Concord School District  
Board of Education  
Instructional Committee Meeting

Date: December 6, 2017

Committee members present: Alana Kimball, Chair; Maureen Redmond-Scura; Jennifer Patterson; Pam Wicks

Other Board members present: Jim Richards, Tom Croteau

District Staff: Superintendent Terri Forsten; Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley; CHS Principal Tom Sica; CHS Social Studies Teacher/Facilitator Chris Herr; CHS Social Studies Teacher Rebecca Tancrede; Assistant Principal James Corkum

Committee Chair Alana Kimball called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m. The agenda included proposals for two new Concord High School Social Studies courses, a brief update on the new Rundlett Middle School report cards and the exploration of a Mandarin Chinese course, and the presentation of the fall enrollment report.

CHS Principal Tom Sica introduced the team to present two new Social Studies courses, noting that the social studies department has put in a strong effort and many hours of work to develop the proposals. Assistant Principal Jim Corkum described the criteria for the group that developed the courses, including that they be multi-disciplinary, relevant, authentic, offer opportunities for inquiry, be electives for grades 9-12, align with guiding standards, and focus on facilitating students to become informed and engaged citizens. With these criteria in mind, the group developed two courses: American Popular Culture and Social Movements: Power to the People.

Chris Herr, teacher and Social Studies Facilitator, provided an overview of the proposed American Popular Culture course, a semester-long elective for students in grades 9-10. A written course description was provided:

Students will identify what popular culture is, analyze the factors that shape popular culture, and evaluate how popular culture shapes the students themselves. Using an inquiry approach, students will analyze the negative and positive impacts of popular culture on their lives while drawing from many social studies disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history, cultural studies and American studies. Students will analyze how factors such as ethnicity, race, gender, class and others are shaped and reshaped by popular culture. Students will engage with sources in television, film, advertising, popular music, social media/"cyberculture" and others while refining their reading, writing, research and critical thinking skills. At its core, this course presents an opportunity for students to investigate and better understand a part of their everyday lives that will make them more knowledgeable and effective citizens.

Mr. Herr noted that the department has sufficient resources to teach these courses without additional funding.
Jennifer Patterson indicated her enthusiasm for this course, noting that she anticipated that the course would bring history and civics to life. She asked how this course would interact with the Grade 11 English course that focuses on media literacy. Mr. Herr responded that he had reviewed the class with the English Facilitator and she was excited about the course, commenting that media literacy is a necessary part of every subject area, including social studies. He believed that the course would be different, but might generate questions that students could explore further in English 11.

Maureen Redmond-Scura asked for a general overview of the arc of the curriculum over the semester. Mr. Herr indicated that the department had not worked out all details of the course; this work would be done during the second semester if the course was approved. He expected they would begin with an exploration of the definition of popular culture and how the definition has changed over time. They would then focus on different media types, driven to some extent by student interest and current events.

Tom Croteau asked about the impact of this course on enrollment in other social studies courses. Mr. Herr responded that there are no courses that the department proposed to drop. Students would make choices based on their interests. He predicted that there might be fewer sections of a few other courses, possibly *Street Law* or *Sociology*.

Ms. Redmond-Scura asked why one of the courses was designated for grades 9/10 (*Popular Culture*) and the other for grades 11/12 (*Social Movements*). Mr. Herr explained that several factors were involved, including the maturity level of the students to handle the material, and the current Social Studies course progression. He noted that the course related to social movements would build on knowledge students would gain in the US History course. The inquiry expectations for the social movements course would be more sophisticated. He also noted that the *Popular Culture* course would be the department’s second elective open to 9th graders. *Big History*, the other course available for 9th graders, is currently running with three sections.

Rebecca Tancrede, Social Studies Teacher, described the proposed course *Social Movements: Power to the People*. A course description was provided:

*Through the lenses of power, resistance, and identity, this course introduces American social movements from the 1950s to the present. Drawing from history, sociology, and politics, students will examine a range of social movements, including civil rights and Black Power, feminist movements, gay and lesbian liberation and LGBTQ movements, and Black Lives Matter. Through student-centered inquiry and discussion, students will examine the question of how social activism across the political spectrum has changed since the mid-20th century. This course is available to 11th and 12th grade students as a Social Studies department ½ credit elective.*

Ms. Tancrede noted that the course would begin with an overview of social movements, what they are, how they happen, and where and how they start. Students would discuss historical aspects, and be involved in relevant student-driven and authentic inquiries. They would look at media sources and discuss bias. Argumentative writing and informed action would also be part of the course. While the focus would be primarily on the United States, teachers are open to a broader, global look.
Jim Richards asked whether students would study only liberal movements, or also, for example, the Free State and Christian Coalition movements. Ms. Tancrede responded that they would aim for a balance of various movements within the political spectrum that have historical significance. Mr. Herr responded that there would be a broad approach to this course, and that part of training citizens is expanding their horizons.

Ms. Patterson said she was interested in the question of a global perspective, given the experiences of many CHS students who are originally from other countries. This could bring an important lens and viewpoint to the course.

Mr. Croteau asked about the assessment process within this course: how will success be measured? Mr. Herr indicated that, if approval was given, a smaller group of teachers or the whole department would again examine the learning objectives given the discussion, and then move to assessment. The teachers would design assessments that would allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Mr. Croteau said he would be interested in seeing the results of the assessments in the future.

Pam Wicks noted that the Social Studies standards would soon be reviewed and updated at the state level, and asked if this would cause a problem if the course was built on old standards. Mr. Herr indicated that the course was built based on newer national guiding standards provided by the National Council for the Social Studies, the same standards that the District Social Studies Committee and the state would be looking at when they undertake this review. When the state standards do change, the high school would review their required courses based on any revisions.

The Committee voted 4-0 to move the two course proposals forward to the full Board for consideration at its January meeting (moved by Ms. Redmond-Scura, seconded by Ms. Wicks).

Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley provided an update on the new Rundlett Middle School report card, which the committee discussed at a previous meeting. The report card was first issued at the end of the first quarter in November. The report card content was completely new, and revised software for grading and reporting was used, so there were some challenges for teachers in the past months. The report from the recent parent-teacher conferences was positive, indicating that students and parents were understanding the changes and teachers were feeling more comfortable. She noted the work still to be done to refine the process; professional learning opportunities for teachers will be offered, to delve more deeply into topics related to competency grading.

Mr. Richards participated in the parent-teacher conferences and commended teachers for staying very late and for taking the time to talk to every parent there and to explain the entire process. Ms. Palley noted that many teachers go even beyond the designated evenings, meeting with parents in the weeks before and after. Ms. Kimball indicated that some parents were seeking more private time for conferences with teachers at the middle school level, and that some parents were still looking for more information about grading. Superintendent Forsten indicated that all parents are encouraged to contact teachers with any questions or to schedule more in-depth conference times. Ms. Wicks noted that
Principal McCollum has been clear in his communication to parents that teachers are available to speak or meet with parents at other times and that there is no need to wait for or rely only on the established conference evening.

Ms. Palley provided a brief update on an earlier request by a student to consider a Mandarin Chinese course at CHS. An organization with a connection to the Chinese government sponsors Chinese language study in the United States, with teachers paid by the organization, in K-12 and college settings. The high school went through a review process with this request that included discussions with administrators and teachers, including the World Language Department. In addition, they surveyed student interest in world language study and collected a great deal of data. There are students interested in studying Chinese and a few other languages as well. Some students expressed an interest in studying more than one language. She noted there would not be a proposal at this time about a Chinese course, but CHS would continue to discuss and consider its offerings and potential proposals for the future. At this time, Concord students can also participate in free VLACS courses, which currently offers two years of Chinese study.

Superintendent Forsten provided the annual enrollment report. She indicated that the declining enrollment trend seen over the last years continued. There are 93 fewer students in the District this year compared to last, a 2% drop. Ms. Wicks asked if this was related, in part, to the recent federal resettlement slowdown. Superintendent Forsten indicated that there has been a drop in the number of these students.

Over a 10-year period, the District has had a 12% drop overall, with 612 students fewer students. This has been consistent with state enrollment numbers. The district’s current K-12 enrollment is 4,442.

At the elementary level, two schools (Abbot-Downing and Christa McAuliffe) had a slight increase in enrollment, while three had a decrease in enrollment, with an overall 2% decrease. At both ADS and CMS there has been an increase in the number of first graders compared to the previous year’s kindergarteners. At the elementary schools, class sizes range from 16-25. Last year the range was 17-27. Overall, the average class size was 20 students, providing a little room to grow.

After increasing slightly from the 2015-2016 school year to 2016-2017, there was a slight decrease this year, with 18 fewer students. A slight increase was projected for next year. CHS has 47 fewer students than last year, with a total enrollment of 1,630, a 2% decrease from last year. Superintendent Forsten noted that this was consistent with statewide trends. Average class size at CHS is 25; there are only three classes with under 15 students this year.

Ms. Kimball asked about the number of school-age children in Concord, including those being homeschooled and those in private school. Ms. Palley indicated that approximately 100 students are homeschooled, and that this has been a steady number over the years. Superintendent Forsten indicated that she is putting together a RFP for a demographic study, which will provide more in-depth information. Mr. Richards asked about enrollment trends in neighboring districts, including Bow, Hopkinton and Merrimack.
Valley. Superintendent Forsten responded that she has not looked at this recently, but that a Concord Monitor reporter contacted her recently and indicated that both Bow and Hopkinton have seen some increase. Mr. Richards noted that Bow has taken on students from another town, with Dunbarton attending Bow High School. Superintendent Forsten indicated that she can prepare that information for the Board.

Mr. Croteau inquired about the staff and physical capacity of CHS. The school enrollment was over 2,000 students at one time. He asked whether there was an opportunity to invite students from other towns to tuition into the high school. Superintendent Forsten indicated that the District is open to conversations with other communities.

Ms. Patterson noted that CHS has done a good job of creatively combining classes so the courses can be offered. Very few classes have numbers below the class-size policy, indicating that the school’s administration is being thoughtful about the use of their resources.

Superintendent Forsten noted that the entire enrollment report, with detailed information about each of the high school’s courses, could be found on the District website.

The Concord Regional Technical Center (CRTC) enrollment is the highest it has been in 15 years, with 615 students attending. Merrimack Valley and Kearsarge School Districts have significantly increased their participation in the program.

Mr. Croteau complimented the CRTC and its director, Steve Rothenberg, for the strong programs being offered. He recently visited the CRTC and encouraged others to do so. Ms. Redmond-Scura noted that dynamic and interesting programs are offered at the CRTC, with the potential to attract people to Concord. Mr. Richards indicated that CRTC students have access to many extra-curricular opportunities, including competitions, related to the various programs, which are very impressive.

The CRTC offers a two-year cycle for each program. Legislative change now allows sophomores to participate. Health Science and Auto Technology were the largest programs, while Stagecraft, Teacher Preparation and Fire Science were smaller programs.

Information about Special Education, Title 1 and Title 3 programs was not included in this report. Information about Student Services will be on the agenda for the January Instructional Committee meeting. Committee members expressed an interest in hearing about and discussing the use of instructional assistants, out-of-district trends and behavioral intervention, especially for the youngest students, and early childhood programs.

The Committee voted 4-0 to adjourn (motioned by Ms. Wicks, seconded by Ms. Redmond-Scura).

The meeting adjourned at 7:18p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alana Kimball, Chair
Donna Palley, Recorder