

## **Curriculum Committee Meeting**

Wednesday, March 11, 2020 9:00 AM

Central Office Conference Room, 24 School Road, Weston, CT 06883-1623

I. **Call to Order**

II. **Discussion of remote learning options as it relates to school closures**

III. **Follow up discussion on school start and end times**

IV. **Discussion of updates to homework policy**

V. **Update on field trips**

VI. **Approval of February minutes**

VII. **Other curricular issues**




# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner 

DATE: March 9, 2020

SUBJECT: Guidance to CT School Districts

Thank you for your efforts to keep students and staff safe, and for your work planning ahead. This guidance is subject to change as the situation changes in Connecticut. Districts should make decisions based first and foremost on the safety and well-being of students, staff and the entire school community, and with the input of local municipal public health officials.

### **School Closures and Distance Learning:**

At present, the decision to close remains at the local level. The flowchart attached will help provide guidance.

The State Department of Education recommends that *if* districts make decisions, with the recommendation of municipal health departments or district health department directors, to close school for up to 2 weeks that those days are made up during vacations or in June. The State Department of Public Health is available for consultation. A second option, to provide distance learning in lieu of on-site schooling, must be approved by a waiver (attached). Districts must consider applicable state and federal laws and policies, including but not limited to employment laws, collective bargaining considerations, and special education. Consistent with our previous guidance, work with unions to ensure effective and equitable staff engagement in distance learning plans.

Closures that may extend past two weeks will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Use the Superintendent email address previously provided to you to communicate questions directed to the CSDE. Please keep your district emergency operations coordinator informed of questions and responses.

### **Postponing or Cancellation of Events:**

Districts, in consultation with the municipal or district health department, should consider the directives made to state agencies by the Governor (below) in considering district planning for large events where there would be 100 or more people in attendance such as:

- Athletic events
- School plays/Spring concerts
- Field trips

Summary of Guidance from Governor to State Agencies:

- An immediate freeze on state employee travel for state business outside of Connecticut until further notice.
- Any State of Connecticut-organized large meetings, conferences, or gatherings anticipated to have more than 100 people in attendance will be evaluated as to whether these events should move to teleconference or be postponed.
- For events or meetings with large numbers of people within arm's length of each other, encourage those who are at higher risk due to age (70 or older), cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, or chronic lung diseases like COPD, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems, not to attend or dial in.

The attached flow chart provides guidance on school closures, distance learning, and 180 day waivers. Please be sure to use the Superintendent Only e-mail address with any questions. Staff is monitoring this mailbox closely allowing for the quickest responses possible. Please DO NOT share the e-mail address; it is intended for prompt responses to superintendents.

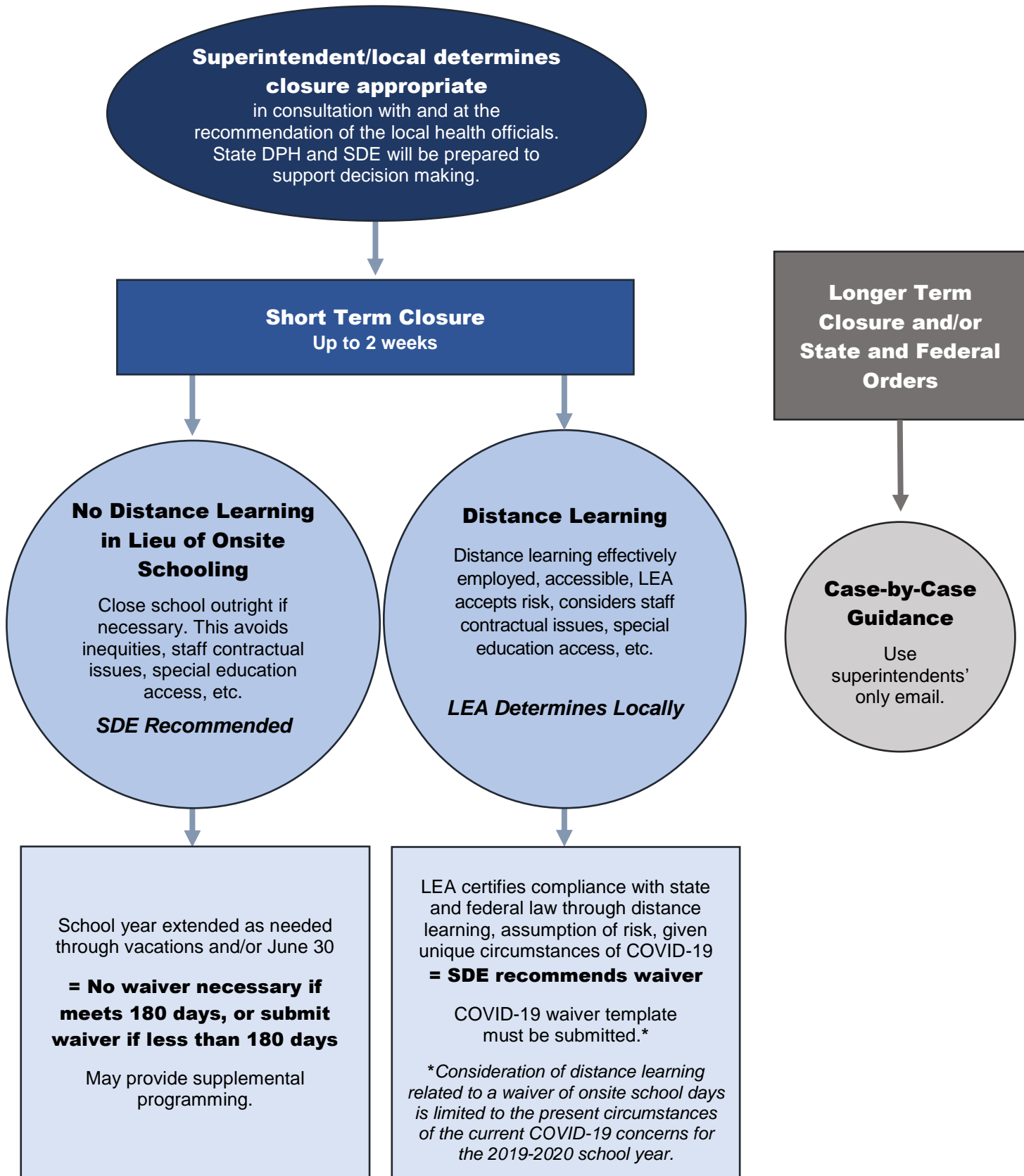
If Connecticut experiences widespread sustained community transmission, public safety considerations including extended school closures as a public health prevention measure will be made at the direction of the Office of the Governor with input from Connecticut State Department of Education, Department of Public Health, and Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection.

Once again, thank you for your efforts.

Stay healthy.

# Connecticut State Department of Education COVID-19 Guidance Related to School Closure and 180 Days

March 9, 2020 – This Guidance may be updated in conjunction with CDC and DPH recommendations, and rapidly changing circumstances.



Connecticut State Department of Education  
COVID-19 Waiver Application Form:  
180-Day School Year Requirement

As part of the basic educational requirements in Connecticut, each school district must make a minimum of 180 school days available to students each school year. The Connecticut State Board of Education may grant waivers to school districts, in cases of unavoidable emergency.

**COVID-19 Waiver forms for the 180-Day School Year Requirement must be submitted to the Commissioner of Education. Districts must provide the following documents for the Connecticut State Board of Education (CSBE) to consider a request. All requests are subject to the final approval of the CSBE.**

1. Completed COVID-19 Waiver Application Form.
2. Written correspondence signed by the Superintendent and school district board chairperson requesting the waiver. The written request must identify/provide:
  - a. **Distance Learning:** District must provide a signed statement attesting that the district has considered all risks and factors, and is complying with, applicable state and federal laws and policies, including but not limited to employment laws, collective bargaining agreements, and special education. The Connecticut State Department of Education and CSBE rely upon the districts to consider and implement their distance learning plans and do not require submission of the planning documents. *The consideration of a waiver of days using distance learning as a factor is limited to the present circumstances of the current COVID-19 concerns for the 2019-2020 School year.*
  - b. **School Closure and No Distance Learning in Lieu of Onsite Schooling:** In the case of a closure without “distance learning” and the inability to meet 180 school days, a statement attesting that the district has exhausted all opportunities to provide 180 days of school, including extension of the school year to June 30, 2020.
3. If decision is been made to move forward with closure, it is advisable to supplement the application with written confirmation from the local public health director or district health department director that they recommend/ed closure of the school or school(s).

Connecticut State Department of Education  
 COVID-19 Waiver Application Form:  
 180-Day School Year Requirement

**Submit completed Connecticut COVID-19 Waiver Application Form and related attestations via email, to the previously provided Superintendents only e-mail address.**

School District	
Superintendent	
Person submitting application (name & title)	
Email	
Phone	
Mailing Address	

1.	Number of waiver days requested per school year:	School Year(s)	
		Number of Days	
2.	Which schools or grades does this waiver request include?	<input type="checkbox"/> All schools and grades within school district <input type="checkbox"/> Specific grade levels and/or schools (please list):  	

## **Weston Public Schools**

### **Report on K-12 Homework Practices**

#### **Draft - June 12, 2019**

#### **Background**

The district is conducting a review of its Homework Policy (6154) and Regulations. The current policy was adopted in 1984, while the regulations were last revised in 2000. Given the district's commitment to enhancing healthy learning environments, it is timely to examine this policy. Several neighboring districts have examined or are conducting similar review processes on their homework policies.

During the 2017-18 school year, the administration documented each school's [homework practices](#) and presented this information to the Board of Education's Curriculum Committee on June 9, 2017. One of the key questions examined in this initial review was whether or not teachers were aligned across their grade level on the amount and type of homework assigned. Where inconsistencies were identified, principals worked with their grade level teams and departments to monitor implementation of the district policy. There was a noted improvement during the 2018-19 school year as a result of these management efforts.

Following this initial ground work, the administration developed an [action plan](#) for conducting a qualitative review of the district's homework practices. The action plan was presented to the BOE's Curriculum Committee on January 16, 2019, and it was refined based on that discussion. In the plan, several steps were listed for obtaining feedback from the various stakeholders—students, teachers and parents.

#### **Data Collection**

The primary protocol of data collection to elicit student, parent and teacher feedback was through focus groups using a semi-structured interview protocol. The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction led the student and parent focus groups in collaboration with the school principals. Four parent focus groups (one per school) and a total of six student focus groups ranging from grades 3-12 were held. In addition, school principals met with their leadership teams and respective faculties to garner their feedback regarding current practices.

#### **Focus Group Results**

The following section highlights the focus group responses to the interview questions. These are not direct quotes, rather the data is a synthesis of the most common responses and sentiments. The data is organized around several themes that emerged in the responses (e.g. Purpose of HW, Meaningful HW).

##### *Purpose of Homework*

- Reinforces content and allows the opportunity to practice the skills learned in class.
- Homework is good training and preparation and teaches students the work ethic that they need.

- At the younger ages, homework gets them into good habits and routines to prepare them for the next level.
- Helps students build the organizational and executive functioning skills that they need—time management.
- It should help the student learn more about the subject; it should not be busy work or too repetitive.
- Students indicated that homework helps them see if they can do the work on their own without the teacher's assistance.
- Homework should not be used as a tool for students to have to teach oneself the content.
- Homework helps students prepare for assessments.

### *Meaningful Homework*

- Consistent with the research on homework, there are benefits to independently reading on a regular basis. This was a common theme particularly in the lower schools.
- When homework reflects what has been done in class, or when it targets student needs, it is more meaningful.
- Homework is more meaningful when there are options and choice for students.
- Use of technology for homework should be balanced.
- Examples of meaningful homework highlighted by the participants:
  - Book talks, Quizlets, online math practice, grammar homework, maintenance math, challenge work, science homework, presentation assignment on the Revolutionary War.
- Students like projects where they need to be creative.

### *Counterproductive Homework*

- The greatest stress reported at the high school regarding homework is with respect to Spanish homework, especially when it is not posted until late at night and it's due the next day.
- When students don't have clear directions regarding homework, it creates stress for students.
- Students feel frustrated when homework is not reviewed or given feedback on it.
- Research indicates that there are diminishing returns after students have spent two hours on homework in the evening.
- Assignments due at midnight encourage kids to procrastinate and stay up late.
- Students indicated that it is stressful having homework due on the same day that a project is due.
- Group projects are stressful when roles are not clearly defined or when group members don't pull their weight.

### *Quantity and Frequency of Homework*

- Responses to this question were child dependent and varied widely from not enough homework to too much.

- Parents expressed concern about there being more than two quizzes/tests on a particular day. The middle school has a team calendar of assignments to guard against this.
- Sometimes there are too many assignments in one night and not enough on other nights; students indicated that homework could be spaced out better.
- Students indicated that their teachers are accommodating and move the date of a test when they know there are assessments in other subjects.
- Students are using the Extended Learning Time (ELT) at WMS to get their homework done.
- Students report there is sometimes too much homework in one night.
- Parents of WMS students reported that there is not enough homework being done at home as a result of students completing it during ELT. Parents expressed concern that this will make the transition to ninth grade more challenging.
- Students indicated that too many assignments are due on the Tuesday or Wednesday following school breaks.

*Perceptions of Teacher Responsibilities:*

- Set clear and explicit instructions for homework assignments.
- Provide feedback on homework for learning, but not for assigning a grade to the assignment.
- Teachers should post grades on PowerSchool in a timely manner and more frequently.
- Provide fair expectations on the timing of homework.
- Be mindful of student stress.
- Provide more communication on the scheduling of tests, quizzes and projects.
- Teachers need to collaborate with each other to coordinate and spread out the assignments.
- Teachers should provide enough time to complete the assignment; the assignment should be assigned prior to leaving school that day. It's very stressful if a teacher assigns homework in the evening that is due the next day.
- Provide checkpoints for long-term assignments.
- Parents would like to see more feedback provided on the homework/assessments.
- There were concerns raised about tests not being returned to students so parents can see how students are performing.

*Perceptions of Student Responsibilities:*

- Homework should be the student's own work.
- Students are responsible for getting their work completed and handed in on time.
- Set a daily routine for completing homework to establish good work habits.
- Make homework a priority and budget time around other activities.
- Inform the teacher if the assignment is too difficult or takes too long to complete.

*Perceptions of Parent Responsibilities:*

- Parent involvement should be minimal unless the student is struggling.
- Parents should give guidance only, if needed.
- Parents should set time aside for homework/reading around activities.
- Guide students in establishing good work habits by having a time and place set aside at home to complete homework.
- Involvement depends on the child. Some students may need more structure and reminders than others.

*Where/When Students Complete their Homework*

- The answer to this question varied widely based on the student's activity schedule.

*WHS Mid-term and Final Exams*

- The high school has established two blackout days prior to the first day of exams in order for students to have time dedicated to studying without any new content being delivered on these days.
- However, concerns have been made that assessments (quizzes, projects) are being assigned on these blackout days.
- Some students have requested a blackout week to provide more opportunity to focus on preparing for exams.
- Students would like teachers to spend more time reviewing for finals with them.

**Proposed Next Steps**

*Summer 2019*

- Craft the updated Homework Policy and Regulations for review by the Policy Committee.

*September 2019*

- Bring the updated Policy to the Policy Committee for review.
- Principals to review the drafts with their leadership teams for any additional feedback.
- Begin piloting anticipated changes to the Policy with the start of the school year.
- Communicate these changes to families at Back to School Nights.

*October 2019*

- Place Homework Policy and Regulations on the BOE agenda for a first read.

*November 2019*

- Place Homework Policy and Regulations on the BOE agenda for a second read.
- Fully implement the Policy following Board adoption.

*Spring 2020*

- Provide update on the implementation of the new Homework Policy and Regulations at a Curriculum Committee meeting.

InstructionHomework

The Weston Board of Education recognizes the value of home study and considers it an integral part of the teaching program.

Home study shall afford an opportunity for increased self-reliance and growth in responsibility. It may be used to improve the child's ability to plan and organize and as an aid in developing good, independent work habits.

It may be assigned to strengthen and expand classroom learning or to provide essential practice in needed skills or to remedy specific weaknesses. Home study shall never be given as a penalty, as a disciplinary measure nor as "busy" work. Homework shall count as part of a final grade.

The faculty shall implement the above policy and shall issue guidelines outlining the responsibility of the teachers, the parents, and the students with respect to home study.

Policy adopted: December 6, 1984

WESTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
Weston, Connecticut

## Instruction

## Homework

### Definition

Homework is the responsibility of the student and should reflect their work. Homework is any short or long-term assignment for study or preparation done outside the classroom which supports and extends student learning. Its primary purposes include reinforcement, remediation, enrichment, development of study habits and exploration of resources in libraries, on the Internet, at home or in the community.

### Philosophy

Homework is a necessary and integral part of the instructional program and learning process that allows students to follow through on their personal commitment to academic work. Through meaningful assignments, students develop constructive attitudes and sharpen useful skills.

The regular practice of homework requires self-discipline and enables students to function as individuals. Assignments offer opportunities for problem solving and increased learning. Students who benefit most from formal education are those who approach it with curiosity, varied interests, and a willingness to work hard.

Homework is an essential part of the individual's learning and development. Yet it is recognized that time must also be allotted for physical and social recreation. Teacher feedback on the quality of homework shall be provided on a regular basis as appropriate to the grade and area. Homework activities, differentiated as needed, are designed to accommodate students with learning and organizational difficulties or those with other special needs.

### Parameters

- Activities should be a natural extension of the learning experience to develop initiative and responsibility and to encourage application.
- Activities should supplement and enrich classroom learning, improve research and study skills, and teach students to organize time.
- Long-term project activities are essential, and should clearly be defined. The emphasis of the assignment is to demonstrate a student's level of learning.
- Parents should not be involved in projects, or any other homework, unless specified by teachers. Teachers, in turn, are strongly urged to limit the requests for parental involvement.
- Activities outside the classroom should foster communication and cooperation between home and school.

- Activities should vary in format: long-term, independent, and overnight homework should be assigned.
- Activities should increase in complexity and duration with the maturity and grade level of the student.
- Activities should be designed to help students actively process and construct concepts.
- Students should be encouraged to study new materials daily and to review previously-learned skills and materials regularly.
- An effort should be made to coordinate the student's workload and evenly distribute assignments throughout the week.
- Meaningful feedback to the student on the quality of homework shall be provided on a regular basis.
- Time guidelines for daily homework should be adjusted to recognize the time needed to complete long-term projects.
- Activities should provide opportunities for students to be successful by allowing flexibility in format and presentation.
- Assignments for students with a 504 Plan or an IEP will be consistent with the goals of the student's plan.

#### Special Circumstances

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS: Tests/quizzes should not be given and projects and homework assignments should not be due immediately following religious holidays recognized by the school calendar. In addition, these guidelines should be followed when the school is notified in writing by a parent/guardian of a specific religious observance for his/her child.

SCHOOL CALENDAR VACATIONS: During the school year at the elementary and middle school levels, homework will not be due immediately following the return from a recognized school calendar vacation. This restriction may not apply to students who are in accelerated programs or TAG.

ILLNESS: Homework requests for multi-day absences for illness will be honored. Homework may be picked up through the main office at the end of the day following the request. For a one-day absence, students should call classmates and rely on other systems designated by the school, i.e. homework hotline, web sites. When absences are extended or chronic, parents should contact the school nurse.

OTHER ABSENCES: Parents should notify teachers of an impending absence using the procedures outlined in the school's student handbook. Depending upon the student and the course, the teacher may feel it essential to give the student assignments to be completed during the absence or upon his/her return. In these instances, the parents are asked to ensure that assigned work is completed and handed in upon return or when

required by the teacher. Such work will count as part of the final grade. After a prolonged absence, however, it may be advisable to seek private tutorial help at the parents' expense. Make-up privileges do not apply when a student cuts class.

### Time Guidelines

Of all the activities in which students are engaged after school hours, homework assignments need to be the highest priority. The need to establish time parameters was driven by the realization that Weston maintains high standards for student achievement and high expectations for the quality of instruction and the meaningfulness of homework assignments. The following guidelines represent an average nightly figure rather than a minimum or maximum. It should be understood that these guidelines are based on the time it takes the "average" student to complete his/her work. Students in accelerated programs, AP courses, or TAG will often exceed these guidelines due to the requirements of the course work.

Students should ideally read nightly, in addition to homework assignments. To help establish the reading habit, parents or older brothers or sisters are encouraged to read to children in the primary grades.

GRADE	AVERAGE TIME FOR HOMEWORK	TIME FOR READING
Kindergarten	Occasional, brief activities which meet specific individual needs	Up to 20 minutes
One	Occasional, brief activities which meet specific individual needs	Up to 20 minutes
Two	20 minutes	Up to 20 minutes
Three	30 minutes	Up to 20 minutes
Four	30-40 minutes	Up to 20 minutes
Five	40-60 minutes	Up to 20 minutes
Six	60-75 minutes	Up to 30 minutes
Seven	60-90 minutes	Up to 30 minutes
Eight	60-120 minutes	Up to 30 minutes
Nine - Twelve	35-45 minutes per academic course (averaging 2-3 hours nightly)	Up to 30 minutes

6154(d)

Ref: 6155, Differentiation and Grouping  
Parent/Student Handbook

Regulation adopted: December 6, 1984  
Regulation revised: June 22, 2000

WESTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
Weston, Connecticut

## **Curriculum Committee Meeting**

February 19, 2020 9:00 a.m.

Central Office Conference Room

### **1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

#### Present Committee Members:

Taffy Miller (Chairperson), Hillary Koyner, Gina Albert (by phone)

#### Present Administration:

William McKersie, Ph.D., Superintendent; Kenneth Craw, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent; Lisa Wolak, WHS Principal; Dan Doak, WMS Principal; Pattie Falber, WIS Principal; Laura Kaddis, HES Principal; Alex Bluestein, K-5 ELA and Social Studies CIL; Christine Cincotta, 6-12 ELA CIL

### **2. Review and discussion of annual Next Generation State Accountability Report**

Discussion:

- Dr. Craw provided background information on the Next Gen State Accountability Report.
- Each of the Principals commented on their respective schools and how they are using the information from the annual report to identify areas for growth and improvement.
- The principals also noted that areas where students are doing well serve to inform them on how to continually raise the bar.

### **3. Presentation and Discussion of K-8 Literacy Program**

Discussion:

- Ms. Bluestein and Ms. Cincotta provided a presentation on the Weston K-8 literacy program with special emphasis and on grades 5-8.
- The presenters discussed the workshop model of teaching English Language Arts.
- The impact of eliminating the sixth grade double block of ELA was presented and discussed.
  - Sixth grade serves as a bridge year between intermediate and middle school especially in ELA as 6<sup>th</sup> grade students go from 120 minutes of reading and writing per day in 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 86 minutes per day in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, which then goes down to 43 minutes in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.
  - Elimination of the double ELA block would affect the depth of teaching as the double block allows deeper learning into a topic and allows the teacher to teach the writing process.
  - The CILs, Principals and Assistant Superintendent have recommended to maintain the current 6<sup>th</sup> grade ELA structure, continue to study the double block structure and provide the Curriculum Committee with an update in the fall.

#### **4. Approval of January 2020 Minutes**

**Motion Passed:** passed with a motion by Taffy Miller and a second by Hillary Koyner.  
**2 Yeas - 0 Nays.**

#### **5. Other curricular issues**

No other items were put forth for discussion. Meeting was adjourned at 10:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

June Curiano  
Administrative Assistant to the Assistant Superintendent