



Ashland Public Schools

English Language Arts Curriculum Review Plan

Introduction:

The Ashland Public Schools is committed to the pursuit of academic excellence for all students. Our Blueprint for Continuous Student Improvement drives the work that we do every day to ensure that we meet this goal. The development and implementation of a clearly articulated curriculum in all subject areas is essential for success. In order to make certain that the curriculum that is currently in place, meets the needs of our students, is taught to fidelity, and is aligned to the standards, the district has created and adopted a curriculum review process. This is a comprehensive process in which teachers look at essential questions, data, test results, staffing levels, and professional development and create a self study by grade level and building. This self study will highlight strengths and areas of concern across all grade levels. From this self study an action plan will be created to address the needs in English Language Arts (ELA) help students attain excellence.

Committee Organization:

The following are the members of the ELA CRP Self-Study Team:

Sue Bronstein	English Liaison	High School
Mike Caira	Principal	Mindess
Dave DiGirolamo	Principal	Middle School
Emily Dreissig	Teacher	Pittaway
Aleisha Egan	English Teacher	High School
Sheila Fiandaca	Teacher	Mindess
Peter Regan	Principal	Warren
Meghan Robshaw	Teacher	Pittaway
Karen Smith	Teacher	Mindess
Kelley St. Coeur	Principal	High School
Jen Temple	Teacher	Warren
Ryan VanWyhe	Teacher	Middle School
Paul Vieira	Assistant Superintendent	Central Office

Timeline:

This committee first met in September to establish norms and create essential questions to be asked of all teachers in the department. These questions were sent to teachers in a survey form and as part of a round table discussion. Teachers had the month of October to answer each of the survey questions and on November 8th the round table discussions occurred at each grade level. Teachers met in schools and wrote the self study which was submitted on November 23, 2016. Throughout the first three weeks of December, principals and teachers had the opportunity to look at the self study to validate the findings. This validation process is critical to make certain that the information accurately represents the work that is being done in each building and grade level.

Essential Questions:

Survey

1. How are program decisions made? Inclusively? In isolation? Do all stakeholders have a voice?
2. In your opinion, what is the overall mission of the ELA department?
3. Are your current instructional resources aligned to the Common Core and do they meet the needs of our students?
4. Are the ELA courses/lessons/texts used at your grade level current and relevant, and do they reflect the growing diversity of our student population?
5. What are our writing program needs, and how might a consistent program (such as Write Traits or John Collins) enhance the development of student writing?
6. How much time is spent on writing at your grade level? How are students assessed on this writing?
7. Does your grade level have a common writing rubric for scoring assessments? If yes, is it used on all writing assignments across the subjects? If no, then what is used to score writing?
8. To what extent are all types of writing being taught at your grade level--persuasive, informative/explanatory, and narrative--and how are we measuring proficiency in each area?
9. What are the terms and techniques that are critical for literary analysis? How is literary analysis taught? How do teachers get beyond plot?
10. To what extent is MCAS data shaping the way we deliver content? (How does testing data affect the methods we use and skills we emphasize in the classroom?)
11. What tier one and tier two reading interventions and supports are available at your grade level for students who struggle in reading and writing?
12. What is the role of independent reading in your classroom, and what are the expectations for independent reading at your grade level?
13. How do we foster etymological word-part awareness (prefixes, suffixes, Greek/Latin roots) at each grade level? How often is this taught?
14. What phonology programs have you been trained in? (Foundations/Wilson, Lively Letters, Orton-Gillingham, Project Read, Wisnia-Kapp, etc.) Do you currently use any of these programs to meet the needs of your struggling readers?

15. What is the role of grammar in our K-12 ELA curriculum (and what would we like it to be)?
16. How important are handwriting and spelling instruction in the development of younger writers?
17. How and when do students learn typing skills at your grade level?
18. Have you received professional development in your current textbook or program series?
19. What portion of your current text do you use? How much do you supplement the text with outside resources?
20. If you are not using a reading/writing program, how do you ensure that you are meeting the standards set forth by the Massachusetts State Frameworks/Common Core?

Round table

1. How do we know that the curriculum is being taught to fidelity?
2. How do teachers and buildings communicate vertically to ensure continuity?
3. What is in place to support horizontal cooperation and coordination?
4. What are the basic writing expectations at each grade level? How can we better articulate those expectations?
5. How does creative writing (stories, personal narratives, plays, poetry) function as a part of the ELA curriculum at your grade level?
6. How does expository writing function as part of the ELA curriculum at your grade level?
7. Which ELA skills are emphasized, reinforced, and practiced in other disciplines and/or subject areas at your grade level?
8. How is formative assessment being used to improve instruction?
9. How clear are the ELA UBD curriculum targets for each unit, and to what extent do those targets involve the collection of data through pre-assessments and summative assessments?
10. How can we evolve our ELA curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of growing ELL and ESL populations?
11. How do ELA classes take advantage of library resources, and how might those resources be enhanced or altered to better serve district needs?
12. Which techniques are critical for rhetorical analysis of nonfiction at your grade level?
13. What basic technology skills do we hope to encourage, measure, and develop through ELA (and are they being developed equally for all students)?
14. How is technology currently being used to accomplish ELA goals?
15. How should we be developing and changing our ELA curriculum to address evolving literacy needs?
16. What realistic technological resources and opportunities might enhance student productivity and achievement? (In other words, what technology ideas should we consider for the future?)

Self Study

Teachers met to look at the survey and round table data to write the following self study. Based on the survey, round table discussion, and validation process what follows is an accurate picture of the preK-12 ELA program in the Ashland Public Schools. At the conclusion of the narrative is a list of strengths to celebrate and areas of concern for the District to work on in upcoming years.

Pittaway:

The Ashland Preschool Program is a tuition based inclusion program governed by the Ashland Public School system. It is housed in the Pittaway Elementary School building on Central Street. It consists of two full-day 4 year old classrooms, one full-day 3 year old classroom, and four half day program classrooms that teach 3 year olds in the morning, and 4 year olds in the afternoon, as well as a Leap Into Literature ELA based 4 year old enrichment class. There are two sub-separate classrooms for 3 and 4 year olds.

The preschool uses Houghton Mifflin Pre-K (HM), an ELA based curriculum that is the precursor to the Journeys curriculum, Handwriting Without Tears (HWT) as a handwriting curriculum, the Second Step character building curriculum, and Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) as an assessment tool. The HM curriculum is intended for Pre-K level use. In addition, teaching staff create supplemental activities as well as adjust provided activities to meet their students' needs based on data collection.

The preschool staff has developed a curriculum map, as well as Unit Planners that were created using the Understanding By Design model. The staff meets monthly during Curriculum Meetings to discuss, update, and reflect upon curriculum. Overall the staff thinks this curriculum is effective and they enjoy using it. Some professional development would be helpful to get all staff on an even playing field, as the staff has changed since the original professional development was offered.

Data Collection/Analysis: At the preschool level, data collection is accomplished by student observations, completion of tasks, participation in activities, and work sampling. Using the **Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment** tool the data provides individual student, classroom and program progress results. Teachers use this information to guide curriculum adjustments for students and the group. This information can also be used to guide and develop program goals.

Writing: At this level, activities are provided to develop the fine motor skills needed to hold writing tools for the intention of writing. While our focus is on pre-writing skills, we use the **Handwriting Without Tears** curriculum in each classroom. Students are provided many opportunities during the day to practice these skills independently and with support. In the Pre-K year, teachers work with students to help them write letters, numbers, and their names. As skills develop, students are given opportunities to copy thematic vocabulary words and copy sentences. For creative writing, students will dictate their

thoughts for the teacher to write down, or it is written out, and the student copies it. Teachers will also facilitate inventive writing prompting knowledge and reinforcement of letter sounds.

Instruction and ELL: Although formal instruction for English Language Learners is not mandated at the preschool level, teachers use many of the strategies associated with Sheltered English Instruction (SEI). We are noticing an increase in the number of students who are english language learners that are in the program, and find that the strategies are effective for both ELL students and regular education students. At this age, language is still developing and all can benefit from exposure to these strategies.

Technology: Technology at this level is very intentional. Classrooms will use ipads for small group teaching, and at the listening center. The program also uses a smart table, which provides learning across all domains, in addition to promoting social skills, cooperation, turn taking, and decision making.

Warren:

Description: The Warren School ELA department includes grades K-2. There are 29 classroom teachers who teach ELA (10 kindergarten, 9 first grade and 10 second grade). It has been recommended that teachers have a 90 minute block, five days a week for ELA instruction. SPED teachers teach in inclusion classrooms or provide pull out for ELA instruction. There are 3 Literacy teachers that provide literacy instruction and support for struggling students in a small group or a one on one setting. There is one literacy teacher per grade level. Literacy teachers also teach a 40 minute **Growing Readers** class to all 29 classes once every other week. The focus of **Growing Readers** is reading comprehension and comprehension strategies. In addition to **Growing Readers**, kindergarteners receive another Literacy class for 40 minutes once a week. ELL teachers provide ELL instruction within some classrooms using a co-teaching model along with providing instruction in a pullout setting.

Perceived Mission: The K-2 teachers at Warren School teach students how to read and comprehend written text and write to express themselves so that they may become independent readers, writers, and lifelong learners.

Coordination: Warren School has one monthly grade level meeting and one monthly curriculum meeting. The agendas for these monthly meetings are usually made by administration based on district initiatives. Based on the Warren surveys and roundtable discussions, K-2 teachers stated a need for common planning time among the grade level and vertically within the school. Survey answers stated that K-2 teachers currently rely upon less efficient communication by sending emails, sharing in Google Drive, meeting before or after school and connecting in the hallway, teacher's room or during recess. Consultation with SPED teachers or ELL teachers is arranged before or after school by the individual teachers.

Data Analysis and Implementation: K-2 teachers and the Literacy Support teachers use the required assessments DIBELS, DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment), and **Journeys** Benchmark Assessments to assess student reading and skill levels. Students are picked up for literacy support based on these assessments. K-2 teachers use the data to group students into guided reading groups.

Warren School is in the process of training a group of K-2 teachers, Literacy Support Teachers, SPED teachers and an ELL teacher on how to administer the BAS (Benchmark Assessment System). This group will then teach the rest of the K-2 teachers how to administer the BAS. Warren is changing from using the DRA to the BAS in order to align with the Mindess 3-5 School.

Each grade level has additional formative literacy assessments to drive their instruction. Kindergarten assesses students on letter identification, letter sounds, word association, rhyming, 40 sight words from **Journeys Reading Program**, sentence dictation, upper and lower case letter writing, and writing prompts. First grade administers a Dolch Sight Words knowledge assessment, common grade level writing prompts and the Words Their Way Primary Inventory. The Words Their Way Inventory data is used as a formative assessment to group students into spelling groups. Second grade administers common writing prompts. Some second grade teachers give the Words Their Way Inventory, while others give spelling pre-tests on **Journeys** spelling words.

Resources and Alignment to Common Core: Based on the surveys, Warren K-2 teachers use the researched-base **Journeys Reading Program** published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt as the foundation to their reading instruction. The **Journeys** publication we have is a 2012 copyright. Last year, K-2 teachers aligned **Journeys** to Common Core through curriculum mapping during monthly curriculum meetings.

Reading Curriculum and Instruction: K-2 Teachers shared in the survey that they use **Journeys** as the foundation to their reading instruction. 17 responses stated that they received professional development in the **Journeys Reading Program**. Teachers post the **Journeys** focus wall poster in their classroom each week and teach the skills and concepts listed on it. First grade and second grade has a **Journeys** pacing calendar so that each week all classes are working on the same lessons. Kindergarten has created a pacing calendar this year, but needs time as a team to finalize it. Some K-2 teachers stated in the surveys that they supplement Journeys with stronger children's literature for the read alouds, Raz-kids, Making Meaning, mentor texts, Project Read, chapter books, guided reading books from the library, Words Their Way and Write Traits in order to differentiate and meet the needs of struggling students, advanced students and ELL students.

The surveys showed that independent reading is considered an important part of the reading instruction at Warren. K-2 teachers use D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read) time and or Read to Self during Daily 5 to allow for independent reading. It varies from class to class on how often and how long

independent reading takes place. However, the surveys did show that the majority of first and second grade classes have independent reading every day.

Phonemic Awareness and Phonics is an important part of the **Journeys** daily lessons and teachers are teaching it. 18 responses stated that they supplement their phonemic awareness and phonics lessons with some Project Read strategies. Other phonology programs like Wisnia-Kapp, Lively Letters and Foundations were mentioned that they were being used to supplement when needed but were in the minority.

Writing: **Journeys** does have a writing and grammar component and uses the Write Traits language. **Journeys** focuses on a different type of writing each week.

The surveys clearly showed that K-2 teachers at Warren supplement the writing component in **Journeys** by using other programs like Write Traits, Empowering Writers, John Collins, and Writer's Workshop. K-2 teachers stated that they teach all types of writing: narrative, persuasive, and informative/explanatory as stated in the common core. Each grade has common writing prompts that are administered 3 times a year. The writing prompts are scored using common rubrics at each grade level. It appears from the survey that common writing rubrics are only used for the writing prompts 3 times a year. The writing rubrics were developed at each grade level and have not been aligned vertically to show growth and increase in expectations from grade to grade. The survey responses consistently state from the K-2 teachers that they want a writing program with a clear scope and sequence that meets the common core standards.

K-2 teachers agreed that grammar is an important part of literacy instruction. The survey showed that K-2 teachers teach grammar daily.

Handwriting and spelling instruction are important according to the responses in the survey. Different programs are being used to teach handwriting (Handwriting Without Tears or Zaner Bloser) and spelling (**Journeys** Spelling or Words Their Way).

Technology: K-2 teachers are using technology to accomplish ELA goals by using Raz-Kids, Spelling City, Sight Words app, ABCya, and Word Processing to type their stories. K-2 teachers commented that the availability of technology is not consistent from classroom to classroom. There is one iPad cart available for sign out and is shared among the 29 classrooms. Classes have a 40 minute computer class once a week. According to the computer teacher, K-2 students work on a variety of reading and writing activities as well as learn basic technology skills like mouse skills, navigation, and keyboarding in their weekly computer class.

Specialists and ELA instruction: ELA skills are practiced in all special classes as well. In Music, students read the lyrics to songs, teacher explains to classes that as there are different kinds of stories there are different kinds of songs, read the letter names of notes on the G-clef staff, and music related stories are sometimes read. In art class, stories are sometimes read as a motivator at the beginning of a

lesson and students are encouraged to read a book if they finish their art work early. In P.E., students write how they stayed physically active over the summer, soccer action words (verbs), Dr. Seuss reading games, and the obstacle course requires reading gross motor signs.

Mindess:

General Introduction: The ELA survey was given to all third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers. Of the 29 teachers at Mindess, 16 completed the survey. Of those, 3 teach third grade, 5 teach fourth grade, 5 teach fifth grade, and 3 teach multi-age. Teachers at Mindess feel our mission is to teach a balanced literacy program that meets the needs of all students including our special education and ELL students while ensuring that all common core standards are fully addressed. Overall, there was a general sense that teachers are asked to pilot various literacy programs, but the final decisions regarding those programs are made outside of the building, namely by administration. Most recently, the Journeys program was instituted in our building, but a majority of teachers feel it doesn't meet all the common core standards or the needs of all students. They also feel that with solid curriculum mapping (currently in progress), that presents an enriching, challenging curriculum aligned to the CCSS, a basal program is not necessarily the answer. At our round table discussion, teachers mentioned the many programs that have been introduced by the district over the years (John Collins, Project Read, Rebecca Sitton, Six Traits, Journeys, etc.). However, it was clearly voiced that there was no formalizing of these methods and materials across the grades and the building.

Communication and Coordination: All grade level teams and multi-age meet on their own time at regularly scheduled times, whether weekly or bi-monthly. During these meetings, teachers discuss how to meet the needs of students, supporting each other with curriculum ideas and materials, and calendaring and scheduling issues. Teachers constantly meet informally to further discuss these issues and support each other. In both round table discussions, teachers clearly expressed that there is no time to communicate vertically to ensure continuity or discover overlap in curriculum, but all would appreciate the opportunity to do so.

Impact of Standardized and School-Based Formative Assessment: Teachers believe that the focus on standardized testing results is teachers "teaching to the test" which can lead to a loss of more creative learning for students. Many responses spoke to the use of data as a way to determine strengths and weaknesses in both student learning and teacher instruction. Mindess uses the BAS schoolwide as a tool to determine students' individual instructional reading levels. This data is used to place students in guided reading groups and literacy classes in the Neighborhood program. Teachers also use this data to set up student-accessible libraries for independent reading.

Common Core Alignment: There is an overall belief that teachers are adhering to the CCSS because they have created units, lessons and materials that are rigorous and supplement the Journeys program. The Journeys program alone is not enough to meet state or teacher expectations. Grade 3 currently uses

Journeys extensively, but supplement with Words Their Way and other programs as the phonics piece is deemed insufficient for their students' needs. They are in the process of using UBD to create more cohesive units that will integrate Journeys with other materials, and thereby better address common core expectations. Grade 4 and grade 5 use Journeys as a supplemental tool to teacher-created units. Grade 5 currently has a completed yearly curriculum comprised of four genre based units. Grade 4 is currently at work developing similar units for their grade.

Reading Curriculum and Instruction: Whether already incorporated or currently being incorporated into new units, all grades teach reading and understanding literature through trade books in a variety of genres. These genres are selected based on the CCSS expectations for each grade level and are or will be clearly delineated into ELA units. Instruction is presented through various means, including explicit instruction of close reading strategies, literature circles, reader's notebook, and guided reading. Teachers use Journeys stories and small readers as well, although they are inaccessible to some of our populations due to their reading levels or limited English proficiency. In general we do not have the materials we need for this population. Teachers are reaching out wherever they can, accessing our public libraries, online reading sites, or purchasing on their own to get what they need. In addition, current materials do not adequately meet our rapidly changing, more culturally diverse student population. Third grade teachers follow the reading strategies specified in the Journeys weekly lessons, explicitly teaching comprehension skills. They focus on story elements such as setting, character, and plot, as well as other reading skills gained through the understanding of main idea and details, cause and effect, etc. At this level there remains a focus for many students on learning to read versus reading to learn. In fourth and fifth grade these skills are expanded and built-upon through the use of a reader's notebook, reader's workshop model, literature circles, and socratic circles. Students read independently during DEAR, SSR, and/or through online programs such as Raz-Kids. They are expected to be able to read independently a book at their level, of their choosing after explicit instruction and modeling, particularly at the lower grades. Some teachers utilize the Daily 5 structure in which independent reading is a component.

Writing Curriculum and Instruction: Writing instruction is considered by all three grades to be the weakest aspect of our ELA curriculum. Many teachers, both through the survey and the roundtable, clearly voiced this concern, also expressing that a writing program that we can all commit to would benefit our students and our teaching. Teachers also shared that the continuum of learning from grade to grade needs to be addressed in order to adopt universal vocabulary and eliminate overlap and gaps. This is true both throughout our school as well as to the schools below and above us. Across the 3-5 grade bands, all required genres of writing are being taught. In addition, students engage in creative writing such as poetry, skits, journal entries, quick writing and other responsive writing.

Third Grade: Based on the surveys completed, students receive daily writing instruction up to 40 minutes per day. Teachers use writing rubrics that have been created by teachers and mutually agreed upon. Students focus on paragraph structure and write either a personal or fictional narrative .

Fourth Grade: Based on the surveys completed, students receive between 180 and 200 minutes of writing instruction per week. Currently there are no grade-wide common writing rubrics. Expectations are that students should leave fourth grade with the ability to compose a 3-5 paragraph piece.

Fifth Grade: Based on the surveys completed, the amount of time spent on writing instruction varies across classrooms. All fifth grade teachers use the same designated Six Traits rubrics for each of the four anchor pieces. These pieces include: a personal or fictional narrative, compare and contrast essay, research paper, and persuasive letter.

Technology: Basic technology skills for this age group should include keyboarding skills and choosing and using appropriate websites for research. Students are given keyboarding instruction and practice by our computer teacher but resort to hunt and peck when using classroom Chromebooks. Teachers are currently using Google Classroom, Newsela, Readtheory, Readworks, etc. as resources for interactive reading and reading materials. Google Docs is used for sharing documents, works in progress, etc. between students and school to home. Programs like Raz-Kids and Google Classroom allow students to respond and complete assignments online.

Other ELA Content - Grammar, Spelling, and Handwriting: In general, teachers feel that grammar study is important and is being taught in the classroom, although additional focus would be beneficial. There are some lessons and resources that are being used in Journeys, but teachers supplement as well. Spelling is also viewed as extremely important, however, teachers strongly voiced opposition to spelling instruction simply through word lists, as there is little perceived benefit. Words Their Way is being used by some. It was positively mentioned at our roundtable discussions and there was great positive feedback from the PD day workshop on this program. Opinions on cursive are far more varied. Third grade students only are given cursive instruction via Handwriting Without Tears. Fourth and fifth grade does not receive cursive instruction. While some felt it was important, others felt that there were more pressing matters to address.

Middle School:

Description: The AMS ELA department includes grades 6-8. There are two teams at each grade level and one ELA instructor per team. SPED teachers co-teach two ELA inclusion classes per team and play an important role in curriculum development and instruction. ELA teachers teach four forty-five minute classes per day along with a Discovery class. Class sizes vary from 20-30 students per class. Remedial reading support is provided by SPED teachers and a reading specialist who works with all three grade

levels. Some literacy instruction also takes place in Social Studies and Science. ELL interventions are provided by an ELL specialist.

Perceived Mission: The ELA department at AMS prepares students to be successful readers and writers in high school, college and beyond. AMS uses the Common Core guidelines for Career Readiness to ensure that students obtain the literacy skills necessary for a lifetime of learning.

Coordination: The AMS ELA department meets vertically once per month to consider department plans and needs, and coordination of the 6-8 curriculum has improved in recent years. Using common planning time, teachers at each grade level meet with their counterparts to discuss pacing, materials, and assessments. Frequent consultation with SPED teachers for inclusion ELA classes is also essential to development of curriculum. Monthly ELA vertical curriculum leader meetings have created new opportunities for vertical alignment between schools by encouraging mutual goal-setting that did not exist previously, but better school-to-school alignment is desired.

Data Analysis and Implementation: AMS ELA teachers use the Gates-MacGinitie Comprehension Assessment along with PARCC/MCAS scores to assess student skill levels, measure growth, and identify students for remediation. On standardized tests, students achieve proficiency at high rates in grades 6-8 and median SGP scores are very high. Student scores on standardized tests indicate a healthy, thriving department and instruction with high fidelity to the curriculum and standards.

Technology: Each grade level has a 25-count Chromebook cart designated for use in ELA classrooms only. Time with the Chromebook carts is split 50-50 between the teams, and the carts have become a part of daily routines (when they are in the classroom).

Resources and Alignment to Common Core: In general, the curricular resources in the ELA department at AMS are aligned to the Common Core, but this is an area of need. Available money is usually spent on replenishing damaged copies of anchor texts at each grade level, but there aren't enough core novel books to send them home with students. Most ELA textbooks at AMS are over twenty years old. Nonfiction text structures and features are often taught using reproducible packets rather than books. The department is currently requesting an aligned 6-8 grammar text, but each grade level would also benefit from the addition of nonfiction readers or a leveled online reading utility like NewsELA. The AMS ELA book closet also needs attention. Ideally, a book closet would be filled with books that might serve as alternative reads or small-group reading selections, but most of the books in the book closet are no longer in use. The AMS library holdings remain far below normal standards of acceptability.

Reading Curriculum and Instruction: Most ELA UBD units at AMS are anchored to core novels, plays, story compilations or nonfiction packets. Much of the reading emphasis is analytical (and, to a

lesser extent, comparative) and delves much deeper than plot. Specific concepts--such as theme, characterization, setting, point of view, and symbolism--are addressed in sixth grade and repeatedly investigated throughout the middle school years in a spiraling curriculum. Seventh grade adds drama, poetry, and memoir, while eighth grade narrows the focus on nuances of dialogue and more subtle authorial choices like mood, tone, irony and parody while also beginning the analysis of film. All of this is in alignment with the Common Core standards. Comprehension strategies--such as inference, prediction, and word dissection--are synthesized within the larger units and taught repeatedly throughout the year. Socratic questioning, whole group discussion, literature circles (with specified roles), QAR analysis, and RAFT activities are just some of the classroom methods used to deepen understanding and formatively assess students around important ideas and concepts. It should also be noted that SPED teachers play a role in the development of mainstream reading curriculum as well as a separate decoding and comprehension reading curriculum for students with reading goals on their IEPs.

Grammar is also addressed at each grade level, but instructors at AMS would like grammar to have a more solid presence in the curriculum (with increasing levels of grammatical awareness required in higher grades).

The core novels at AMS often express diversity. For example, sixth graders read *The Breadwinner*, a novel set in Afghanistan during the time of the Taliban, providing opportunities to discuss Islam, cultural differences, and the traditions and history of the Afghans. Seventh graders read *The Watsons Go to Birmingham--1963* while exploring the important events and figures of the Civil Rights Movement. Whenever the department purchases new novels diversity is a major consideration.

Writing Program: Much of the writing done in ELA at the middle school is analytical and highly structured, usually in the areas of persuasive and informative writing. There is a much lighter emphasis on narrative, but narrative and poetry opportunities are made available as part of the Discovery curriculum and are sometimes used as alternative assessments in the regular classroom setting. Time spent on writing is significant. Up to thirty percent of class time is dedicated to writing and talking about writing. Students in every grade work through the drafting and revision process numerous times. A great deal of writing support is provided by SPED teachers in inclusion classrooms.

Sixth grade ELA instructors reinforce paragraphing concepts introduced in lower grades, and students get lots of practice in building paragraphs around a main idea while using quotes as evidence. Seventh and eighth grade instructors hone those same skills, with increasingly rigorous expectations, and by the end of eighth grade students have written many full-length essays. The Chromebooks have been integrated into every aspect of the writing process. All ELA teachers at AMS use Google Drive or Google Classroom folder systems, and the "comment" function on Google Docs is an efficient way to provide feedback on drafts.

Rubrics: There is not currently a common writing rubric at AMS, nor is there a rigidly consistent language around writing, though there is a good deal of continuity around writing instruction. This is also an area where AMS can achieve better alignment internally by synchronizing ELA writing expectations vertically with Mindess and the high school. An AMS MLA style guide is contributing to better uniformity in citation methods. Perhaps a common writing rubric would be beneficial.

High School:

Description: The AHS English Department includes grades 9-12. All teachers teach multiple grades and levels; all courses are year long and leveled by ability. English teachers teach five classes, which meet five of the seven days of the rotation. Class sizes are on average 19 students per class. Special education teachers/education support professionals co-teach and/or support most CP1/CP2 classes. Students with IEPs and other ed plans are supported in a variety ways by the Special Education Department. All students are offered Tier 1 and Tier 2 support in ELA classrooms by virtue of audiobooks, Kurzweil, graphic organizers, group brainstorms, study guides, annotation strategies, exemplars, and after-school conferences, but there is little direct classroom instruction in reading available to the struggling student who doesn't have an accommodation plan. ELL interventions are provided by the SEI trained/endorsed teachers (7 of 8 department members) with support from the ELL teacher.

Perceived Mission: The AHS English Department prepares students for college and career and works to inspire lifelong readers. AHS uses the Common Core State Standards Guidelines to equip students with the ability to read, listen, think critically, and to present reasoned arguments effectively.

Coordination: The AHS English Department has department meetings once per month as well as monthly curriculum meetings. At these meetings the Department discusses plans, needs, and curriculum questions.

Data Analysis and Implementation: AHS English teachers use MCAS scores, results on common Midterms, Finals, and shared tests to assess student skill, measure growth, and identify students for remediation. Similar to previous years, in 2015 99% of AHS students scored either Advanced (67%) or Proficient (32%) on MCAS. Student scores on standardized tests are a testament to a competent and motivated department that offers instruction with high fidelity to the curriculum and standards. Anecdotal feedback from graduates and parents serve to reiterate this.

Technology: The AHS English Department shares 30 iPads, routinely uses document cameras and projectors, and schedules time in AHS's two computer labs for word processing and research purposes.

Resources and Alignment to Common Core: Texts taught reflect the demands of the Common Core and standardized tests, but the text choices are largely classically-centered. The English Department

would like to expand its curriculum with diverse, minority authors, but have been somewhat constrained by:

1. Budgetary considerations.
2. Time to develop curriculum that connects standing units to contemporary non-fiction articles.
3. Time to create a greater variety of meaningful narrative writing assignments as per CCSS.

Curriculum and Instruction: AHS English units are anchored to core novels, plays, and poetry. Reading is analytical and seeks to identify and understand thematic elements of a text. Specific rhetorical and literary devices, strategies, and concepts are introduced as grade-appropriate (as per Common Core guidelines), and the bulk of reading takes place outside of the classroom assigned as homework. Class time focuses on developing analysis strategies and writing. Ninth and tenth grade curriculum is skill and concept-focused, while grades eleven and twelve revisit and build on those skills, with eleventh grade structured as a survey of American Literature and twelfth grade designed as an introduction to World Literature. All classes combine various comprehension and analysis strategies: guiding questions, annotation, and discussion formats. To complement analytical reading, AHS is committed to increasing students' love of literature through consistent implementation of an SSR (Silent Sustained Reading) Program, incorporating 20 minutes of a Sustained Silent Reading program into one block per 7-day rotation.

Writing expectations at AHS are rigorous. Students write informally via answers to discussion questions, freewrites, and reader responses, as well as more formally at least twice a term, both on-demand and longer process essays. AHS rubrics are grade level CCSS-based with some assignment specific modifications. The English Department makes extensive use of anchor papers as a teaching method for writing and calibrates assessments by sharing and discussing essays/rubrics/scoring at department meetings. AHS also has departmental research paper 9-12 benchmarks, designed to hone critical analysis, evaluation of online sources, effective research, word processing skills, and MLA formatting. Creative writing plays significantly less of a central role, but is present in terms of teaching narrative essay as per the Common Core S.S. The English Department would like to find time to develop curriculum that deepens student exposure to narrative writing. Grammar plays an important role in writing instruction and is addressed through both direct instruction and writing assignments. To enhance grammar instruction, the English Department would be interested in more grade appropriate resources and time to develop curriculum. We agree with AMS that grammar curriculum that is aligned 6-9 would be beneficial and allow the AHS English Department to focus on more sophisticated concepts that would enhance student ability to increase sentence variety and make conscious stylistic choices.

Typing Instruction: We concur with the AMS view that "typing is an area where inequalities often surface (and are compounded) as students without access to technology at home rarely type well; this, of

course, impedes their development as writers, which is a much more serious matter. We shouldn't assume that students will learn typing on their own. Keyboarding should be a part of the curriculum at Mindess and AMS.”

Strengths:

Pittaway:

- Teachers have been able to tailor the curriculum to their students needs, supplementing materials, and selecting activities from the curriculum that best fit their students' skill levels.
- Monthly Curriculum meetings have been a strength, especially for first year teachers or those who are new to the program. The overall moral of the teaching staff is also a strength, they are willing to help each other and often use each other as resources, sharing materials, ideas, and past experiences.
- Consistent curriculum used by all teaching staff that have similar areas of focus.
- Since the HM Pre-K is a language arts based curriculum this is always embedded or a focus in each activity they provide. They also include activities in other developmental areas, such as science, technology, mathematics, social studies, social emotional learning, and the arts.

Warren:

- Teachers following the scope and sequence of Journeys as the foundation of their reading instruction.
- Common Assessments K-2-DRA (switching to BAS), DIBELS, and **Journeys** Benchmark Assessments.
- Writing prompts 3 times a year in each grade.
- Common writing rubrics are developed at each grade level, but need to be aligned vertically.
- Consistent daily independent reading in grades 1 and 2 and at least 3 days a week or more at the kindergarten level.
- ELA teachers consistently stated that grammar, handwriting and spelling are important parts of the ELA program and are being taught.
- Minimum of 90 minutes of Literacy a day (exception half day kindergarten)

Mindess

- All literacy teachers provide instruction that aligns with the CCSS.
- Common units, summative assessments, and writing rubrics are used by all teachers at the fifth grade level in both single-graded and multi-age classrooms.
- We have transitioned from strictly pull-out support services to greater inclusion by both our ELL and Reading Support teachers.

- Willingness of all teachers to initiate and meet on their own time to discuss and plan as necessary to deliver the best possible instruction, and ensure that they are meeting the needs of their students.
- All Mindess teachers foster and incorporate independent reading in their classrooms.

Middle School

- **Use of technology:** As stated above, the ELA department has adapted well to technological advances, making full use of the Google suite of utilities.
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- **Literary Analysis:** Writing instruction, in general, is a strength at AMS, but the instruction for analytical and technical writing is strong. Because so much emphasis is placed on the analysis and unpacking of core novels, students leave AMS with a useful analytical skillset.
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- **Results:** PARCC/MCAS scores at the middle school have improved significantly over the years. There has been an admirable consistency of achievement in this area, and the middle school recently earned a Level 1 rating on the Massachusetts Accountability Report Card.
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- **Department Continuity:** AMS ELA teachers write grants together, collaborate on unit plans, meet frequently, and share instructional strategies--especially involving Chromebooks. There is enthusiasm for the increasing vertical alignment, and ELA teachers now use a common MLA style guide for citations.
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- **Co-teaching Model for Inclusion:** The co-teaching model has been successful. It creates a setting with diverse learning styles and a variety of instructional approaches that helps all students grow.

High School

- All students are offered Tier 1 and Tier 2 support in ELA classrooms by virtue of audiobooks, Kurzweil, graphic organizers, group brainstorms, study guides, annotation strategies, exemplars, and after-school conferences.
- ELL interventions are provided by the SEI trained/endorsed teachers (6 of 8 department members) with support from the ELL teacher.
- The AHS English Department prepares students for college and career and works to inspire lifelong readers.
- AHS uses the Common Core State Standards Guidelines to equip students with the ability to read, listen, think critically, and to present reasoned arguments effectively.

- AHS English teachers use MCAS scores, results on common Midterms, Finals, and shared tests to assess student skill, measure growth, and identify students for remediation.
- 99% of AHS students scored either Advanced (67%) or Proficient (32%) on MCAS.
- Student scores on standardized tests are a testament to a competent and motivated department that offers instruction with high fidelity to the curriculum and standards. Anecdotal feedback from graduates and parents serve to reiterate this.
- The AHS English Department shares 30 iPads, routinely uses document cameras and projectors, and schedules time in AHS's two computer labs for word processing and research purposes.
- Texts taught reflect the demands of the Common Core and standardized tests.
- AHS English units are anchored to core novels, plays, and poetry.
- Reading is analytical and seeks to identify and understand thematic elements of a text.
- Specific rhetorical and literary devices, strategies, and concepts are introduced as grade-appropriate (as per Common Core guidelines).
- To complement analytical reading, AHS is committed to increasing students' love of literature through consistent implementation of an SSR (Silent Sustained Reading) Program, incorporating 20 minutes of a Sustained Silent Reading program into one block per 7-day rotation.
- Writing expectations at AHS are rigorous.
- The English Department makes extensive use of anchor papers as a teaching method for writing, and we calibrate assessments by sharing and discussing essays/rubrics/scoring at department meetings.
- AHS developed and uses departmental research paper 9-12 benchmarks, designed to hone critical analysis, evaluation of online sources, effective research, word processing skills, and MLA formatting.

Areas of Improvement:

Pittaway:

- Handwriting professional development for Handwriting Without Tears program
- Majority of staff has had no professional development on Houghton Mifflin Pre-K
- Vertical continuity through communication with Kindergarten staff at Warren
- Since some staff teach full day and some teach half day the amount of time you are able to focus on a skill or activity may vary

Warren:

- Spelling- Currently at Warren School some second grade classes are using the **Journeys** spelling words, while some are using Words Their Way. All first grade classes are using Words Their Way. However, it was stated that even though teachers are using Words Their Way, they were not trained and would like to be trained formally,

- Handwriting-There are two handwriting programs currently being used at Warren School: Handwriting Without Tears and Zaner-Bloser.
- Writing- There is not a set writing program being used. A few teachers were trained in Write Traits. A few teachers were trained in John Collins Writing. Some are using the writing in Journeys. All ELA teachers stated that they are teaching the different types of writing.

Wish List-

- Purchase more leveled guided reading books in packs of 6.
- Purchase more low level readers, advanced readers, and books appropriate for ELLs.
- Increase technology (ipads, chromebooks, etc.)
- Professional Development: Words Their Way and Writing.
- A tiered 2 program specific for reading intervention.
- Scheduled Common planning time.

Mindess:

- There are insufficient materials for below grade level readers.
- We lack the necessary reading support staff to service our current caseload. For budgetary reasons, the reading support ESP position was eliminated and has not yet been re-established.
- There is no official writing program at our school. This leads to a lack of common language for teachers to use and students to learn.
- There is insufficient time to meaningfully talk to our peers about what we're doing or need to do.
- Lack of continuity of expected student outcomes from grade-to-grade, including 2nd to 3rd and 5th to 6th.
- Common rubrics should be used at all grade levels.
- Access to technology varies greatly from room to room. Although each classroom has 8 Chromebooks, other rooms are at one-to-one due to teacher initiative (grant writing, etc.)
- Few teachers are trained in specific reading instruction methods, for example, Wilson, Orton-Gillingham, etc. Those that are, were trained through the Special Education Department.

Middle School

Typing Instruction: Typing is an area where inequalities often surface (and are compounded) as students without access to technology at home rarely type well; this, of course, impedes their development as writers, which is a much more serious matter. We shouldn't assume that students will learn typing on their own. Keyboarding should be a part of the curriculum at Mindess and AMS.

Grammar Alignment: Though all ELA teachers at AMS include grammatical concepts in their instruction, there is no robust, aligned grammar curriculum. An aligned text would remedy this lack of continuity and help the department standardize instruction around grammar.

Exposure to Nonfiction: Each grade level has at least one unit organized around informational texts, and many of the supporting texts for each unit are nonfiction, but this is another area where the department might improve. It could be argued that students don't get enough concentrated time on informational texts at AMS. This is due, at least in part, to a lack of resources. A subscription to NewsELA might be a solution, or SRAs have been suggested as a potential method for assessing comprehension levels.

More interventions for “falling through the cracks” students: Additional reading classes have been very successful at raising comprehension at the middle school. All students who do not score proficient on ELA standardized tests should have access to extra reading instruction. There are dozens of students in the middle school each year who could use this extra reading practice, but space is limited.

Reading and Writing in Other Disciplines: It would be useful to create and implement a common rubric at AMS for writing in other disciplines in accordance with the [ELA Common Core Reading and Writing Standards for Social Studies and Science](#).

High School

- There is little direct classroom instruction in reading available to the struggling student who doesn't have an accommodation plan.
- The English Department would like to expand our curriculum with diverse, minority authors.
- Time to develop curriculum that connects standing units to contemporary nonfiction articles.
- Time to create a greater variety of meaningful narrative writing assignments as per CCS. Creative writing plays less significantly of a central role, but is present in terms of teaching narrative essay as per the Common Core S.S. The English Department would like to find time to develop curriculum that deepens student exposure to narrative writing.
- To enhance grammar instruction, the English Department would be interested in more grade appropriate resources and time to develop curriculum. We agree with AMS that grammar curriculum that is aligned 6-9 would be beneficial and allow the AHS English Department to focus on more sophisticated concepts that would enhance student ability to increase sentence variety and make conscious stylistic choices.
- We shouldn't assume that students will learn typing on their own. Keyboarding should be a part of the curriculum at Mindess and AMS.

<u>School</u>	<u>School Year</u>	<u>Action Item</u>	<u>Measurable Outcomes</u>	<u>Timeline</u>	<u>Person(s) Responsible</u>	<u>Resources Required</u>
District	16-17	Review current preK-5 program for reading, writing, grammar, spelling, and handwriting	An analysis of the current program and its effectiveness	Spring 2017	Admin, teachers	Release Time
District	17-18	Select a preK-5 program for reading, writing, grammar, spelling, and handwriting	The selection of a preK-5 program that is used to fidelity	Fall 2017	Teachers, Admin	Release time
District	17-18	Provide professional development in all areas	Access to PD to effectively implement the program(s)	17-18 school year	Admin	Financial, release time
District	17-18	Provide appropriate resources for students and teachers to implement the program	Implementation of program	17-18	Admin	Financial
District	18-19	Implementation of preK-5 program	Implementation of program	Fall 18	Admin, teachers	Financial
District	16-17	Assess current k-5 schedule for ELA instruction time	Recommendation for amount of time spent each day on ELA instruction	Spring 17	Admin, teachers	Meeting time
District	16-17	Assess current k-12 schedule to create possible common planning time.	Recommendation on how to create common planning time for staff given the framework of the school day	Spring 17	Admin, teachers	Meeting time
District	16-17	Assess Vertical Articulation System	Recommendation for how staff will continue to meet vertically	Spring 17	Admin, teachers	Meeting time
District	16-17	Create a 5 year textbook adoption matrix	5 year matrix	Spring 17	Admin, teachers	Meeting time, financial resources

District	17-18	Assess current staffing levels and make recommendations for increased staff, programs, including our at risk student population	3 year staff plan	Fall 17	Admin, teachers	Meeting time
District	17-18	Create and implement K-12 writing rubrics	Copy of the rubrics	Summer 18	Teachers	Financial Resources, release time
Middle	16-17	Assess the need to have typing as part the curriculum	Report on feasibility and need for a typing class/program	Spring 17	Admin, Teachers	Release time
Middle	16-17	Select a grammar text that is in line with the preK-5 text and program	The selection of a grammar text that is used to fidelity	Spring 17	Teachers, Admin	Release time
Middle	17-18	Provide professional development in for grammar text implementation	Access to PD to effectively implement the program	17-18 school year	Admin	Financial, release time
Middle	17-18	Provide appropriate resources for students and teachers to implement the program	Implementation of program	17-18	Admin	Financial
District	17-18	Generate, by grade level, a list of new texts to address the various needs across grade levels	The creation of the list	Fall 17	Admin, teachers	Time, Finacial