

MANCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT SAU #37

COMMITTEE ON CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

October 25, 2016

6:30 p.m.

Chair Langton called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Committee Members Langton, Girard, Freeman, Van Houten

Absent: Committee Member Avard

Messrs: B. Vargas, A. Lotz, D. Ryan, J. Gillis, B. Krantz, B. McCafferty, F. Ransdell,
C. Martin

Chair Langton stated Mr. Avard had a prior commitment, which I concurred was a priority so he will not be in attendance this evening.

Committee Member Girard stated and I may be leaving early for the same reason, Madame Chair.

Chair Langton stated I'm well aware of that. Thank you very much.

Chair Langton advised that the purpose of the public forum is to give the residents of Manchester the opportunity to address the committee on items of concerns affecting the community; that each person will be given only one opportunity to speak; that comments shall be limited to three minutes to allow all participants the opportunity to speak and any comments must be directed to the Chair. Any resident wishing to speak will come forward to the nearest microphone, clearly state their name and address when recognized and give their comments.

There was no one present wishing to speak.

Chair Langton addressed item 5 of the agenda:

5. Request from Amanda Lotz of Southside Middle School to conduct graduate research in accordance with School District policy, Agency 101.

Committee Member Van Houten stated I was looking at the policy for this and it appears under the new policy that this would go straight to the board and doesn't come through C&I.

Chair Langton stated I would really like to have Dr. Vargas speak to this because he and I had a discussion with regards to this kind of motion coming before the board as this is, in my 11 years, this is only the second request I have ever seen. Dr. Vargas had some insight that he would like to offer.

Dr. Bolgen Vargas, Superintendent of Schools, stated ideally you have a similar internal review board in this organization given the size. Also, I would suspect that many students in this area are constantly requesting, and professors and others to do a study here. It doesn't have to be anything elaborate, but for example, a clear question is who is sponsoring this student. Is it a principal? Is it a central office person? And making sure that that person consents to it. For example, if I get permission of the board to conduct a study and the study is going to take place in a building and we don't have a process in place, given what principals have on their plate, I would like to put a process that we ask of them and I could tell the board the risk factor. If anyone wants to study our most vulnerable children, let's say children with severe special needs, you would want to put more rigorous process in place than someone just saying I want to talk to the kid. I'm not saying that that is happening here, but when you don't have a process in place it could happen and then when it happens we spend a lot of time explaining to ourselves and parents how did this happen. What I suggest is that I would put a brief process for you, maybe no more than two to three pages, so anyone who contacts us you could refer to x office. We would have them complete the form and then we would review it and follow through and then we would bring it to the board for final approval. In some cases I would tell you that you should

trust your superintendent or your team to be able to do that so that the board doesn't have to get into that. If we are not able to manage that process then... I don't know any place where you put certain things like this through the board, particularly in a city like this where you could be getting a lot of this forms, maybe yes, maybe no, but that's my guess here. You need to put something in place.

Chair Langton stated agreed.

Committee Member Girard asked Dr. Vargas, do you have any recommendations with respect to the item that is before us on the agenda tonight?

Dr. Vargas replied the recommendation, my understanding is that the student already works for the district. That is a great thing. That gives you great confidence. We need to support them. Also, it would be under the supervision of the school principal, the project. I am comfortable when you read what she is proposing to do that that's fine. That is a very low risk type of study that she is doing.

Committee Member Girard stated the only concern I have about this in taking a look at the project, as stated in her process outline, it says that students will use the Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle to set and achieve goals related to the science and engineering practices outlined in the Next Generation Science Standards. I don't know what is going on, but the Next Generation Science Standards have not been adopted by this district. They have not been adopted by the state, but we seem to have an awful lot of people coming before this committee wanting to do something with Next Generation Science Standards. I guess my question is, why would we allow a study that is going to align to something we are not doing. I don't understand how that works.

Dr. Vargas stated if our values are that we want people to research and you could make a case that this could be beneficial for us to learn from this person taking a look at this particular issue that, as you suggested, we have an approval, but that doesn't mean that we cannot study. Once we reject something we should be able to take a look into it and you want teachers to have that

kind of freedom. As long as it doesn't present any risk to the organization or to the students. Again, this is very low risk. This doesn't force you, whatever the finding is, to adopt a new curriculum. That is not the purpose of this study.

Committee Member Girard stated I didn't think it was, Doctor, but my question is, since we don't use the Next Generation Science Standards, how can someone who wants to do a study using those standards be valid in our system. I guess I don't understand.

Dr. Vargas stated the student is here, right?

Chair Langton asked could you please come up?

Ms. Amanda Lotz, Southside, stated I think it is very interesting that that's what you picked up on, Mr. Girard, because I troubled over that a little bit. I have been working on the science curriculum committee last year and this year. We are creating the Manchester Academic Standards, but we are using this idea of focusing on science process and improving students' abilities to use those processes. Since the Manchester Academic Standards for science aren't solidified yet I decided to go to Next Gen and that way I had a solid document to base this on.

Committee Member Girard stated if I understand, you are a teacher in the district.

Ms. Lotz stated yes, sir.

Committee Member Girard stated you are working on aligning the district to Next Generation Science Standards.

Ms. Lotz responded no. The process that the curriculum committee has gone through is we have taken our old standards and several sets of standards including the Next Generation Science Standards, looked at them all and as a committee read through and discussed what topics we think are most important, what processes we think are important. A lot of what we are pulling together on the committee is saying that the ability to use scientific thinking and critical thinking

skills and the ability to report out information accurately is what is important. Right now, the only solid document we have with that information is the Next Generation Science Standards.

Committee Member Girard asked what other standards are you working with as you do your review?

Ms. Lotz replied we have been looking at the New Hampshire frameworks, which Manchester was using before we starting implementing the new Manchester Academic Standards. We also pulled some sets of standards from other towns and cities. I know we brought in some from other states. The first meeting we had, the instruction was bring science standards, let's look at what people are learning and what they think science should be about as a basis for our conversation.

Committee Member Girard stated question for Mr. Ryan before I continue with Ms. Lotz. Mr. Ryan, the standards that I sent you, were they forwarded to this committee?

Mr. Ryan replied yes, they were forwarded to Tina Proulx.

Committee Member Girard replied thank you, Mr. Ryan. Ms. Lotz, assuming you go ahead and you do this study, is this going to be, since you are basing it on the Next Generation Science Standards, and since you are working on what standards the district will be aligning to, is this something that may be used to determine whether or not the district should move in the direction of the Next Generation Science Standards?

Ms. Lotz replied definitely not. The study itself isn't based on the standards. It is just based on the practices, which are things like asking questions, which includes writing hypotheses, obtaining and evaluating information, communicating information. It is all very generic science skills that we already teach.

Committee Member Girard asked that being the case, why would you reference the Next Generation Science Standards in your study?

Ms. Lotz replied I just wanted to ground my study in an established document.

Committee Member Girard stated so using the existing GLEs that are currently the standard in New Hampshire doesn't provide you with a grounded set of standards to conduct your study with?

Ms. Lotz replied not the way that I had intended the study to be. I could definitely go back and look at those, but I feel like I would pull out the same scientific practices anyway because it really is just the basic ask a good question, complete an experiment to identify the answer to that question, communicate what you learned. I could definitely reword it, but I felt that the wording was already there.

Committee Member Girard stated I have two more questions, Madame Chair. What is this study ultimately designed to determine? I see appendix e, student learning pre and post survey. What are you trying to accomplish here? I look at these questions and these are feeling questions to me, I'm good at writing a hypothesis, I like doing labs, I like science, science is easy to understand, etc. etc. What are you trying to determine with this study and how will that be useful to the district when it is done?

Ms. Lotz replied my ultimate question is, will students having access to their own educational data impact how well they perform? I feel like to set a baseline for that it was very important to find out how students view themselves in science to begin with. A lot of students, especially by the time we get them in eighth grade think they know how they learn so they come into eighth grade going I'm good a science or I'm bad at science. I was curious if seeing their own data and setting their own goals would change that perception.

Committee Member Girard stated so in other words this is a pre and post survey. You are going to survey them first then you are going to show them their data and you are going to see how that affects them at the end of the study.

Ms. Lotz responded yes.

Committee Member Girard stated I can understand how that would be useful to the district.
Thank you, Ms. Lotz.

Chair Langton stated Ms. Lotz, could you just clarify for me which grade level you teach?

Ms. Lotz replied eighth grade.

Chair Langton asked is that the life or physical science in Manchester?

Ms. Lotz replied life science.

Chair Langton stated I'm a middle school science teacher so I'm pretty interested in this myself.

Committee Member Girard stated this is an opt in for the parents, right? Parents have to opt into this study?

Ms. Lotz replied yes. All participating students have a letter or will have a letter sent home with a consent form.

Chair Langton stated and your basis is the scientific inquiry process. That's what it sounds like to me.

Ms. Lotz stated yes.

Committee Member Van Houten stated welcome. I assume that this is part of your course work toward a degree. Is that correct?

Ms. Lotz replied yes, ma'am.

Committee Member Van Houten asked and toward what degree are you working?

Ms. Lotz replied my master's in curriculum and instruction with a concentration in STEM.

Committee Member Van Houten stated all the documentation here indicates that you have suitable oversight from your college that will help and support you and that the whole process has been looked at using the IRB specifics.

Ms. Lotz stated yes.

Committee Member Van Houten stated and Ms. Gillis, I assume that you will be supporting her and monitoring as she goes through.

Ms. Jennifer Gillis, Principal of Southside Middle School, stated absolutely.

Committee Member Van Houten stated just to bring back to a point that we have debated here before, sometimes it is not just about what the district will get. Sometimes it is about helping one of our colleagues, one of our teachers to grow and to learn and to bring her insights to us. I have done academic research as well and sometimes it just doesn't give you the results that you want and that is a learning process in and of itself. I think even if we are just benefitting the one teacher that we want to have in the classroom doing a good job, that is absolutely worthwhile. I also want to, again, reiterate that although discussing this here I think is totally appropriate, our policy, Dr. Vargas, we have a policy that was approved just last month and according to this policy it does not come to C&I. It goes straight to the School Board. Again, I think it is valuable to have the discussion here and I think it is valuable to understand what you can bring to us, but I really do see most of this as a matter of helping our own people to grow, helping those researchers from schools around the district, around the area to grow, and I think that benefits all of us. I think education has to be a two or nine way street between our schools and our colleges

and our administrators and everyone who will help to empower our district. I applaud you for bringing this forward. I wish you well on the study.

Committee Member Girard asked do you teach at Southside?

Ms. Lotz replied yes, I do.

Committee Member Girard asked and will you be conducting this study with your own classes or other science classes in the school?

Ms. Lotz replied my students will be the ones keeping data binders. I have a colleague who has agreed to give the pre and post survey to his students. That way I will have a comparison point to determine if my kids actually did improve based on using data binders or if it is just an evolution through eighth grade.

Committee Member Girard stated but this isn't going to affect your kids' grades if they don't participate or anything like that.

Ms. Lotz replied no. I do not intend to grade any of it. It is purely going to be for research.

Committee Member Freeman stated Mr. Girard already asked one of my questions, but welcome. I actually would like to give you kudos for how this was organized and how you presented it to us. I found it to be very thorough. I'm very impressed. That's all I'm going to say about it. Any question I had about it other than what Mr. Girard asked about the Next Generation Science Standards was addressed in this so thank you very much.

Committee Member Girard moved to approve this item. *The motion was duly seconded by Committee Member Freeman.*

Committee Member Van Houten stated again, I don't know that moving to recommend is an appropriate part of the process.

Committee Member Girard stated it has to get to the board somehow, Connie.

Chair Langton stated it came before our committee so it is our jurisdiction basically to move to forward to the board.

Committee Member Van Houten stated then I would respectfully ask that Dr. Vargas take a look at our policy and that we clarify this for future IRB processes.

Chair Langton stated Dr. Vargas is very well aware of this as he and I discussed. I'm assuming this came on the agenda from the previous administration. Is that correct, Mr. Ryan?

Mr. Ryan replied that's correct, prior to the new policy.

Chair Langton stated and I know Dr. Vargas would like to look through this and maybe create some kind of a group or a committee that looks at this prior to it coming before us.

Chair Langton called for a vote on the motion to approve this item. The motion carried with Committee Member Van Houten abstaining.

Chair Langton stated thank you for coming before us this evening.

Chair Langton addressed item 6 of the agenda:

6. Discussion regarding leveling at the middle schools.

Mr. Ryan stated I wasn't certain what we were going to be discussing in terms of leveling. I imagine that you have questions that were going to drive it. I invited our four middle school principals to join us so if they wouldn't mind coming forward as they are the experts in their building. We have given no direction to any type of other forms of leveling or anything since the

previous discussion two years ago in C&I. I'm not certain of what the topic is for this evening so I figured they could come and answer any questions that you have.

Chair Langton stated I'll just give a little bit of feedback. I've had a couple of board members ask that this be put on the C&I agenda. Apparently there were some issues with leveling or questions about leveling at the middle schools and whether or not we were doing it citywide. My understanding is that we had been leveling our math classes and our English language arts classes at the middle schools. Dr. Livingston, prior to her departure, had not been aware of any changes, yet parents were told that there were changes at an open house so I think we are just trying to get some transparency here within the district. Would any one of the principals like to address that or would you like to take questions?

Mr. Bill Krantz, Principal of McLaughlin Middle School, stated I'm assuming you are talking about my school. It was me at the open house that shared with the families how it was that we were leveling. We are doing what we would call flexible grouping and essentially we are not having our course numbers in the leveled content areas end in a 3, 2 or 1. They are all ending in a 2. The staff was asked to use data that I would have used to hard level, which would have been say a high math class in sixth grade. A great example, at the beginning of the year we had 120 kids on each of our two teams. We would have had to do a bell curve type thing where we would have looked at the data that was available. That would have been the teacher recommendations from grade five, Performance Plus data, anything that we could look at and then we would have had to have identified, I guess, the top 30 as best we could and then the middle 60 and then the bottom 30. That has never, in my years, when we switched over to hard leveling, turned out to work exactly like that. There might have been 37 kids that would have met the criteria to be high, but we can't have 37 in a class so there would have been some number of kids that would have been shifted into that medium group and so on, there might have been medium kids pushed low or low pushed medium. Are you guys following the math on it? It is pretty basic stuff I think.

Chair Langton stated Mr. Krantz, you did send us a letter where you were talking that your school levels 1 and 2, 2 and 3, and 3 and 4, which to me makes sense at a middle school level, being a middle school teacher. I think the issue came with the fact that a couple of School Board members had reached out to Dr. Livingston hearing from parents that leveling wasn't taking place in one of our middle schools and she said she hadn't heard anything about it. I believe she was going to check with Mr. Ryan, but then parents heard at your open house that...

Mr. Krantz stated for me, I was as transparent as I could be. I wasn't trying to hide anything.

Chair Langton stated I think that was the problem. They heard something at open house that leveling wasn't taking place like it had in the past. They were told that you had mentioned or someone in the administration addressed the parents that Mr. Ryan had said that that was okay. I'm not sure what the other schools are doing so if we could just hear a little bit from each of the schools as far as how that leveling takes place.

Mr. Krantz stated we are still leveling technically. We have had a few phone calls from parents and we have had a board member also email. Essentially the teams were asked to look at the data so there was a learning lesson here too. I wanted folks to look at data to figure out how they wanted to group their students and that was a good exercise. Then they would provide to me how they wanted to group kids so there would be a high class, it just wouldn't have a course number that ends in 3.

Chair Langton stated middle schools aren't leveling like the high schools, levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and AP. It is basically here levels, unless you are talking eighth grade math.

Mr. Krantz stated with eighth grade math, our high would be algebra. We have three algebra classes in my school, one for each of the teams. We can have a conversation about whether 90 or however many kids should be getting algebra. Hopefully I won't get in trouble for saying this, but I would like every kid in eighth grade to get an algebra book to be honest. Our teachers are good enough to differentiate their instruction. Then we don't have a kid walking into a class that everyone know is the low level class. You can't measure the negative on that one. In any

case, the families that were concerned were generally the families that wanted to make sure that their son or daughter was in the high class. They know their kids well enough and they were in fact put in the high group. The reason why we wanted to be flexible was because I made a decision to want to avoid the hard low class. I just didn't feel comfortable having, particularly in sixth grade... Remember, we opened the year with 120 on each team. We were maxed. To put 30 low level kids in the same class I just wasn't feeling comfortable with. I wasn't comfortable with it for the past few years when we were doing it. In my opinion it is not a good model with the resources that we are lacking. If we had the resources that maybe we could bring to bear to be able to maybe team teach or something like that in that low level class, to be able to divide the kids up and provide direct instruction, small group instruction, any number of good strategies to try to help kids out, then I think it might be a more effective model as it were or instructional practice. What we have been able to do is make it so those low level kids are grouped into two classes instead of one. It tends to be that the identified students that are on each team would not all end up on one class, which we could run into some IDEA issues with that if we have too many identified kids in one class as you guys might know.

Chair Langton stated those classes do have para support I hope.

Mr. Krantz stated yes. I just makes it so that we are spreading out youngsters and they are not all in one place. There tends to be more difficult classroom management challenges in the low level class. For me it doesn't make any sense to basically put kids into an environment that the teacher, it is almost impossible, to get the desired results. We have really good folks. They are working their tails off. It is not that they are not good at what they are doing. It is that they are up against things that are brought to bear that are beyond their control, the environment the kids are coming from, truancy, etc. There is a high, there is a medium and there is a medium low, as it were.

Chair Langton asked what would be the number of students in those classes roughly?

Mr. Krantz replied in grade six there would be in the high 20s. One of my teams is at 116 and the other one is at 113 today. The 116 has 29.

Chair Langton asked 29 students in a math class?

Mr. Krantz replied yes. The other one would be around 27, 28. In grade eight there is a hard algebra class with a corresponding course number for that and the reason for that is because, we didn't know this because our colleagues at Parkside I guess were doing a pilot, but we are hopeful that... That algebra class is being taught with the high school standards. If those students achieve whatever the agreed upon grade is then they can go into high school and would be able to do the geometry placement test so any algebra kid can take that test. I offer it to everybody. If you are in a non-algebra class... I'm a math teacher. That's what I have done, so I'm kind of passionate about this particular thing. We would like our kids to be able to go to high school with a credit. It wouldn't count for one of the required math classes. It would be an elective credit. I think that is how they are handling it. Seventh grade is handled the same way that we did sixth grade so there is a high group and then there is a medium group and then there is that low/medium. That is how we did it. Maybe it is a wink, wink, but we are still leveling. We are using the same data. We are still grouping the kids. It makes it easier in my world to move kids between classes with the same course number.

Committee Member Van Houten stated you mentioned that you had some parent input. Was it positive or negative or a mix?

Mr. Krantz replied every parent that I spoke to at open house or made phone calls to, once I explained what we were doing they were not displeased. I expect if they were they would have kept talking or they would have called whoever. They would have gotten a hold of the central office. I would like to think that I explained it well enough. We really are leveling, we are just calling it something else. What it really is, it is flexible and we really do want to provide an opportunity for kids that can move at a quicker pace to in fact do that and be grouped accordingly.

Committee Member Girard stated the first question I have is whether or not the other three middle schools are using this flexible model. A simple yes or no.

Mr. Brendan McCafferty, Principal of Hillside Middle School, stated we are not doing this at Hillside, but a lot of it is pretty similar in that we shift around students as we realize that they need to go up or down. In the end I don't think he is doing anything much different than we are already doing, just calling it something a little different. I think some of the research I've read, we look at kids that believe they are being tracked versus being leveled and it shows that some kids internalize a lower ceiling. I think what Mr. Krantz is trying to do is take some of those labels away and provide for more flexibility within by moving kids around. For those of you who don't remember, when leveling started, right before I started my job six plus years ago, in the middle of the summer we are doing it. I think we are still trying to catch up to what are we doing and are we doing it right. For my two cents, if we are going to do leveling, these kiddos really need to believe that they can move up from level one to level two and two to three. We have low level math classes at 30 and classes above them at 30. For example, Mr. Krantz was saying that if you have a low level math class, not only are students internalizing that struggle, but naturally you are going to have a higher percentage of students with IEPs, a higher percentage of students with other challenges, with makes it more challenging. Right now, in seventh grade, say that is a sixth grade class in seventh grade, our math classes are mostly maxed out per the School Board policy of 30. That is another challenge. We are not doing what he is doing per say, but I think we are all pretty much similar across the four schools.

Committee Member Girard stated I want to pick up on something Mr. McCafferty said because I think you are fundamentally doing something different. I just want to make sure I understand. If I understand, Mr. Krantz is mixing his middle and lower students because he seems to have a fundamental objection to having a lower level class be populated entirely by lower level kids. If I heard you correctly you are moving kids up a level if they can do the work and down a level if they can't do you are moving them between levels. You are grouping them the way they should be groups. I use the term should subjectively, but you are grouping them based on what you think their ability is at the time if they show themselves capable of moving up you move them up, if they show themselves not capable of staying where they are, you move them down. That is a very different thing than what Mr. Krantz is doing, if I understood what you said you were doing correctly.

Mr. McCafferty stated I don't think it is that different though.

Committee Member Girard stated but he is not creating a group and moving people in between. He is mixing a group. He is creating a heterogeneous group. That is what he is doing. He is trying to say he is going to differentiate the instruction as a way of leveling within the class. That is a very different thing than what you are doing, sir, respectfully.

Mr. McCafferty stated I respectfully disagree. It is more than semantics.

Committee Member Girard stated the funny this is, Mr. Krantz is not disagreeing with me.

Mr. McCafferty stated I guess I'm just speaking to you about Hillside. When we see some of these numbers and some of these percentages of say students in a low level class that we try to bump some of them up if we think they are able to go a mid-level to get them around peers that might be able to motivate them. A lot of these kids that are in different levels have the capability to move up. There are multiple reasons for maybe moving some students around to balance classes, whether academically, behaviorally, or a combination to motivate them. Again, my two cents. I don't think it is that different what we are doing.

Mr. Forrest Ransdell, Principal of Parkside Middle School, stated I would say over the last several years what we really have at all three grade levels we have four identified levels, inclusive of sixth and seventh grade. When we identify four levels of students we have three levels of course offerings. That, in and of itself, forces us into a model of flexibility where we have our top level that is typically the top half of the 3's and all of the 4's, if you will. Our basic level course is the ones, and theoretically the bottom half of the 2's, and then our middle level, theoretically, is the top half of the 2's and the bottom half of the 3's. The level of data with which we are able to work with is largely teacher recommendations, which has value, but some of the data is not quantitative data. It is qualitative data and that is the vast majority of it. My goal, over the last three to five years has been to create a system where students do have that mobility, once teachers are able to work with those students and make those decisions about

what level of instruction those students require once they have experience with them. It is, by its nature, a fluid system. When you are working with four identified levels and three identified slots, if you will, you are going to have a fluid system to begin with to some degree by design. It was designed that way in 2012/2013, when Mr. Tursi was the assistant superintendent. That is the last time that this was addressed with any specificity. The other issue that we then look at and pardon me if I've lost my train of thought for just a moment, we are four levels into three. We want to move kids around. When we look at the research behind leveling you can find research on both sides, but some of the constant is if leveling has a positive effect it is for those students who are leveled at the upper levels. There is either no measurable effect or potentially a negative effect on students that are leveled at the lower levels. You look at the performance track for students all the way through. If you have begun in the lower level, it has been called tracking for many years for a reason, typically you will stay on that track and you will achieve at a lesser level throughout the remainder of your secondary career. There are studies that have shown that you can make those predictions based on sixth grade mathematics placement moving forward. Leveling, if it is done correctly, if we want to call it flexible grouping, if we want to call it ability grouping, there is any number of different names, but when you level it theoretically is to create instructional groupings that allow greater focus on the needed instruction, but without the resources to bring to bear, if we happen to have 33 children who are our basic level, number one, we can't have a class of 33 nor is a class that large effective for the students who need that additional time on task, that additional instruction, those additional things to close those gaps that they come to us with. There are a lot of factors at play here. Certainly McLaughlin's move was well discussed among ourselves in the district in the spring. I cannot explain why Dr. Livingston would indicate she wasn't aware of it. To my knowledge she was. I believe I remember having a discussion with her about it however brief it may have been. From that standpoint Mr. Krantz is not doing something completely out of the box here. He is leveling in a different way. He is maintaining those levels for the students that the research shows us can have a positive impact at the upper and mid-upper levels and he is taking something at that lower end and attempting to do something different to give those students a better shot at attaining those math skills moving forward. A rose by any other name sometimes... Still the levels exist at McLaughlin as they exist at the other three middle schools as well.

Ms. Gillis stated let me speak on behalf of Southside. We are still doing similar constructs as my colleagues have noted. What I would offer is, what we are starting to witness, our higher levels are starting to cap out so essentially then we are in this balance of we have 30 in the room, we have one or two who may be nudging to that level, how do we best support them. I think it is a conversation that we are all starting to have because we are seeing the students. They are achieving and we want to keep getting them all to raise that expectation. The higher they go we need to have the ability to be fluid in how we move them. On the flip side, the same thing applies. If we have a student, as Mr. Ransdell was talking about, who is placed in a certain level and we recognize that student is not at that place at that time, we are also struggling to say move them down if that next course is capped out at 30 as well. It does box us in a little bit for scheduling purposes. It is harder to navigate. It is a conversation we have started to have because we are seeing our students change and we need to be flexible and reflective of what their current needs are.

Chair Langton stated a question to all the principals, are you class sizes for all middle school classes 25 to 30 students? That does make it very difficult. You can't move anybody if your classes are maxed out.

Ms. Gillis responded for us, our higher levels are maxing out. That is forcing us to have a conversation of what does that next level down look like and how do you move a student when it is the 31st kid or you are two months into the school year and all of a sudden this kid is flying, but we can't get them into a 4 essentially.

Chair Langton asked what is the average number of students on a team? And you have four classes, correct?

Ms. Gillis replied four core classes. Right around the same. I think you were saying 113-ish.

Chair Langton stated Mr. Krantz, you had a large one. Did you say 160?

Mr. Krantz replied my grade six because I have only a couple of four person teams, there is one at 116, one at 113 and then because we have a split team in seventh and eighth grade, which was the original reason why we even went to this format because we didn't want to have leveled classes on a split team. You only have two sevens and two eights so the feeling was we were going to put medium kids on there is what we originally did. We called them medium, but because it was a signup, which I'm sure will be another discussion, they ultimately proved to be L4 kids in there. In order to try to make it so it wasn't this elitist team, we were trying to be thoughtful of that. My seventh and eighth grade classes are probably mid-20s. The seventh are in the mid to high 20s so 25-27 and my eights are very, very happy to be below 25 I believe in most instances and that's a consequence of that split team, which is why I was trying to beg for things that were impossible to do to get a two person team in sixth grade to get those numbers down. That would have been really great. I keep saying this every time and I know there is no money in the well, but five person teams is the answer. It is the most economical way to do it. It is five sections.

Chair Langton asked with reading and language arts like we used to have?

Mr. Krantz replied yes, and you get the extra language arts. Or, consider this, we do data dives, we identify a group of kids on one team that would benefit more from an extra block of language arts and another group an extra block of math and in addition to that they can get other instructional minutes with the resource room that is specific to math or with math essentials or with our language arts essentials, which is in keeping with the data that we get when we have done the focusing monitoring from the Department of Ed who taught us or retaught us that if you want to help a kid catch up you need to increase the number of instructional minutes. If you want to catch a kid up a year you have to give him twice as many minutes on average. We are struggling with the ability to do that within the current school schedule.

Committee Member Freeman stated listening to the four of you talk I can appreciate the struggles that you have with this. Fundamentally I don't think leveling is working for us. I don't think it is empowering the average child and those are not my words. I can appreciate how you have tried to work within the system to make it work for the kids, not just for you, and it is not

for you, it is for the kids. My question, and actually it is more of a statement, it seems to me that there is just really an intrinsically lacking lack of communication as far as what is happening in the schools and getting that information to us. That is why... We are not here to micromanage or to question or to put anybody under a microscope, but we need to understand because I also received a phone call about this question. Mine is more of a statement than a question. I can appreciate how this is really pulling all of your teams to the max. It is stretching you all pretty thin. I applaud you for trying to be flexible and doing the best for these kids.

Dr. Vargas stated what Committee Member Freeman is saying about what you are facing, what they are saying and I think it is acknowledged here that when you have 30 or 33 students in this situation it is very difficult. You are trying to do the best you can, which is what I have been telling this community that you do more with less. It gets to a point where it is like a rubber band, you can only stretch it out so much. That is a conversation that I think is the foundation for a good conversation in here. I'm looking hard right now at how can we respond to you, maybe revisiting or taking a close look at the Title I money. You have a lot of students in there that are facing significant challenges academically, social/emotional and physical. I don't need to tell you the middle school and you are just coping. This class size thing is only one element of what you are dealing with. I thank you and I see each of your buildings. I cannot stop echoing your statement that you are trying to, what Committee Member Freeman is saying, do the best that you can for our students given the circumstances that you face. Back to middle class families who are attracted to this district, and I know because I have spoken to some already and this notion that you have so much pressure and not the right amount of support is something that is concerning a lot of people. We have to find a way to respond to that.

Chair Langton stated agreed. I would like to see the lower levels have more support. Sometimes just splitting that class with two different teachers and one teacher with 13 students can help immensely too. But again, if you don't have that staffing you can't do that.

Mr. Krantz stated if I may, just to that point, we were very fortunate to be allowed to get a math essentials teacher. We had a personnel shift that allowed us to do that so there's our additional instructional minutes that are afforded to five classes' worth of students. The numbers are manageable so the class size is not 30. It is going to be around 15 because it is a one on 15 and these are students that are really struggling and we are very hopeful, actually, we know that it is going to make a difference. There is no question.

Chair Langton stated absolutely. They are not as intimidated when they are in a smaller class.

Mr. Krantz stated that would be a second math class basically. What was neat about it was we didn't open the year with it so we had to sell it to the parents and we have sold it.

Chair Langton stated so in lieu of a unified arts students are taking more academics.

Mr. Krantz stated exactly.

Committee Member Girard stated I just want to put a couple things on the record. One, I am not one of the people who spoke with the chair about this item or asked that it be placed on the agenda. I have some things I want to say. I'm not one of the people who asked to have this on the agenda, although I will say, Mr. Krantz, that I have received a number of communications from a number of folks in your school who have told me you are doing away with leveling and all of the stuff that we have already discussed here and no, not all of them were parents who had kids in the upper level classes. Some of them were decidedly parents who had kids in some of these mixed classes that were concerned that their kids were doing as well and weren't being as challenged as they could be because of the efforts necessary to tend to some of the lower level kids. I don't know what the answer to that is. I know Committee Member Avard sent out an email to everybody, which makes it a public record so I don't have a problem mentioning it. I have seen stuff on social media. I think I agree that we need to have the conversation. I'm not sure that leveling is the problem. I think part of the problem is that Manchester has a foot in the middle school paradigm and it has a foot in the junior high school paradigm. I understand pretty well how middle school works. My dad was a middle school principal and an assistant principal

for a long time. I will tell you, that said, I'm a fan of leveling and I won't go into it tonight, but my kids have been in these mixed classrooms and it has been an utter disaster. It is punitive to kids who can do more and do faster and learn at a greater speed. I think we should never lose sight of that because while we always want to make sure that all of our kids can learn to the best of their potential, I see no value in handicapping kids who can do more because they are tethered to a classroom that can't. There is only so far differentiation of instruction is going to get kids in a class that has a broad range of students. I think we, as a district, need to have a discussion about middle school versus junior high school, level versus not leveling and make a decision about a system because it doesn't make any sense to me that you are breaking kids down into four different levels, but you are only proving three different levels. I don't understand how that works. I think the discussion of leveling or not leveling is muddled here by the fact that we are trying to do two different systems at the same time. I would like to echo... We get the phone calls, folks. I mean this. It is great that you guys work together and you share your experiences and you talk amongst yourselves and you talk to the administration, but they are never the ones that get the phone call. It puts us all in an awkward position here. As far as I know Committee Member Avard got this all started with the email that he sent and unfortunately he is not here so his questions or concerns or reason for bringing it up aren't being articulated here and maybe we should put this on the table at a time when the entire committee can be here and have the discussion. Just a couple more things and then I'm done, Madame Chair. I don't know exactly what we are going to get to in the conversation tonight. Mr. Krantz, when you were talking about your split level team you said that you didn't want to have leveled classes in a split team. Does that mean that those classes in the split team are leveled or not leveled, your seventh and eighth grade team?

Mr. Krantz replied when we first did it, what we did was, because we were leveling the first year so we showed that course number as being medium because it was a sign up so parents had to volunteer or the kids had to volunteer to be on the team and the only way that it made sense to me was to not have a hard course number ending in 3 or 2 or 1 so we made the course number end in 2. That's all. It is really semantics.

Committee Member Girard stated I have been told that all of your course levels at McLaughlin end in a 2. Is that accurate?

Mr. Krantz replied in grade six and seven that's correct. In eighth grade, all three eighth grade teams, even the split, has an algebra, which ends in 4.

Committee Member Girard stated if you grades six and seven all end in a 2, aren't you homogeneously grouping and trying to differential instruction within the class.

Mr. Krantz stated they all end in 2. That would lend itself more to heterogeneous grouping, but the teachers are flexibly grouping.

Committee Member Girard stated I'm sorry, I meant heterogeneous grouping. I always get that screwed up.

Mr. Krantz stated like I said, there is a group that is known to be the top group, but they are not identified as such by a course number that ends in 3. It is more like a middle school. You are right, we are a middle school/junior high hybrid. We should be, in my opinion, a middle school. With all due respect to your thoughts on leveling, I would have been in a low level class. I never should have been in a low level class. It was all about my environment and because people gave me an opportunity to not be tracked in a low level class and be punished for being in a low level situation I was able to rise up and be here now to speak to you. I respect your point of view. I disagree with it from a personal history point of view. I never would have been put in a high level class and I had no control over the fact that I was living in an environment that manifested itself in such a way that I would have been identified as a kid that should have been stuck in a low level class and I would have been tracked there, guaranteed and then I would have likely have taken on some of the habits that might not have been conducive to learning or to make good decisions. Trust me, I have my own three kids and we made phone calls to West High School when they were put in a class like what you were describing and we wanted them to be, for the very reasons you are describing, we wanted them to be moved up a level and it was more about being concerned about the attitudes, if you will. I don't want to come across like I'm judging the

kids that re in a lower level class. The fact is, my situation that I came from, I had no control over it. We lived in poverty and I had some really bad things happen to me and if I didn't have a school system that was flexible enough to allow me an opportunity to raise myself up then I wouldn't be here. I remember that and I am not going to let, unless it is a situation where I'm insubordinate and I get fired for it, I'm not okay with having a low level class. I'm just not. It has been my experience that it didn't work for me, it wouldn't have worked for me and it has not worked for a lot of our kids, particularly when we put 30 of them in a room. Relative to the phone calls, send them to me. I'd be happy to speak to them.

Committee Member Girard stated some of them have spoken to you, but I'm not at liberty because they asked me not to.

Mr. Krantz stated there is supposed to be a bit of a chain of command. I think out of respect, if someone has a question for the principal I would be happy to answer it. We may, at the end of the conversation, agree to disagree, but I'll do my best to explain what it is that we are doing and I assume if they are not happy with my answer then they are going to go to my bosses. I guess I'm being told I should chill out.

Committee Member Girard asked did I hear something about a pilot program at Parkside?

Mr. McCafferty asked can I respond to the other thing first?

Mr. Ransdell stated this past year we had an agreement with West High School. The students that take algebra at Parkside and we have followed that up during this school year, but we came before C&I a year ago March and Mr. Motika and I discussed that and presented that along with Mr. Ryan a year ago March. The way that system works is that a student takes the high school algebra class in grade eight and it is the high school level 2 algebra class. If a student passes the course and since it is the high school course taught by a high school credentialed teacher then that student will earn some form of high school credit. If they succeed in entering the geometry course they will earn high school algebra 1 credit on their high school transcript. The reason for that is because they will then not be taking that particular course in high school. If they do not

qualify for the geometry course and they are going to repeat algebra we certainly hope, and at this point have a little bit of anecdotal data because it is early in the year, to believe that they will take that course and be more successful because they have experienced it once or they will take it at a high level. Related to the anecdotal evidence, I had a student who happened to come back and visit this particular year from last year's cohort and this was a student who struggled mightily the entire year last year in algebra, flirted with passing and not passing most of the year. When I asked this student, are you glad you did it, the answer was an immediate and vociferous oh my god yes, it is so much easier this time. That was mission accomplished because that is he student that is going to go on and be successful in that math more so than if we had had that student do eighth grade math or arithmetic or those kinds of things without that experience who would have been likely to repeat that eighth grade tier freshman year. Anyway, that is the general description. If a student does not qualify for geometry than it is math elective credits so they do not receive math credit for that algebra course in the eighth grade, they still need their years of required mathematics in high school.

Committee Member Girard stated I think that is a good idea, Mr. Ransdell, I just find it curious because if they do actually go into geometry they actually can't be part of the STEAM Ahead program at West because they require you to take the STEAM algebra class rather than take the high level math if you can. That is not a discussion point here, but that's an aside that we might want to tackle at a future point in time.

Mr. Ransdell stated it is certainly worth a future discussion. There is a rigidity sometimes about the leveling and placements, even sometimes within our own schools, I will say, but certainly as our kids are moved to high school.

Ms. Gillis asked can I just offer one thought? I'm hearing you guys talk a little but about middle school versus junior high. In working with my colleagues for the past two plus years now, we are incredibly committed to our kids and I think we constantly keep looking for how do we move with them as they are moving. I know that we continue to go back and look at data. We continue to go back and look at best practices. We are trying to figure out how do we best support them. I'm also hearing you talk about a communication breakdown. We are more than

willing to keep coming. We keep coming to your meetings. We keep showing up. We are more than willing to talk about middle school versus junior high. We are more than willing to talk about what do we see our kids evolving to or needing or ideas that we have for support. We are not open to any of those conversations. You will see us get a little bit charged up at times because we do believe very strongly in raising that bar and pushing expectations for our kids. We collectively and individually believe very firmly in the possibility of every student in each one of our buildings. I'll end by saying we have looked at a lot of citywide events so that we can capitalize on different student strengths. We have the city spelling bee, the city geo bee, the city firefighter challenge. We are looking for all of these different avenues to highlight and showcase student success. We are absolutely... We are coming to the table. We are asking. We are looking. We are more than willing to work with our guys to share that communication, but we are here and we are fighting on behalf of them. We really want to see them all. I would love to keep pushing the high school to push the levels higher.

Committee Member Girard stated I haven't lost sight that Mr. McCafferty has something he wants to say. I just want to say though, if you make a major change like it appears that you did in your school, Mr. Krantz, it is a great idea to give us a heads up first because you know we are getting the phone calls. Whether it is a miscommunication, people agree, they are afraid that if they say something to the principal their kid might suffer repercussions, rightly or wrongly, that is their feeling. We deal with it all the time and if there is going to be a major change in your building and how you do something, it is always better to be on the front end of that curve than reactive to it after the fact. I won't speak for Committee Member Freeman, but that's why I brought it up. It makes it very difficult when we are always fighting a rear guard action trying to figure out what happened.

Mr. Krantz stated absolutely understood and there was never any malicious intent.

Committee Member Girard stated I don't think there is, Bill.

Mr. Krantz stated I did what I thought was okay to do.

Committee Member Girard stated I certainly don't think there was any mal-intent.

Committee Member Freeman stated my mantra is proactive instead of reactive because that usually works out a lot better. I will agree with Committee Member Girard about... Naturally, protocol dictates that you go to the administration first, but it is always good if we have a heads up as well because we do get the phone calls.

Committee Member Girard stated on the broader topic I will say this because I was here when McLaughlin was built. I was a mayor's aid when Superintendent Leonard Bernard came in and said let's do middle school. Middle school came to this community for one reason and one reason only. It was the least expensive from a capital point of view. It was the least expensive way to handle the overcrowding at the elementary schools. Nobody sat down, nobody made the pitch about why middle school was better than junior high schools. I promise you, nobody did any of that. That did it strictly to shift population. I don't think they ever figured it out along the way. I know then Assistant Superintendent Brennan did his best, but it was never set up the right way.

Mr. Krantz stated I do not disagree with you.

Chair Langton stated the chair of this committee is a middle school proponent.

Mr. McCafferty stated I would just like to add that these are great conversations to have and if we are going to discuss middle school philosophy versus junior high school, regardless of which one we are going with, we have to start with class sizes. Again, in my time I have seen an increase, it seems like an increase every year or students that have 504s, students who have IEPs, students who you have to go through safety protocols for suicide ideation, you put that into a class of 30 with an expectation on us to move students up. I think that is where the conversation needs to start first and foremost. Committee Member Girard, you mentioned that you get the phone calls and we respect that. We are all responsible for every single student in our school and making sure that they have everything they need, along with our wonderful teachers and paras and the entire staff. What you are getting we are getting times 800, 750, etc. That can't be

overstated. I would just caution us as a group, something you said earlier, the words that popped out to me without hearing the rest, when you were saying about leveling that when I hear mixed classes with no value and handicapping and we are speaking about this publicly, to me, it might jump out to some people that it is these kids versus those kids. These are big words and I think as a group we want to be mindful, and I say that respectfully, of the words we are using about our kiddos because, again, with 28, 29, 30 all very deserving students with multiple challenges and obstacles, it drives us to a point where Mr. Krantz spoke with the administration last year about wanting to give this a shot because we have to find a way to not track certain kids. Again, I would just echo, as I think you do already, encourage those phone calls to come back to us because every parent deserves their time and their explanation and I think overall when they sit down and speak to us or in this case, Mr. Krantz, that they would get it and they would feel better about it.

Committee Member Girard stated I would like to follow up on what you said about wording because I want to be clear. I was not always an upper level kid. I had teachers who said you can do more and you can do better. My expectations were pushed. What I have noticed in my personal experience as a parent whose kids have been put in heterogeneous groups is that the kids who are less capable get frustrated because they can't keep up with the pace of the overall class, the kids who are more capable are frustrated because they can be doing a whole lot more and can't and the kids in between, you would think they would be at the right place, but they are not because the teacher ends up spending too much time with the extremes. We all have our experiences. I don't discount any of your professionalism, but will tell you there has got to be a better way. I understand the argument for heterogeneous grouping, I really do, but I think there are limits to the extremes that you can have in a heterogeneous class, I really do, because that's my experience not only as a parent, but that is also my experience as a student. I don't think there is any kid in a class that isn't valuable or can't learn, but I do think there is value in taking kids who need additional help and making sure that they are in an environment where they get that additional help, without penalizing the kids who don't need it and who can do more in an environment that allows them to move at their pace. I don't know what the answer to that is and I'm not one of those, the world needs ditch digger two kind of guys. I appreciate you bringing that up so I had the opportunity to clarify by thoughts. I wasn't randomly trying to use words

that could be harmful to a slower student. These are the kinds of discussions that I hope we have so we can sort this out and come up with a game plan that we can implement, that we can budget around, that we can have discussion programmatically over and try to get ahead of some of these things rather than constantly trying to catch up and react. I understand that class size is a big part of that. It is one of the reasons why some of us have held some of the positions on various items that we have held in the past because resources, when they are limited, you put yourself into an either/or and you can't act like you are district that can do both and.

Mr. McCafferty stated it might be punitive to one group. What we are seeing at certain levels is by just class size alone the combinations, it seems by nature, though unintended, to be punitive to students in lower groups at that size. I think as a district, as a city, we need to ask a question of ourselves. It doesn't have to be either/or. In our case we are responsible for all the kids and making sure they all get what they need. I'm hoping we can move towards committing to this and that if that's what's needed.

Committee Member Van Houten stated I come from a perspective of having taught leveled classes for many years here in Manchester, primarily levels 4 and 1. When I first came to the board I believe that my commitment was still there. As I walk around and see some of the classes in our district and I look at some of the blended classes that we are doing in grades one and two, I wonder why something like that may not work, say at the middle school, where we blend the sixth grade and the seventh grade. As I look at projected based learning, as I see those types of things evolving, I'm becoming much more of a convert to not leveling, to empowering our teachers with good professional development and to using the concepts that are now proving to be so much more beneficial in a 21st century learning environment. That is a 180 degree turn for someone like me who spent 36 years teaching primarily levels 4 and 1 and not really seeing the average student other than in the extracurriculars that I worked with them in. I applaud you for looking at data-driven directions. I applaud you for being open to different directions and I don't know how you feel about any of the things that I've mentioned, but I think those are part of the conversation. I don't know that all of you know this, but I had the advantage about talking about Parkside with Forrest at great length. I will be inviting Mr. McCafferty to have a conversation with me about his school as well. I'm looking to provide a forum for you on a

radio show in which you can bring your vision of the middle school forward. I hope that some of these topics that I'm mentioning and that others have mentioned come out there. It is not the board, I agree, but it gives you a forum and gives you a change to explore some of these and to nothing else, to edify me a little bit more in terms of how I need to grow as a board member. Masterful teachers and class sizes that are controlled are totally the floor that we have to reach for. I had several other things that I was going to mentioned here but I think what I will close with is just to ask Mr. Ransdell to tell a little bit about what you told me. You told me that there were extra blocks of time at the end of lunch breaks that you were utilizing as empowering fillers for our students. Would you mentioned that and let them know what you told me please.

Mr. Ransdell stated Mr. Krantz alluded to some of the additional instructional time that we have available to us. On a daily basis we utilize our enrichment period, which every student has a period that backs up to their lunch, a half of an instructional period is their lunch and the other half is a period of instructional time available. We call it enrichment. It is called a little something different at different schools. What we do is we use our initial math computation assessments at the beginning of the year and each team then identifies the concept with which the greatest percentage of students are struggling with and they begin an instructional process three days a week with that concept until 80% of the students have demonstrated proficiency in that concept and then they will move to the next and it will be a slightly smaller group of students that will have need. Each time the concept is moved it will be fewer students each time who need that assistance. We start with the concept of greatest need and that is a really flexible process because it is a quick four question assessment at the end of each week and after demonstrating proficiency for two weeks the students leave that instructional process and move back into the original or the actual enrichment programs and activities that happen during that period of time. That is a quick, general description.

Committee Member Van Houten stated and I applaud the different individualizations that each of you bring to the table because it is ultimately all about kids. As I said you are changing my focus. As I walk through our schools, as I talk to our educators you are making me believe that perhaps there are just different ways to do things that don't involve locking youngsters in. Mr. Krantz, I share a background similar to yours and I came through the Manchester School District

from grade five right on through and there were people that supported me a great deal, but a lot of things going on in the schools supported me a great deal. My mom was an immigrant. My dad was a dropout. It wasn't an environment in my family that was conducive to education because they didn't know how to do that. It wasn't that they didn't want me to succeed, they didn't know how and the school showed me how to succeed. I too might have floundered and not been able to sit here with you tonight because my education might not have suited me as well. I hope that you will take me up on the offer to do some kind of a forum on the radio show in a one hour venue where we can talk about this more fully. I can share that with the board and share that with everyone else in a podcast. I'm not advertising. My show is not a commercial show. There is no advertising. I get no pay for it. I would hope that you would take the opportunity to help me and maybe one or two of colleagues to learn more about this and to see where this goes, where we can go with this. As we are on the cusp of looking at redistricting and looking at many, many other things and bringing in new people and new voices, it is a great time now to do this and I appreciate that you have brought this to us.

Committee Member Freeman stated just to address something that was brought up about the phone calls. I would like you all to understand that every board member understand and encourages parents when they call us to go right to the source. The two phone calls I got about this issue, Mr. Krantz, were two of the 20 phone calls I got last week. The first and foremost thing I say to parents is have you spoken with the principal. Yes, I spoke with the principal, I wasn't happy with that. Have you spoken to the administration? I don't want to run interference between the school and the parent. I encourage and I not only encourage, but I insist that they open up a line of communication with the school because by the time it gets to me it is never what it started as, never. I understand that. I had a son that went 14 years through this school system through the autism program. I know that if you want to get a question answered you go right to the source and that is what I encourage all parents to do when they call me. I know that everyone on the board, all 15 of us understand, that that is where it starts. I hope you all do understand that we don't take those phone calls at face value, but we do have a responsibility to our constituents to follow through with them. I just wanted to make that point.

Mr. McCafferty asked could we make a plug for this committee, something to think about and maybe bring to the full board? Several years ago, I think Dr. Brennan was the one who brought this to our district, middle schools had two language arts teachers so all kids had a writing class and a reading class.

Chair Langton stated that happened for three years. We had a language arts and we had reading and our scores rose tremendously because of that.

Mr. McCafferty stated we had district assessments. We had a full time middle school language arts coordinator in Tina Proulx and in math in Heidi Boyle. The things were able to align. Our scores on the local assessments were going up and the NECAPs were going up. Then we got rid of those two folks. We were demonstrating success. Since this is the curriculum and instruction committee, when you talk about project based learning, SLOs, Manchester Academic Standards, curricula in all four subjects, committees that are started, half started, we are working to get back on track, we feel, for 85% of the topics that come up, if we had, and this is going to go to the budget, if we had a standout k-12 personnel that were just committed to curriculum and instruction and assessment so many of these things would be... If we never stopped that several years ago, where would we be today? Just a plug for this committee to consider and bring to the full board. Respectfully, we see that as a priority to the success of the kids in the district.

Chair Langton stated just to bring Dr. Vargas up to speed, Dr. Vargas, there was a point in time, for only three years in this district, in Manchester, where the middle school students had a language arts and a reading class. Right now it is combined for one course. When you think of 180 days, or at this point because it is hours, 170 something days, with 45 additional minutes of a language arts and a reading, that is a tremendous amount of instruction that students have lost and they can't recoup that. Our scores had risen tremendously. I'm in a district that has done that for the 23 years that I've been in that district. Manchester only had it for three years and lost it for budget cuts or for whatever reason. I would think it is extremely important that we bring that back or we have that opportunity for our students. Additional education never hurt anyone. It has only benefitted them.

Mr. McCafferty stated with so many things on so many people's plates that have just built over the years as we have cut and lost, it is going to come back to having personnel in charge and overseeing that. Think about it, at one point we have one person just for middle school language arts and middle school math. You talk about investment, that buck went a long way. Again, just something for the board to think about.

Chair Langton stated that wasn't anything that you asked to lose, it came about in the budget process. I just wanted to bring Dr. Vargas up to speed on what had happened in our district and where we are currently. Mr. McCafferty, Mr. Krantz, Ms. Gillis, Mr. Ransdell, thank you so much for your input and comments.

Committee Member Van Houten stated as ESSA is better articulated, I think we will see it moving, at least from my understanding and I have been doing a little bit of work with the DOE on this, we will see the evolution is away from core subjects to an entire curriculum, to an entire evolution of the youngster. I don't think much underlies that any better than reading. To master science, to master social studies, one needs to be able to read and to write. I think we will see, I'm hoping that we will see, ESSA giving us the contributions that we need to move forward in those directions. I'm hoping that that is what will happen in the near future.

Mr. Krantz asked can I just say one more thing? Committee Member Girard made a comment about the students being in a class that the teacher did not have the skillset to maybe deal with the heterogeneous group. We also acknowledge that when middle schools came into existence there really wasn't professional development to even get us the training necessary to be a middle school caliber teacher dealing with heterogeneous groupings. I'm absolutely confident in our staffs. If such professional development were provided that they would be able to, in fact, deliver in the way that middle schools throughout the country have been doing it for many years and you are one of them. It is all about what Dr. Vargas was talking about when we first met him, the devil is in the details. You have to deal with minutia. You have to provide people with appropriate training to be able to execute a thing. As we are talking here, I want to make sure that we are not speaking for him. He is the chief and we are going to figure out how the threads

of the rope that we are trying to design here is going to work. I think I'm probably stating the obvious, but just in case he is wondering.

Dr. Vargas stated I just want to say thank you again for your work. The knowhow is here. Someone has said to me where is your agenda and I found an agenda here. The question is, there are a lot of recipes so how do you bring it. Let's say there are a lot of talented people here, but we don't have a symphony yet. That is going to require bringing the community in because I will tell you that we just finished, prior to this meeting, talking about our facilities and the list goes on. At one point do you have clear priorities. I'm a great believer in reading. I couldn't agree more with what you just said about how essential reading is as a gateway to success for the students. I'm not surprised. I saw in your school how you are utilizing a reading program, but you have, let's say two teachers, when perhaps you could use more. The teacher will tell you, the principal will tell you and when you look at your assessments for some of our students that are facing significant challenges, you can see that that would be something that would help our students. I also want to say for people who might be listening to this, there are kids here who are doing incredibly, advanced placement. In your schools kids getting college credit and those kids are succeeding in an enormous way. Two of you spoke about your background today. What it is, for poor kids, you have to mitigate some of the challenges that they face outside the school door. That has to be part of the equation. You are good. You are excellent, but at the end of the day I think we will make a mistake if we say that we can do this alone, including addressing our budget challenge.

Chair Langton addressed item 7 of the agenda:

7. Update on the elementary health curriculum.

Dr. Christine Martin, Assistant Superintendent, stated really the update is very brief. What is currently being used in our elementary schools is what is known as the Michigan Model for health. It is an older version, I believe a 1996 version of the Michigan Model. The Michigan Model is used in 39 states in the union. It is a research based, evidence based curriculum model covering topics such as managing conflicts and preventing violence, tobacco prevention,

nutrition, physical activity, character education, building character in ourselves and our school, etc. Those are just sample topics. What is currently happening with our elementary health teachers is they are engaged in professional development, many of them for their alternative certifications in health. At the same time they are also working on revising our health curriculum here in the city. I'm at a bit of a disadvantage in that Ms. Snow, our former director of the Innovation Zone, spearheaded the health initiative with the health teachers and Ms. DeVincent, our federal projects person, will be taking over that task and meeting with the elementary health teachers during our November 8th workshop day. That is a brief overview of the model. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

Chair Langton stated just a couple of clarifying questions. Currently, all first through fifth graders have health class once a week, correct?

Dr. Martin replied that's correct.

Chair Langton stated and we have no health class though in the middle school.

Dr. Martin stated that's correct also.

Chair Langton stated at some point I think that would be very important to get back into the curriculum because there is a big void there. I'm at a middle school that has a health curriculum and it is quite impressive. I realize we have a budget constraint, but I think that is extremely important for students to give them a base in moving forward with healthy lifestyles.

Dr. Martin stated I appreciate that, Madame Chair. It is an odd structure. We teach in the elementary level, we forget those very important years of a child's life and then continue on in the high school level.

Chair Langton stated very formidable years there in the middle school.

Dr. Martin stated I'm completely supportive of that.

Committee Member Freeman stated first off, we didn't get a copy of that assessment that you are referring to, Dr. Martin.

Dr. Martin stated what I have in front of me is simply notes from a website talking about the Michigan Model. All of our teachers have the binders of the Michigan Model. We do not have one currently in our office. I wasn't really clear of what you wanted for an update on the elementary health curriculum. If you would like to know what the topics are in each unit I can certainly do that for you. It will take some time because there are individual binders for each grade level.

Committee Member Freeman stated I have nothing but time. I would appreciate it. Just a comment, being a therapist and having a good amount of knowledge about health, I would really like to explore more on how a health class went from just basic hygiene and evolution of body into more of a suicide watch and feelings. I would like to get a better sense of how that kind of morphed into what it is right now. Again, I have nothing but time.

Dr. Martin stated I'm actually very passionate about the topic and I'm happy to do the research for you to provide that information.

Committee Member Freeman stated that would be wonderful and well received. Thank you.

Committee Member Van Houten stated Dr. Martin, I'm not sure if you know the answer to this question, but in the middle of the last academic year I talked to some health teachers who were saying that there were some stumbling blocks in getting the alternative certification. Do you have any awareness of how that is going at this point?

Dr. Martin replied yes. All of our elementary health teachers who are currently in the classroom either are currently certified or have a certificate of eligibility and are working on their three year plan.

Committee Member Van Houten asked and we are facilitating that process for them, correct?

Dr. Martin replied yes. Ms. DeVincent has taken over for Ms. Snow and is supporting them moving forward in that process.

Chair Langton stated Dr. Martin, just one last question. The curriculum as far as the health curriculum for the elementary level, is that online for parents to peruse through?

Dr. Martin replied unfortunately, given the age of the curriculum it was all hand typed documents. I don't even have a copy of those. They are not to be found in our office. I apologize for that. This is not an impressive statement. When the new curriculum is complete you can be very certain that all the units of instruction will be accessible to the community.

Chair Langton asked and when is that date currently planned?

Dr. Martin replied Ms. DeVincent, as I said, is going to spend the day with those folks on the 8th so after November 8th I will have a clearer update for you on where they are in their process.

Chair Langton stated perhaps an update at the next C&I meeting?

Dr. Martin responded absolutely.

Committee Member Van Houten stated one more quite question. The curriculum management plan is on our table and has been there for months. Are we holding up the health curriculum by keeping it on our table?

Chair Langton replied I don't believe we are holding up anything at this point.

Committee Member Van Houten stated I know there was an evolution of dates and a revolution of times. I guess my question really should be, is there any way that we can facilitate this?

Dr. Martin replied facilitate the moving forward with the health curriculum?

Committee Member Van Houten replied yes.

Dr. Martin stated again, I'm speaking a bit out of turn. I believe as a part of their certification process it is essential for them to be doing the research that they are doing to complete the curriculum. Unless the committee has an objection I don't believe we are going to stop the work. We are simply going to keep moving.

Committee Member Van Houten stated absolutely. I have implicit trust in you and the others who are working on the curriculum.

Chair Langton stated prior to this evening, SAT results were going to be presented. After speaking with Dr. Vargas he wanted a little more time to review and to ensure that the official results would be brought to us. We will have that at a future meeting.

Dr. Vargas stated I just want to say thank you. This was a very good discussion. It gives me a great appreciation for what they are trying to do given the challenges. I thank each one of you for acknowledging that challenge. For example, you heard one of our principals say that if I could put a small group of the most needy kids with direct instruction that would be an optimal situation, but then it is not doable with the budget that we gave them. When you don't give people the tools or the time or the support you have to be careful what kind of demand we put on them. I appreciate your patience because we are dealing with children and children are only children once.

Chair Langton stated I realize that discussion went on for a while, but I do think it is important for us to share our perspective, their perspective and the perspective that we are getting from the community that we serve.

TABLED ITEMS

A motion is in order to remove any items from the table.

8. Update on the PACE Program.
(Note: Additional information is attached. Tabled 2/10/2016.)

This item remained on the table.

9. Curriculum Management Draft Plan.
(Note: A public hearing was held on 3/7/2016. A final document is being prepared.)

This item remained on the table.

*There being no further business, on motion of **Committee Member Freeman**, duly seconded by **Committee Member Van Houten**, it was voted to adjourn at 8:05 p.m.*

A True Record. Attest.



Clerk of Committee