Instructional Committee
November 12, 2014

Committee members present: Jennifer Patterson, acting chair, Rusty Cofrin, Clint Cogswell (appointed), Kass Ardinger (appointed)

Committee members absent: Barb Higgins, Tom Croteau

Other Board members present: Oliver Spencer, member-elect Alana Kimball, member-elect Jim Richards

Administrators present: Superintendent Christine Rath; Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley; CHS principal Gene Connolly; CHS Assistant Principals Steve Rothenberg, Ben Greene, Tom Crumrine, Ronna Cadarette; English Department curriculum facilitator Linda Lawson, Math Department curriculum facilitator Tammy Hatcher

There were two agenda items: a presentation on competency grading at CHS, and the proposed calendar for 2015-2016.

Competency Grading

Gene Connolly reported on current activities at CHS to communicate with parents and students about the changes in grading approaches at CHS.

Tom Crumrine reviewed the topic of competencies and noted that competency work has been going on at CHS for a number of years. The NH State Minimum Standards adopted in 2005 required all high schools to develop competencies for all courses. The Minimum Standards for School Approval adopted in 2014 now mandate that School Boards require that graduation be based on the mastery of competencies. Mr. Crumrine reviewed some major reasons for competency-based education, including clear identification of the learning targets, opportunities for practice and good feedback.

With respect to grading based on competencies, up until 2012-2013 teachers had discretion about how to assess and grading. Beginning in 2013-2014, teachers were expected to align all their classroom work with one or more of their course competencies. Teachers were also expected to have reassessment procedures in place, but there was not one way to do reassessment. CHS faculty spent time during the year sharing their practices with one another and providing ideas about how to implement reassessment school-wide.

For 2014-2015, CHS administrators reviewed the research, models from other high schools and feedback from teachers and proposed the following guidelines.

- Formative assessment (including homework/practice) is important but would not be calculated into the grade.
• Formative assessments are needed to give feedback to students prior to summative assessments.
• Formative assessments guide instruction.
• The implementation was done to be true to competency grading and base student grades on how well they understand and apply the content material.
• Crimson Code would be reported in Quarter 2 to “tell the story better.”

Tammy Hatcher and Linda Lawson explained the thinking behind separating homework from the final grade so students did not get a high grade due to completing homework but not mastering the competencies; or a low grade because of not handing in homework but mastering the competencies.

Oliver Spencer asked for clarification about whether homework was expected; the response was that homework was important but had not been calculated into the end-of-quarter grade. The high school team noted that this was changing.

Kass Ardinger asked for clarification about a situation where a student did not do well on the summative test due to performance anxiety. Ms. Lawson noted that there can be different forms of final assessment and the student would be given the opportunity to do a reassessment that would better assess the student’s mastery.

Ben Greene reviewed what has been going well: a consistent philosophy about competencies and thoughtful and effective formative assessment.

Steve Rothenberg reviewed the challenges, including
• the translation of “what counts” to students and parents;
• using formative assessments to guide instruction and give student the next steps to learning;
• developing a variety of summative assessments;
• providing supports for competency recovery;
• allowing students to advance upon mastery of a competency;
• assessing the Crimson Code;
• creating an atmosphere that embraces “grit.”

Ronna Cadarette reported on one change that has already been put into place: in the second quarter, the rule will change – summative assessment will be 80% of the grade with 20% allocated to assessment of two important components of the Crimson Code (10% punctual and prepared; 10% active participants in their own learning.)

Mr. Cogswell asked if competencies and assessments are the same across sections of a course; Mr. Connolly indicated that this was more the case now than in the past. Mr. Cogswell asked if this was the case in English; Ms. Lawson indicated that the English Department had many common assessments and were actually working on common formative assessments. While students could be reading different texts, the competencies for that course are the same.
Jennifer Patterson said that feedback from students included that there were different expectations and systems in different courses. Some teachers use a 4-point scale; others a 5-point scale. This is an area the high school still needs to address.

Mr. Spencer asked how staff can emphasize to students the importance of being punctual and on time. CHS staff responded that the best method is to have repeated conversations with students and teach students how to self-assess on these “work study habits.”

Mr. Cogswell asked about the differences among teachers in the ways in which students were given an opportunity for reassessment. Ms. Cadarette showed the Committee the reassessment document and acknowledged that this is a challenging area, with different teachers and students requiring different amounts and kinds of work in order to be eligible to take a reassessment. Ms. Ardinger noted that perhaps some students get discouraged because the class is going on and they haven’t mastered the competency.

Ms. Cadarette showed the Crimson Code posters that are in place at the high school and reported that there is now a group of teachers and administrators who will get feedback from students and parents and will make some recommendations for further changes. In addition, this group will develop a rubric for the aspects of the Code that now will be included in the grade.

Mr. Rothenberg reviewed the major lessons learned; there is a strong belief in the concept of competencies, including the opportunity for reassessment, and implementation must be “do-able.”

The Committee thanked the high school staff for their presentation; Mr. Connolly noted that they would return as their work developed. Superintendent Rath informed the committee that the Minimum Standards require School Boards to modify or adapt existing policies to reflect this competency approach.

Proposed Calendar

Superintendent Rath presented a draft calendar for 2015-2016, which closely mirrors the calendar for 2014-2015. The calendar has the four professional days that were first approved in 2014-2015. The staff has had two days so far this year that have been well used and worthwhile. Superintendent Rath noted that the November PD day was being moved to coincide with Election Day so that schools could be used as polling places without students that day.

Superintendent Rath noted that the CEA needs to agree to the sidebar that permits the start of the school year before Labor Day.

Ms. Patterson, acting Chair, asked Mr. Cogswell and Ms. Ardinger to serve as members of the committee.

The Committee voted 4-0 to recommend this calendar to the full Board at its December meeting.

Christine Rath, Recorder