

# Weston Public Schools Community Update

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*This periodic publication comes to you from the Weston Board of Education.*

*Reaching out to all stakeholders strengthens the district's essential partnership with the community and celebrates its progress as a world-class educational system. Please feel free to contact us with your feedback or questions at any time.*

*Contact information is provided on the back of this newsletter.*

## Looking Ahead: Sustained Excellence in Education

*Colleen A. Palmer, Ph.D.*

Weston Public Schools is steadfast in its commitment to maintain its status as a premiere, high-performing district. Every student matters. The district takes pride in knowing its students and personalizes educational pathways for their individual needs. As a smaller school district, we enjoy a sense of community on campus, enhanced by a strong partnership with our families and neighbors in Weston.

We commonly challenge the status quo in our forward-thinking, innovative, and research-based approaches. The district's core work is to ensure an outstanding learning experience for all of our students and to strengthen the district in every aspect of our work. Data are used strategically to measure our progress within a framework of continuous improvement in support of educational excellence. In this way, our schools strive to assure a

quality education in every classroom, every school day, and for every student.

To guide the district's work and to establish foundational goals, the district updated its Strategic Plan in 2012, and reviews this on an annual basis.

Additionally, a Master Planning Team was formed

to monitor the implementation of the Strategic Plan and to develop a set of key indicators by which we define the quality of our district. These indicators will measure both student achievement outcomes and district operations. By collecting and analyzing data re-



garding the current status of each indicator, new goals or areas of improvement will be determined. When we measure our success, we do not want to be overly reliant on external metrics that are crafted by organizations outside of our district. Yes, SAT,

AP, and other similar scores are critical to us, but they are not adequate to inform our practices in all areas or completely define us as a district. We are more than just test scores. We also value our own internal assessments, including performance-based assessments such as the AIM Cornerstone or a student's Writing Portfolio, as well as a compendium of other measures.



This team will define key quality indicators of our district that we consider as both internal and external measures of our progress. An essential resource for this work will be the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence, a research-based framework for organizational quality. During this inaugural year of development work for the team, there are administrator, teacher, paraprofessional, and Board of Education representatives involved in the foundational work. After the groundwork for measurement is established this year, parent, community, and student representatives will join the team for the 2015-16 school year.

As all of the work moved forward and preliminary data were reviewed, the district sought feedback from the Master Planning Team to identify five areas of focus during the 2014-15 school year. These include: 1) writing, 2) mathematics, 3) STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathemat-

ics) embedded opportunities, 4) pathways to success, and 5) healthy learning environment.

## Writing

- The district has been engaged in a multi-year initiative to improve preK-12 writing achievement. There is a concerted effort to engage teachers in professional development in writing to model effective writing for a variety of purposes and audiences, provide students with targeted feedback on their writing, and involve students in self-assessment of their work.
  - At the K-5 level, there has been an emphasis on improving writing stamina and volume with our young writers through the writers' workshop model, as well as a focus on strengthening writing units in each of these grades.
  - At the 6-12 level, teachers in English and social studies are involved in the development of a writing portfolio process in grades 8 and 10. One of the goals of the portfolio process is to support the transition from middle to high school by aligning the expectations for writing between the two schools.

## Mathematics

- We are amidst a curriculum renewal cycle for our K-12 math program, which continues to be a high priority for the district. Curriculum renewal in Weston begins with a research phase into new standards and programmatic resources to support the program and then moves into an implementation phase with a strong emphasis on providing teachers with the professional development that is essential for making the desired shifts in instruction.
- Our overall goal in math is to develop highly ef-

fective problem-solvers. To that end, our district is focused on developing deep conceptual understanding of math concepts, strong procedural fluency, and the ability to apply mathematical thinking to new situations. We draw on a variety of resources to support this endeavor, including the adoption of new curricular resources in grades K-8.

- Our implementation plan has been purposeful, providing teachers with professional development to enhance their instructional practice.
  - 2011-12 – Pilot
  - 2012-13 – Grades K-2 and 6
  - 2013-14 – Grades 3-4 and 7
  - 2014-15 – Grades 5 and 8
- There will be an upcoming Tri-State Consortium visit in March 2015 whereby educators from other high-performing school districts in the Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey region will assess our math program and provide us with feedback on how to continue to improve.

## STEM

- The district will be conducting an examination of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) opportunities afforded to students. We understand and value the important role that a vibrant STEM curriculum serves within a comprehensive curriculum. There is a commitment to explore how we may augment these programs as a preK-12 system.
- As part of our study, we are seeking to de-

fine what an exemplary STEM program looks like in Weston. We have a number of key elements in place, but recognize that we may be able to make stronger connections between the disciplines through curricular and co-curricular opportunities that engage students in the fields of robotics, scientific research, coding, and pre-engineering.

- With the increasing demand in the workplace for highly qualified individuals who have expertise in various STEM fields, it is important for Weston to continue to grow these programs.

## Pathways to Success

- Ensuring that each student has a personalized pathway to success, the district continues to explore opportunities for learning that best meet individual needs.
- The assurance that every student will have a pathway supporting a productive and appropriate post-graduate experience cascades through our work at every level. Students prepared for their next level of work, and informed of career opportunities, link readiness with access so that graduates from our district will have thoughtfully designed plans for success for their future.
- The idea that every student, every day, is afforded





educational opportunities for success also encompasses the goal that overall the performance outcomes of the district continue to show growth, while any difference in performance between groups of students is minimized. This means that achievement levels are reviewed by any relevant subgroup, e.g. gender, regular education/special education classification, etc. to ensure no group of students is overlooked in any aspect of its educational journey.

### Healthy Learning Environment

- Both students and adults in our school system thrive in their work if they are appropriately supported and enjoy an engaging, comfortable, and safe school environment. From the physical plant to the concerted efforts to prevent bullying, every aspect of our school culture impacts how students and staff function and feel about their daily experiences. This focus goal incorporates the social-emotional component of school, as well as the physical safety of all members of our district.
- School Climate surveys will be conducted in November for both students and their parents/guardians. This critical feedback will help in-

form the district of any areas of growth and confirm areas where both students and families feel the district is doing well.

- The district is also cognizant of the daily demands placed upon our students for school-related work and responsibilities. The high school administration continues to work to moderate the level of stress on students, especially at pivotal periods of the school year.
- A staff that is supported and is afforded meaningful and relevant professional development opportunities continuously seeks to improve its own practices and enjoys a higher level of job satisfaction. The district values its professional development plan for its staff and embraces lifelong learning by all. Teachers that learn create classrooms that learn.

A district of 2,400 talented students and a team of approximately 400 dedicated professionals bring forth much energy, passion, and tenacity for learning each day of school. It is our privilege to support the students of Weston in their educational journey. Our greatest indicator of success is realized through all of the stories of alumni who report back to us that they were prepared for the challenges after graduation and who are flourishing in their current continuous pathways to success.

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