



Lexington Public Schools

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To: Dr. Paul B. Ash
Members of the Lexington School Committee

From: Carol A. Pilarski

Re: Standards-Based Report Card: Status Report Year 1

Date: June 11, 2013

As you know, the Lexington Public Schools proudly introduced the pilot implementation of the district's newly created Standards-Based Report Card (SBRC) for students in grades K-5 during the 2012 - 2013 academic year. As we are near completing the first year of full implementation of this new reporting tool, Louise Lipsitz and I would like to share with you a status report.

First of all, it should be duly noted that the standards-based report card committee, along with our K-5 principals, the entire elementary staff, the district's Data-Base team, the integration technology specialists and technology trainers demonstrated extraordinary team work as we collectively embarked upon this challenging effort. Anything that requires such a dramatic shift in culture necessitates the kind of collective thinking, planning, and follow-through that was exhibited by this team. This collaborative group worked diligently and tirelessly over the course of this past year to ensure a successful roll-out of the new report card for all constituencies: teachers, students, parents/guardians.

As you will recall, the newly adopted report card was designed in order to more effectively communicate the status of student progress in meeting appropriate grade level, year-end goals. This new reporting instrument specifically outlines those standards that should be met by each student, at each grade level, in all academic areas, including pro-social behaviors. As promised at the onset of this project, we have been consistently evaluating the status of the implementation with the entire elementary team of teachers and principals. We are happy to report that considering that the Standards-Based Report Card represents a significant change from the previous report card, our staff has overwhelmingly agreed that the experience itself, as well as the intended outcomes, though challenging, have been most positive and successful.

Clearly, as with any new initiative, there have been suggestions for improvement and slight modifications. At the end of April, our K-5 staff was surveyed and they provided us with information that will guide our summer work and the district's professional learning plan for next year, in an effort to further advance and support this important initiative. In this report, we intend to share some of the highlights, challenges, and intended next steps, as we move into our second year of implementation.

1. **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- Three years of careful and thoughtful planning before the implementation led to an ability to draw on the ideas and innovative thinking of multiple constituencies, while also giving us the opportunity to incorporate the Common Core standards and other state curricular updates into our work.
- Teachers report they are happy to have replaced the previous decade-old report card as they concur that the new report card more accurately reflects what is being taught and expected in terms of both content and expectations for learning outcomes . . . what is it we want all students to know and be able to do.
- The professional learning schedule that accompanied the implementation plan was greatly appreciated by teachers both by grade-level and building based opportunities. Teachers agreed that the “roll-out” plan for this project was thoughtfully done, providing ample time during the school day to work in teams.
- Collaboration and increased clarity have been the key outcomes. PLCs have developed an even more powerful focus on both student work and clarification of learning goals.
- A number of teachers took on leadership roles as updates to curriculum, revised expectations for student learning, and clarification and alignment of student standards evolved over the course of the research and implementation process.
- Teachers led workshops for peers in curriculum alignment, collaborative analysis of student work, identification of teaching points and strategies.
- The SBRC has kept teachers, parents, and students focused on the desired outcomes for year end learning goals. The new SBRC led teachers to reflect upon their practice in unprecedented ways with an incredibly strong focus on both student work and curricular goals throughout the year, leading in many cases to a movement from ‘my students’ to ‘our students’ at various grade level meetings throughout the schools. Teachers are engaged in a sense of mutual ownership and responsibility of programmatic expectations and student learning.
- Elementary teacher participation in professional learning courses increased as many of our after-school offerings were purposely centered on aspects directly related to the SBRC – “Allies, Achievers, and Risk-takers” for ProSocial work; “The Standards for Mathematical Practice” for the new math practice standards; “Lesson Study” for developing innovative lesson plans that reflect group analysis of methodology and student output; “Jumpstart Your Reading Workshop” for working on implementing and assessing within the workshop model; “The Teachers College Summer Writing Institute” for incorporating the updated Literacy standards into our LPS curriculum goals.
- Teachers have worked much more in teams to create common assessments and to look at student work collaboratively across grade level classrooms to help increase and ensure common understandings of learning goals and outcomes.
- Much of this curricular and instructional work led to further expansion of Atlas Rubicon (the district’s curriculum mapping tool), as both a resource and a repository for longitudinal planning and lesson planning.
- The LPS SBRC Teacher Implementation Guides for each grade level and course were designed with clarity and utility. Teachers expressed gratitude for the information. These guides were often seen at PLC meetings as teachers contributed additional materials and information from their own practices.

- The SBRC has given a greater and deeper focus in conversations at Parent/Teacher conferences.
- At some schools, teachers began creating templates for keeping track of student progress against the standards, and then stored the template models in staff room binders so that others could use and adapt them across grade levels.
- Curriculum is more closely aligned and articulated as a result of grade level teacher discussions around the SBRC – both horizontally and vertically.
- The conversion to entering grades electronically in X2/Aspen is preferred to the paper/pencil task.

2. **CHALLENGES:**

- The process of completing the new report card has been time consuming, particularly in this first year, as teachers were learning both the standards and the technology. The challenges of learning a new system of grading, a new series of performance indicators, new curriculum (in some cases), new technology, and new forms of communicating information with parents created some significant challenges for our elementary staff – and they responded with creative and innovative ways to measure student progress over time, passionate discussions about student work, curiosity about their day-to-day practice, enthusiasm for the opportunity to collaborate and innovate with peers (both within their schools and across the district), and a feeling that they were finally able to present to parents a reporting instrument that more accurately and more specifically reflected the curricula being implemented and their students' progress towards mastery within those curricula.
- While it was challenging to get the teachers who were not on the SBRC Committee up to speed on the research, the necessity for the change, and the changes in content, curriculum, and grading protocols. Having said that, the faculty responded with keen interest, appreciation for the work that had been completed thus far, and an almost palpable 'growth mindset' that this new way of doing things was going to be far superior to the previous way of doing things.
- Teachers needed time (which was carefully allocated in our planning, although it could always be more...) – to plan new lessons and units to reflect the standards, time to create assessments that would measure student progress with clarity and purpose, time to question, time to reflect, time to share. While we provided plenty of time in the fall, and required less time in the spring, teachers still will need time built into the school calendar to refine the work (whether in PLCs or during scheduled PD days or Principal Days).
- The technology is fairly stable, but it needs some 'human factor engineering' work – e.g., the ability to see first term report card grades beside the entry spaces for second term report card grades. This work is being pursued by our Data Base office who works with X2 in managing technical programming issues.
- While teachers have done an exemplary job with both the adoption of the standards and their work to implement them across their curricula, they will still need time to process the changes and reflect upon their practice in order to get the most out of the new work.

- It will also be important to provide structured, consistent opportunities during PL times for teachers to collaborate across the district on SBRC implementation, particularly as the faculty has indicated that these times have been very helpful for them as they refine and re-imagine curriculum.
- We still need to create authentic, realistic, pragmatic links between general education and special education with regard to drawing upon the talents of both groups in order to most accurately address student learning needs in terms of the SBRC.

3. **NEXT STEPS:**

- Offer increased professional learning and time for developing rubrics aimed at increased inter-rater reliability.
- Continue to have informational forums for parents – either through Principal Coffees, PTA meetings, or through other venues to further the understanding of the SBRC and the performance indicators.
- Design PL centered on getting the most out of the technology we use for entering SBRC grades and information.
- Introduce the SBRC to new elementary teachers early in the year – perhaps as one of the first steps in the Mentoring/Coaching process – so that the standards (and student progress towards them) becomes the focus of lesson and unit planning right from the beginning.
- Introduce new teachers to the notion that the first SBRC in January should not have any really big surprises for parents; teachers should have expressed concerns with clarity during the fall conference and/or contacted parents if things had changed prior to the report card going home.
- Create a stronger connection with the middle schools so that they can see how the students will be coming to their schools with a very different set of understandings and skills than they may have had just a few short years ago – e.g., because of the new Standards for Mathematical Practice and the Contexts for Learning units, students now have greater perseverance, a higher tolerance for both ambiguity and differences in solutions, and an expectation that their work will be questioned and analyzed by peers and/or teachers, and that they, in turn, will need to explain their thinking.
- Plan to continue the work of the SBRC Committee – either in its current form or re-constituted – to ensure that the work is updated as the State Frameworks and Common Core Standards are adapted in the coming years, and that we continue to offer opportunities for feedback from teachers and parents.
- Plan to collect feedback from our parents and guardians via an on-line survey that is scheduled to be released on June 24, 2013 when the end-of-year report cards are distributed to students. A letter requesting parental input will be included in every child's report card envelope. (See attached DRAFT of the letter and the survey.)
- There will continue to be two sets of parent/teacher conferences. There has been a change, however, in dates for one week of the elementary fall conferences (please see the revised 2013 -2014 calendar attached to the end of this report). Elementary conferences will take place in the fall on October 31 and November.

4. CONCLUSION:

Co-chair of this committee, Louise Lipsitz, Principal of the Hastings School, and I will look forward to meeting with you on Tuesday, June 11 to present the highlights of this information and to answer any questions you might have.

I must express my gratitude and acknowledgement to the educators listed below for not only their expert work, but their unwavering, and untiring commitment to this project. They have worked hard, but together we have unanimously felt that our experience was satisfying and incredibly productive. . . we even had fun along the way! They have been an amazing group of professionals to work with! I have included their names below for your information. I am personally proud and indebted to them for all they have done.

Standards-Based Report Card Committee	
Carol Pilarski	Laura Lees
Louise Lipsitz	Jeff Leonard
Marie-Louise Bean	Lisa Maffei
Michele Carter	Kathy McCarthy
Patty Cascio	Karen McCarthy
Robyn Grant	Lynne Murray
Amanda Doyle	Katherine Pyskaty
Jen Dugan-Agne	Susan Sepe
Denise Dundon	Eamonn Sheehan
Iris Goldfarb	Ellen Silberman
Sean Hagan	Lauren Stebbins
Ryan Heeden	Leonard Swanton
Jane Hundley	Kirsten Sweet
James Kane	Karen Tripoli
	Mary Yardley