into reading and writing in a more timely fashion. We have worked to increase the rigor of the *Small Moments Unit* in Grade 2 based on teacher feedback. In Grade 5 writing, we added a *Compare/Contrast* mini-unit. This revision allowed teachers to move beyond the straight expository structure in order to widen our students' experiences with writing.