

**BERNARDS TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION  
CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MINUTES  
March 1, 2024**

**Board Members In Attendance:** Janice Corrado, Robin McKeon, Keith Molinari, Jennifer White

**Administrators in Attendance:** Michael Fackelman, Kristin Fox, Dave Hunscher, Grant Kolmer, Nick Markarian, Tom Misiak, John Terry

1. **Board Agenda items:** There are no voting items for our next Board of Education meeting.
  
2. **Discussion Items:**
  - a. **Social Studies Program Evaluation (9-12):** [Link to full report](#) The Social Studies program was last evaluated in 2014 prior to this past summer. Mr. Terry gave an update on the course changes since the last evaluation such as AP US History is now available to 10th graders, there is an active citizenship requirement in Grade 11 that Project Citizen fulfills, elective course choices have been expanded, AP Macroeconomics and AP Microeconomics are now a double elective and AP US Government is a stand alone Grade 11 course. Ridge offers more electives than comparative districts so that students have an overwhelmingly great and vast experience with social studies electives. Another fact that makes our program stand out is that we offer civic education as a stand alone required course. We are the only district in the state that does a stand alone course as a part of our three-year required sequence in social studies. There are a greater number of students taking AP exams since 2014 and student performance continues to be high with 95% or more of students earning a passing score, 4 or greater in nearly all courses. Our scores remain exceptionally high in comparison to national and state averages.

Mr. Terry presented the ongoing work related to the 2014 recommendations and then shared what the committee addressed. The committee worked on this project over two summers. The essential question the committee focused upon was what is the current state of the state? They looked at skills and how to build upon them from year to year to ensure that there is no overlap in topics so that what is covered in each course is not redundant. The scope and sequence of the years was reviewed too. Academic integrity remains an issue that may require added guidance as a result of technological advancements. Discussion was held regarding inclusion and diversity. The committee also met with Dr. Kristen Hawley Turner, Program Director and Professor of Teacher Education at Drew University. Our session was dedicated to

media literacy in general, with a look at both historical sources as well as internet-based sources, and to think through some similar and different approaches to reading and analyzing sources from both the past and the present. Parent and student surveys were reviewed, as well as what other districts are doing, best practices involving research and conversation were explored. As a survey was administered during the school day, it yielded great student response and feedback. Four goals/recommendations came out of this work.

**Goal 1:** Develop more culturally responsive curricula that are more culturally responsive to support the current program of studies and existing courses.

**Goal 2:** Enhance domain specific social studies knowledge and skills to better prepare students for citizenship in the 21st century.

**Goal 3:** Promote media and information literacy to support student ability to navigate and “read” a swiftly changing and expanding media and information landscape.

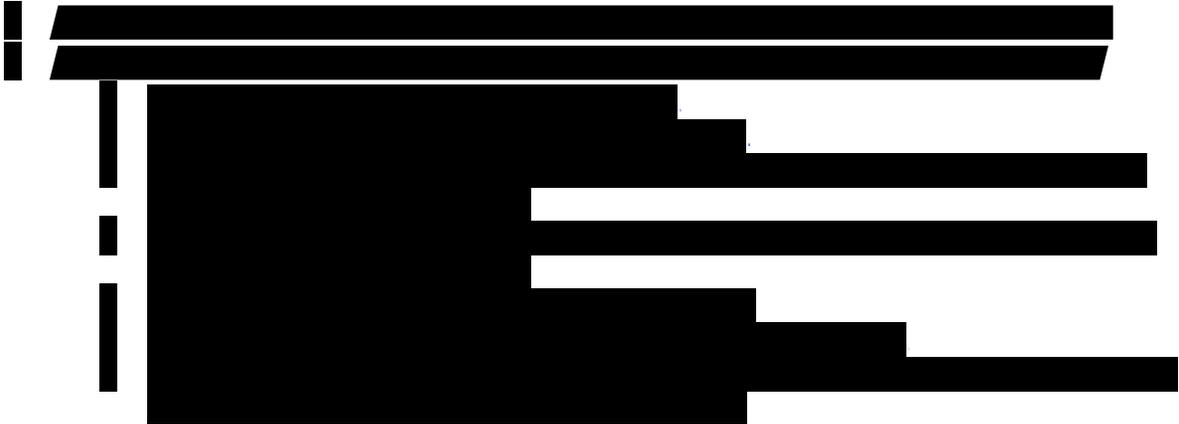
**Goal 4:** refine approaches to grading and assessment to better communicate academic performance to students and parents, as well as promote academic integrity.

- b. [Part 1. Post Secondary Report](#): Ms Fox presented part 1, AP Scores, of the annual post secondary report. Next month Part 2, SAT and ACT scores will be presented. Currently, Ridge offers 29 of 39 available Advanced Placement courses to students in grades 10-12. Seniors can self study for any exam and juniors who have met requirements for a course but could not fit it in their schedule can also self study. Scores range from 1 to 5, 3 is considered passing although the score required to earn college credit varies by institution and major. The large majority of our students who take an AP course have traditionally also taken the exam. Ridge High School traditionally has outstanding participation and achievement on all AP exams. There were 49 more unique students taking AP exams from 548 in 2022 to 597 last spring and the total number of exams being taken is also higher from 1515 to 1558. 97% of those students received a 3 or higher which is consistent with prior years. Student performance on AP exams has remained steady. Our AP courses are highly enrolled, with fluctuations across specific courses. The percentage of students who had at least one passing score increased, from 96% to 97% The percentage of students earning a 5 decreased by 2%, but the % of students earning a 4 increased by 4%. Currently, there are 4 Ridge teachers who participate in scoring the AP exams for College Board which provides valuable information in terms of how students are

performing in comparison nationally and by the state. Overall, our students performed extremely well on the 2022 AP exams and scores are within range or higher than they were 5 years ago.

**NJ Heart PD Resources:** There has been ongoing discussion among K-12 staff as to how to address the issues arising when students are behaving in a discriminatory manner. Teachers have reported hearing and seeing students engage in inappropriate conversation and are struggling with how to best and appropriately handle these matters as they arise. To be clear, these occurrences are on the rise. While HIBS of this nature have increased, there are many more comments and microaggressions that do not rise to that level. Staff have requested guidance, support and specifically have asked for professional development to gain insight in order to manage these situations. In addition, staff have requested to be better equipped to navigate challenging situations inherent in the delivery of certain curriculum. One model being looked at is the train-the-trainer model. Darrell DeTample, who is a teacher at Hunterdon Central and a team member of NJ Heart would meet and lead professional development on this topic, training participants. Then professional development would entail some faculty, team and department meetings co-facilitated by BTSD administrators, trainers and teacher experts who had been trained. Currently, NJ Heart offers a variety of sessions such as Responding to Racist Comments in Class, Implicit Biases and Microaggressions in School, The N- Word: How to Teach the History and Impact, Asian-American Discrimination & Hate Speech, Disparaging Humor: When a Joke is Not Just a Joke, Addressing Anti-Muslim Discrimination, Addressing Anti-Semitism and Establishing Safe and Brave Spaces for Difficult Classroom Discussions. The goal for staff is to build comfort levels as teachers are fearful of mishandling an issue as it arises when they are unsure of what to do or what to say. A lengthy discussion entailed with committee members sharing a variety of perspectives of what should or could be discussed with students, incorporated into lessons and be a potential topic for a BT Connect meeting as a way to engage parents and the community in conversation on this issue. One board member suggested the focus of lessons should be how we are all alike. Other board members shared the viewpoint that we are not all alike, our experiences are not all the same. That does not mean there are no similarities but lessons and dialogue with students need to include differences too as this helps teach empathy, respect and understanding. The goal is to be proactive to prevent, and deter discriminatory behavior and dialogue among students and by helping teachers feel empowered to handle matters head on should improve the climate and culture in school. Other vendors for professional development such as Sage Wellness Group have been explored but at this time are not what we are looking for but we will continue to explore options as this issue is so important. One board member was not in favor of using NJ Heart; As these sessions are available on line this BOE member attended "Addressing Anti-Muslim Discrimination" the previous evening and reported that it was informative and nothing was wrong with it. The committee agreed that we need to provide

support and asked the professional development teams to review and consider the STAFF lesson materials which include the following (links below) .and a sample lesson for STUDENTS on the N-word. We will discuss this further.



- c. **Elementary Spanish:** Currently 2 teachers spend part of a day at Ridge or WAMS and then visit the 4 elementary schools. 4th and 5th graders have 2- 25 minute periods of Spanish weekly. Discussion as to how to improve, make more meaningful, implement differently was moved to next month's curriculum meeting when Ms. Stotler, Supervisor of World language will be available to meet with us to discuss this.
  
- d. **Panorama SEL Survey Update:** No update. Surveys are still being finalized and a link to a permission slip is being worked on.

Our next meeting will be April 5th.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer White