

Secondary Math Academy

The Secondary Math Academy has been meeting every other Wednesday morning for the past two months, and we plan to continue this work during this time throughout the school year for as long as we have Wednesday morning collaborations available to us.

For a variety of factors including teacher reassignment and teacher capacity during the pandemic, we added some new teachers to the academy and said grateful goodbyes to some other teachers who had been in our group. This, in addition to shorter meeting times than last year, has required some re-orientation and readjustment to the scope of our work.

To guide our work for this year, our first task was to create a mission and vision for mathematics work in our district based off the Portrait of a Graduate and Strategic Plan Frameworks. Teachers wrote the following statements to guide our work:

Mathematics instruction in the Coeur d'Alene School District should:

- Be relevant and meaningful and provide students with in-depth learning experiences through choice and creativity.
- Be student centered; utilizing shared academic and personal values between teachers and students.
- Be cooperative with clear and high expectations, where classrooms are a safe environment for students to speak up and participate.
- Help students understand how to learn.
- Be full of P.E.A.K. (purpose, essentials, agency, knowledge) projects.
- Be focused on critical thinking skills, essential standards, and the ability to communicate clearly.
- Empower students to think critically and communicate reasoning.
- Be designed to help students develop deep understanding and agency.
- Involve productive struggle, build community and relationships, set high expectations, help students take ownership of their learning, involve deep mastery, insist on student choice, and require students to defend thinking with evidence.
- Be facilitated in a safe, caring environment where mistakes are welcomed, and use real world situations to encourage collaboration, higher level thinking, and understanding of different strategies.
- Be engaging and fun.

Our plans for this semester are to add Honors Math 1 to the curriculum, to make significant, meaningful revisions and deepen last year's curriculum based on user experience this year (including differentiations for the on-ramps students need to adjust to an integrated math curriculum from a traditional math curriculum), and to investigate and adopt math textbooks for the 2021-2022 school year.

English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum Committee

We have convened a group of thirteen educators comprised of classroom teachers, title teachers, a special education teacher, and an instructional coach, to undertake the work of writing K-5 English Language Arts curriculum. We meet twice monthly from 4-6 pm to engage in learning and writing together. Our first three tasks have been to create a mission and vision around English Language Arts instruction in our K-5 classrooms based on the POG and strategic frameworks, to identify essential and supporting standards, and to align them in a coherent vertical progression K-5.

The following are statements this group has written about the vision for K-5 ELA curriculum.

K-5 English Language Arts Curriculum in the Coeur d'Alene School District should:

- Be inquiry-based, engaging learning that promotes critical thinking and student agency.
- Be intentional and authentic.
- Build relationships to teach the heart and mind.
- Involve student agency with voice and choice.
- Teach students how to effectively communicate, how to give and receive feedback, and how to open themselves up to each other's perspectives.
- Make productive citizens of the world by encouraging agency and productive collaboration.
- Plan for equity, which involves teaching empathy for other cultures, teach skills that carry beyond the classroom and prepare students for life, and create difference-makers in our community who find and solve problems with creativity.
- Allow for uniqueness, rigor, grit, and PEAK (purpose, essentials, agency and knowledge).
- Model how to be a continual learner.
- Include differentiation that helps students embrace their differences with empathy.
- Involve connection, collaboration, and community.

We are also encouraging these educators to investigate Orton Gillingham training as part of this process. Orton Gillingham helps students address foundational literacy skills. Several teachers who have initially attended Orton Gillingham training have found it to be incredibly helpful; if the recommendation of this group is to continue Orton Gillingham training, we will work to weave it in with the Writing Units of Study, the thinking strategies, and reading and writing workshop approaches as we write the curriculum.

This appeared in our District's recent Curriculum Corner, alongside information on trainings to help teachers sharpen their skills with current curriculum resources:

The Next Semester: Choosing What is Essential



LEVERAGE



ENDURANCE



RIGOR

Given that more than ever, time is a precious commodity, it is important to prioritize the learning and instruction for our students. It might be helpful to think about three criteria to establish what is essential for student learning: what has **leverage**, what has **endurance**, and what has **rigor**.

1. **Leverage:** When we talk about what has leverage, we're referring to what helps students in *more than one content area* or in *more than one task*. For example: fractions. Fractions are helpful in understanding art, cooking, music, science, social studies and physical education. It is hard to name a subject area where understanding fractions *isn't* helpful. Something that might have less leverage is memorizing the formula for determining the area of a shape. While knowing how to determine the area of a shape has great leverage, memorizing the formula would have less leverage as there would be few fields or content areas where a person would not have access to the formulas.
2. **Endurance:** Endurance refers to the value of learning something over time. *What will matter next year, five years from now, and twenty years from now?* For example, knowing how to construct a valid argument that considers opposing sides thoughtfully and recognizes multiple perspectives is a skill that will matter throughout a person's lifetime. It would be critical to help students expand their abilities to construct thoughtful, logical arguments. Something that has less endurance is identifying a direct object in a sentence. While it will be helpful to students who continue to study languages, and while it is helpful in understanding which pronouns to use (e.g. *who* vs. *whom*), the importance of naming a direct object does not have great endurance.
3. **Rigor:** When we're talking about rigor, we want to think about *what really makes kids think deeply*. What is worthy of our students' time and attention? For example, understanding the forces that led to the Civil War and asking students to identify how those forces are different from or similar to other forces in different conflicts would cause kids to think deeply. Something that does not have as much rigor would be asking students to memorize the dates and names of the battles in the Civil War.

Together, leverage, endurance and rigor help us create filters for what is truly essential in our students' learning. Determining what is essential helps us focus and spend the majority of our time on what really matters to our students. There has never been a better opportunity to come together (even if virtually!) in learning communities to determine what is essential.

If you would like to talk more about this one-on-one or if you would like to invite me to work with you and your colleagues to talk more about this, please let me know!