

CURRICULUM NOTES

Staff development 2008

In this issue

- Courses of study under review for 2009-10 changes
- Students experience STEM classroom units
- WHS science students put their creativity to work on insect biodiversity displays
- Several major initiatives are underway to keep the CIP a working document
- Value added data helps teams develop goals
- Classroom STEM grants bring lessons to live in LBMS classrooms

The beginning of the 2008-09 school year has been marked by professional staff development in a variety of areas. September's development activities, depending on your grade level, touched on ProgressBook training, DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) training, a response to intervention introductions, projectors and online resources, and developing School Improvement Plans as they relate to the district Continuous Improvement Plan.

October was a continuation of many of those ideas. Projectors and online resources were introduced to the lower grades, along with value added data and autism strategies. Middle and upper grades learned about united streaming and found online resources to complement curriculum maps. LBMS staff also began working with STEM integrated units in math, science, Language Arts, Social Studies and the Humanities. WHS staff worked on MAX (Motivation Acquisition eXtension) Teaching strategies to target research-based practices in preparation for block scheduling. Sixteen WHS staff shadowed Hudson High School staff, who have used the modified block schedule for 10 years. A group of WHS students will shadow Hudson students to experience the block schedule for themselves.

The November PD day was devoted to exposing K-6 to STEM. Staff were given a hands-on STEM experience as part of the district's goal for vertical articulation. Formative assessment strategies were presented to grades 3-6, focusing on increasing student engagement. The session provided strategies for teachers to take back to the classrooms. LBMS staff received the MAX teaching strategies instruction. WHS staff underwent a diversity experience to prepare students for the 21st century marketplace by learning to collaborate and communicate with different cultures. WHS also had building-level professional development on block scheduling.

Reviewing courses of study

The Academic Services department is working with the high school's English, science and foreign language departments to review and discuss small revisions in courses of study to better ensure consistency across high school courses. Some courses require tweaking due to changes in programmatic study.

Academic Services Director Pam Griebel said the largest review area will be mathematics, which will cover PK to 12.

At LBMS, teams of teachers worked with a representative from the SMART Consortium for Science and Math, two engineers from Cleveland State University to develop STEM units that eventually will be embedded in the middle school curriculum. Griebel is working to incorporate our STEM community partners into these curriculum development meetings.

Staff Kudos

LBMS Language Arts teacher Sandy Sopko will have her research findings published in a national education journal early next year.

Sopko's research, "The Impact of Prior Knowledge on Reading Comprehension of Achievement Test Text," will be published in the Journal of Teacher Research.

Congratulations!

Students experience STEM classroom units

Team White students at LBMS embraced STEM as they participated in an interdisciplinary unit entitled "Bridges." Students began their endeavor by interviewing a bridge engineer from R.E. Warner and Associates, who offered design tips and shared his experiences as a bridge inspector.

A trip on the Goodtime III allowed students to examine bridges over the Cuyahoga River. In math and science classes, companies were formed and roles assigned, including project manager, architect, accountant and carpenter. The math room served as the warehouse where materials were acquired. Balance sheets and checks were managed. Bridges were constructed in math and science classes.

The history of bridge development was examined and analyzed in Social Studies. A web conference was held with Dunbar and Pitcher Advertising and Promotional Agency, which led to the creation of company names, logos, slogans, fliers, banners and persuasive proposal paragraphs in Language Arts.

Student-designed banners decorated the hall as bridges were displayed during LBMS Open House. Team White students are conducting strength tests to determine how much weight their well-designed bridges will support. There was assessment of the product and the process.

Students gave the Bridge unit rave reviews. Teachers involved in the process were Mike Bee, Cathy DuBois, Sally Fetko, Darlene Fossesco, Nancy Laing Driver and Erin Zablontny.

LBMS teachers continued their STEM professional development in October by working with the SMART consortium and Dr. Stephen Duffy of CRT Technologies on STEM unit integration. The two entities are now helping LBMS staff write relevant and engaging STEM problems for students to solve.

STEM business partners also will come together in early December to provide interactive STEM days for students. The STEMapalooza days will expose students to potential STEM careers.

What's bugging you?

WHS science teacher Keith Ohnhaus really knows how to “bug” his students. For several years he’s been challenging students to creatively classify and display biodiversity and how it relates to living things.

Students went into backyards, wooded areas and even crossed state lines to collect insects and then mounted them in a variety of settings. Grades were based on using a strong container to turn in the collection, finding a variety of insects from a variety of locations and correctly labeling the insects.

Students created scenes from the hit TV show Deal or No Deal, a LEGO racetrack, an insect chess game, a Guitar/Insectmania scene outside the Rock’n’Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, a Bugology board and bugs playing football and basketball, among others.

Students who did not want to partake in the insect collection assignment were given an alternate essay assignment. Ohnhaus said students could work individually or in groups, adding that he looks forward to how creatively his students display their collections each year.



Deal or No Deal: Bug Edition

CIP update

Our Continuous Improvement Plan is “front –loaded,” meaning that several major initiatives were scheduled to be underway or even partially completed early in the 2008-09 school year.

Obviously, technology goals are at the forefront of this year’s goals, and ProgressBook (grades 6-12) and acquisition/use of online resources and new hardware have received their due attention.

Committees are being put into place to study extended learning opportunities (e.g., full-day kindergarten, post-secondary options), to acquire or develop a data management system and to establish the structures characteristic of a “Response to Intervention” model.

All of the aforementioned initiatives, as well as others imbedded in the CIP, are ultimately designed to support student achievement.

Page seven of the CIP document lists focus areas and performing indicators — focus area A (curriculum, instruction and alignment) and focus area B (varied learning needs) and the performance indicators associated with each provide an easy-to-read summary of our CIP focus and goals over this school year and next.

MISSION STATEMENT

We Educate for Excellence ...

Empowering all students to achieve their educational goals, to direct their lives and to contribute to society.

VISION STATEMENT

The Westlake City School District will provide a dynamic, student-centered, positive learning environment. Our district will be characterized by actively engaged learner, mutual respect, shared knowledge, pursuit of new skills and capabilities, collaborative learning, willingness to take action, a team commitment to data-driven continuous improvement and tangible results.

Curriculum Notes is a quarterly publication of the Westlake City Schools communications office. If you have questions or comments please direct them to Kim Bonvissuto at the Administration Building, (440) 250-1258 or email bonvissuto@wlake.org

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Data-based goals

After undergoing some professional development earlier in the year on value added, data teams will be assembling throughout the district to look at value added data, pose questions about the data and determine what the data is saying.

Director of Academic Services Pam Griebel said teams will look at value added and achievement data to help develop goals for schools.

“Value added encourages you to look at every achievement level of students in the district,” Griebel said. “Our responsibility is to look at all five quintiles to ensure we are maximizing student learning.”

Westlake is in its third year of value added training. Staff now have an understanding on how to read graphs and reports. Now the district is looking at the data, asking questions and developing action plans to ensure all students are achieving at their maximum potential.

Classroom STEM grants bring relevance to lessons

LBMS science teacher Sandy Vontroba won two PPG PELC grants for two STEM lessons. One lesson focuses on asteroid and meteorite impacts. Students will drop bowling balls, shot puts and crochet balls from a six-foot-high ladder. They will use probes, digital cameras and computer calculators to measure velocity, impact and spread of the ray from the impact on the Earth.

The other lesson involves conducting an archaeological dig on the LBMS campus to search for Woodland artifacts and glacier flint.

Both lessons involve all of the core subjects of science, math, language arts and history, as well as engineering, problem solving and the scientific method.

Using the web cam, students will communicate with NASA and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

“Previously, these lessons were done in the classroom on a very small scale,” Vontroba said. “Now these lessons will have more relevant and both will incorporate STEM aspects.”