

Topic: Library & Technology Time

Q: “If reading is so critical, why did you take away library? Teachers now have this extra responsibility?”

A: Library time and access have not been taken away. Teachers can schedule book check-out times and library use/research times as needed. What is new is that we have asked teachers to identify a Performance Indicator that corresponds to their scheduled library time, so that we are always connecting class time to specific learning activities. We have asked teachers to remain with their students in the library during their library research time, as it is an instructional block of time. There was no curriculum “loss,” as there has not been a library/media or technology curriculum in place.

Q: “What is the status of the computer lab? Different means of teaching math and reading and keeping up with technology?”

A: The computer lab is fully-functioning and teachers may schedule it for their classes as needed.

Q: “What is being done to teach our kids technology skills?”

A: Currently, technology skills are taught by classroom teachers within their instructional blocks. They can schedule computer time, or use iPads or laptops in their classroom. We are looking into purchasing additional devices and technology programs.

Q: “Computer upgrades are needed along with student use increased.”

A: Yes, and as we allocate our budget for next year, this will be a priority.

Topic: More Aides for Teachers

Q: “Students are not challenged, but left bored because all the teacher’s time is spent with needy students, i.e. language, emotional, low skills students getting all attention. Teachers need aides for these students.”

A: It is our goal that all students are presented with challenging material at the “just right” level. We know from research that the most important factor in student learning is the classroom teacher--not the presence of more aides. The move toward PCBL allows for more student choice in what/how they demonstrate learning, as well as emphasizing growth as the expectation for all students. Students can become bored if they are not challenged, and this is why teachers are being trained in how to personalize learning. We do have supports in place for student needs--all types of student needs--that are available to students who demonstrate the need. These supports are both inside and outside of the classroom. All of our students are receiving attention, in combination from interventionists and classroom teachers.

Q: “Why not more classroom aides and smaller class sizes? More direct instruction?”

A: We know from research that the most important factor in student learning is the classroom teacher--not the presence of more aides. Class sizes have a smaller effect on learning, but not

nearly the impact of the classroom teacher or direct instruction. We do try to keep classes as small as possible, and for this reason, have not accepted open enrollments this year. More direct instruction is helpful in certain instances, and the workshop models represent this: a 10-15 minute direct instruction lesson, followed by student work time and a debriefing session.

Topic: School Accountability Committee

Q: “What is the status of Needham SAC, and why are parents not informed about meetings? Last online update was 2014.”

“Please discuss SAC meetings and purpose. When is the October meeting?”

A: The SAC has met once so far this year, in September. We just posted the agenda and minutes from this meeting on our website. From here out, we commit to informing parents on the website about every SAC meeting. We do have a full committee, and interested people can contact Jenny or Laurie if they’d like to join, or simply sit in on the meetings. Our next meeting is on October 25 from 3:30-4:30 at Needham. The purpose of SAC is to serve as a guiding voice in school improvement plans and priorities. This link has a great explanation:

<http://copta.org/advocacy-2/school-accountability/>

Topic: Students Who Are At or Above Proficiency

Q: “It is a shame that students not in the “red” have to suffer--no GT, no library, no Spanish. What about those high achievers? We want more support.”

“What is the plan to support students that are above the 25%, not in the red and are in the middle of the bell curve? How is their growth being addressed?”

A: We still have library access, and we have a Gifted and Talented teacher. Jamie Driscoll, our GT teacher, holds both pull-out groups, provides push-in support, and is starting a math club. Our high achievers do have solid support from Jamie, as well as from their teachers who have been trained in Thinking Strategies, workshop models and PCBL.

Topic: Personalized Competency Based Learning

Q: “What is PCBL?”

A: Personalized Competency Based Learning is a model of teaching and learning where students have ownership in their learning, are applying what they learn, and are using their learning to impact the classroom and community. As students own, act, and impact, they are working toward rigorous Standards and Performance Indicators aligned to state and national standards. Their performance is measured against these common Standards and Performance Indicators and can be demonstrated in multiple ways. Rather than students being asked to meet the needs of the learning institute, the learning institute meets the needs of the student. Personalized learning offers student voice and choice in demonstrating their learning, while competency-based learning provides cognitively demanding performance expectations of what students should know and be able to do in to reach their dreams.

Q: “Why are we making the change to CBL and why now?”

A: We desire to inspire and equip **all** students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be successful in school and in life.

Q: “What is being done to work towards CBL? Being set up with grade level teachers doesn’t lend to students moving through performance indicators?”

A: There are many refinements taking place right now and many to come as we progress in creating educational environments where every student is engaged in productive struggle so that he/she is being inspired and equipped towards success. The first work that has already transpired was for the district to create clear expectations of what knowledge and skills every student should be guaranteed up to and through graduation. Teachers and schools are being supported to plan learning, using a backwards planning design, where the clear, long-term targets are the aim for what students interact with each day. Personalized Competency can take on many different forms as each school/district builds on their local context to support every learner. The principles guiding 9-Rs thinking and refinements were distributed at the meeting.

Q: “Can you give a practical example of CBE in a second grade classroom?”

A: In second grade, students are learning to write solid topic sentences so that they can develop full paragraphs with details and examples. In a traditional teaching model, students might be tested on “what is a topic sentence?” Or whether they can identify a topic sentence; or given a grade, such as an “A” or “B” or “C” topic sentence. Traditional models would provide students a couple of opportunities to practice before the test, and then the teacher would move on to the next lesson--whether or not all students wrote adequate topic sentences. In PCBE, the emphasis is on developing the skill, not just the knowledge, that can be transferred to other applications. Additionally, PCBE makes learning the constant, and time/manner/age more variable. PCBE establishes clear criteria for the academic skill competency, not muddled by points or grades based on completion or work habits. Students are encouraged and expected to keep working until they achieve mastery of a skill, not just stop when the assignment is due. With topic sentences, students have a rubric that is known ahead of time, and which provides specific feedback on where they are in their competency band. Moreover, there is some personalization for the skill, and real-life application: for example, second graders might be given a couple of choices of topics for their writing, based on a social studies lesson or a science experiment in the garden.

Q: “How do you envision teachers balancing varying levels of mastery across a wide range of subjects?”

A: Interesting question. Each teacher has varying levels of mastery present across many subjects in their rooms today. While there are many different systemic ways to meet the needs of every learner, the most important refinement is that teachers take on the role of “facilitator of learning” and also focus teaching and learning on not only the graduation standards for each

content, but also the skills it takes for students to own their learning, act on their learning, and impact others.

Q: “I love the idea of personalized learning, but it seems hard in classes with 23 + to 1 teacher to student ratio. What are your thoughts/strategies to accomplish that?”

A: When students own their learning, act on their learning, and impact their classroom and community, the work to personalize learning is shared between the teacher and the student. We must empower our students to be active in their learning so that teachers are truly facilitators of learning. Workshop model, thinking strategies, conferring, and collaborating are some ways to personalize learning.

Q: “How do the individualized competency goals fit into the state expectations?”

A: To clarify, the competencies are not individualized. The graduation standards and performance indicators (competencies) that Durango 9-R has developed are rooted in state and national standards within the content, and have also been refined to meet the criteria of cognitive demand, leverage, transfer, and their ability to foster authentic demonstrations of learning.

Q: “How does PCBL translate into classroom curriculum?”

A: The performance indicators have been written in grade spans in order to foster vertical alignment and clear long-term learning objectives. School and classroom curriculum planning should vary in a personalized system, however the general process should be for teachers to collaborate in grade span teams to answer questions like, “What will it look like and sound like for a student to demonstrate that he/she has this performance indicator secure?” and “When do we anticipate many students might be prepared to demonstrate this performance indicator? And “What are the essential and underlying learnings that students might need in order to eventually be successful in demonstrating proficiency?”

Q: “What schools/districts nationally are the role models for PCBL?”

A: The entire states of Maine, Connecticut, Vermont, and New Hampshire have been refining education to meet the individual needs of their learners through personalized competency. There are districts and schools across the country who have embraced the practices of personalizing instruction for students and creating flexible learning environments for students to demonstrate proficiency in standards. Within Durango, Big Picture High School personalizes learning for students and students have ownership in how they demonstrate proficiency on standards.

Q: “What other school/districts models similar to 9-R (IB, similar demographics, etc.) have you looked at for success data CBE or strategies for implementation?”

A: We have worked in a cohort with schools across the state to gain understanding and vet our reasoning and implementation decisions.

Q: “Is each district creating their own performance indicators? Is there any consistency state-wide? Or nationally?”

A. Depending on the state, districts approach the work differently. In some states, performance indicators are decided at the state level. Colorado is a local control state, meaning that local school districts have the authority to create their own indicators of success so long as they meet the minimum expectations set by the state of Colorado. Our performance indicators exceed the expectations set forth in the Colorado Academic Standards.

Q: “How does it work to have Durango 9-R standards that are separate from state standards? Is it legal to have separate standards and how does that align if I move districts?”

A: Since the performance indicators are rooted in the state and national standards, there are many similarities across systems as they design the long term outcomes for graduation.

Q: “Have they changed the “standards” or added indicators?”

A: Yes. Our performance indicators exceed the expectations set forth in the Colorado Academic Standards, yet are aligned to the CAS and national standards. In our work to refine our local expectations we used the following criteria: cognitive demand, leverage, transfer, and their ability to foster authentic demonstrations of learning.

Q: “Are student performance indicators set to a metric that prepares them to a minimum toward future performance goals or to the maximum?”

A: With increased cognitive demand, the indicators shift the level of thinking and doing past rote regurgitation and into creative, critical thinking. Most often, the indicator itself is more rigorous than discreet standards.

Q: “Can you please provide the K-12 performance measures for 9- via a link on email?”

A: This is underway.

Q: “Would like to see a way to measure our children’s performance throughout the year.”

A: Each school is working on developing their curriculum map and also measuring student success on at least 1 indicator per subject this year. Talk with your school staff about how they intend to measure each student’s demonstration of learning in relation to the performance indicators.

Q: “CBE assessment is very feedback-oriented--much more than we see in traditional models. How are you ensuring faculty are not overburdened or forced to focus mostly on assessment feedback and outcomes?”

A: Yes, feedback is key. However, the mechanisms for giving feedback are tightly aligned to the Performance Indicators on which the assessment is based. This streamlines feedback, as does the Scoring Criteria, the guides for which have already been created for teachers. It ultimately saves time, as teachers are becoming familiar with one set of scoring criteria, not a different set

for every assignment.. The same criteria are used across the district, and teachers know what to provide feedback on, and have an established system for doing so.

Topic: Student Achievement Scores Over the Years

Q: “If scores have been low for a long time, why am I only hearing about it now? Why were the changes not made over the summer?”

A: The data from PARCC (distributed from the state) was not available to us administrators until after school had started, and this is why our decisions happened when they did. Scores do go out annually to parents and to districts, and are posted on the websites.

Q: “What has been the trend with Needham PARCC scores? E.G. steady decline? Cliff-dive?”

A: Needham PARCC scores have vacillated a bit over the past few years. This past year, a significant decline was noticed in the area of growth from the beginning of the year compared to the end of the year, and a discrepancy of what progress students were expected to make.

Q: “What is your assessment of why Needham is below reading levels and test scores? How did we get here?”

A: There are certainly a variety of reasons, and time on academic subjects does appear to be one reason. This is why we are focusing on increasing instructional time on core subjects (which has come at the expense of other specials and allotted time being substituted for other subjects or activities) like reading and writing, because students need time to practice and make progress.

Q: “Why are we still using PARCC? Are students using computer lab as test prep?”

A: The link below provides information the state assessment in Colorado and why Colorado uses CMAS to assess students yearly. In Colorado, our state assessment is called CMAS (Colorado Measures of Academic Success). More information for parents is available through the Colorado Department of Education here:

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/generalinfo-parents>

The computer lab at Needham is utilized by teachers daily. Teachers can sign-up to use the lab as needed to support instruction in their classrooms, and to teach specific technology or research skills. The lab is not utilized for test preparation, with the exception of 1-2, 30 minute sessions prior to CMAS testing each spring. Teachers show students how to use the math tools available within the platform in order to reduce frustration during testing.

In addition to the computer lab, Needham currently has 4 laptop carts, with enough computers for an entire class. These are primarily utilized by grades 3-5. The 9R School Board recently

approved the purchase of two additional Chromebook carts. With the addition of these carts, Needham will have 2 computer carts per grade level, 3-5.

We are currently working to acquire additional technology for grades K-2, and are actively researching options. We will share our plan and technology updates through the newsletter and website as more details become available.

Topic: Spanish, Staffing Assignments & Changes

**Q: “My son is an awesome hard-working fifth-grader whose PARCC scores hovered around 20-25%. How is converting our extra staff to ELL teachers going to help him?”
“Was Spanish pulled to utilize that teacher for other things or to have more classroom time?”**

“Since they dropped Spanish/Library, how will they use that to help all kids achieve reading skills/test results?”

A: Our Spanish teacher is working to support literacy for our English Language Learners, and our other reading interventionists are working to support literacy for other students across the entire school who are below proficient in reading. We have so many students on READ plans this year, that we did not have enough staff to cover all of our reading intervention groups. Our librarian is also working as a reading interventionist in the afternoons.

Q: “Who decided to cancel Spanish? Central Office of Needham Admin? Good decision BTW.”

**“How was the decision to cut Spanish made? What other solutions were considered?”
“What was behind the decision to drop Spanish? What does this mean for our IB status?”**

A: The decision to cancel Spanish was made by the principal and assistant principal. In looking at our students’ proficiency levels, we determined that we needed to maximize time and resources on literacy, writing and math computation. Cutting Spanish gave back time to core subjects that had been taken for the Spanish class. Also, this allowed our Spanish teacher to move into literacy support, which is our greatest area of need. Our current IB status is not jeopardized by this decision. IB is certainly a topic of discussion as we look at what our students need, and how we can best meet those needs. We will be holding discussion on this in the spring.

Q: “Research and science have shown that learning multiple languages at a young age has lifelong benefits. Cutting Spanish may have short-term English proficiency benefits but long term detriment. What can we do to re-instate Spanish language for a complete language proficiency?”

A: Yes, and we agree that a second language is an asset to students. We are now offering an after-school Spanish club for the remainder of the year. This year we will be doing a needs and values assessment to determine the future of Spanish offerings.

Topic: Teachers

Q: “Where do our teachers score on estimate and efficacy? (Visible Learning Chart)?”

A: We have not done a formal assessment of staff expectations and efficacy, and this is something we can look into. We do have self-assessments that teachers take, so this would be a good entry point for sharing data and having a discussion around it.

Q: “Will teachers be staying in “their” grade? No more grade turnover? Seems like teachers are constantly being moved.”

A: Teaching assignments are made on an annual basis, depending on the size and needs of the student population in the school, so they may change grade levels. It is our goal to place teachers where they will be most effective.