Spotlight on Literacy: Building a Community of Engaged Readers Through Classroom Library Renovations/Bookmatching, Summer Slide Prevention and Early Literacy “Lift”

Efforts to Prevent Summer Slide Produced Significant Positive Results, with 80% of Economically Disadvantaged Students Advancing or Maintaining Reading Level

MAMARONECK, NY, November 3, 2016 – Tuesday evening’s Board of Education meeting featured an update on District Elementary literacy initiatives, which include a collaborative all-hands-on-deck approach by faculty members to build a community of engaged student readers. Administrators and staff members described an intense focus on helping individual students in the youngest grades (K-2) progress along their personalized reading continua and pointed to students’ unprecedented “energy and excitement around books.”

“Each reader is a puzzle. We’re really the facilitators of 2,600 idiosyncratic reading journeys,” said Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction Annie Ward, who, along with her team, has been working tirelessly to ensure that students have access to engaging books in subject areas of interest to them and that they benefit from reading instruction and intervention in the early years, beginning in Kindergarten.

Ward was joined by Literacy Ambassador Maggie Hoddinott and RTI (Response to Intervention) Coordinator Julie Wright in discussing alignment of the literacy work with one of the District’s primary Stretch Goals: “Ensure all students read capably and voluminously across genres for a variety of meaningful purposes.” (Stretch Goals were presented to the community at the September 20 Board of Education meeting.) The team presented on several key components in place that are critical to achieving this goal -- including summer slide prevention; classroom library renovations/bookmatching; and what they call the early literacy “lift.”

Summer Slide Prevention
Based on research showing that the expected rate of reading regression among economically disadvantaged students over the summer is two months, the District implemented a program this past summer to prevent summer slide. With staff guidance, more than 400 Mamaroneck School District students from all four elementary schools participated in an initiative that replicated a book give-away program created by well-known researchers Dr. Allington and Dr. McGill-Franzen. Students self-selected 15 books to take home and keep over the summer, and the reading levels among these students were assessed in June, 2016, just prior to the start of the summer, and then again in September, 2016. Of the 422 students participating in the program, 84% of them ended up reading between four and 15 of the books; using the District’s universal
screening tool, Fountas and Pinnell, 80% of participating students were shown to have advanced or maintained their reading levels over the summer.

“These results are extraordinary, given the sample size and that it was in a single year,” remarked Superintendent of Schools Dr. Robert I. Shaps. “What we found was that the students participating in our summer initiative seemed to experience a similar rate of growth to the rest of our body of kids.”

**Classroom library renovations/Bookmatching**
Hoddinott talked about the infusion of 1,100+ hand-selected titles into classrooms last spring, totaling more than 17,000 new books for all elementary classrooms. She emphasized the importance of the collaborative work among teachers, librarians, reading specialists, and coaches to match the ‘just right’ book with individual students so that students will interact with the text. From graphic novels and nonfiction picture books, to books on bizarre and/or forbidden topics, or wordless books, Hoddinott has been researching books with “kid appeal” and revamping classroom libraries so they are vibrant and dynamic places for all readers. As one of the elementary school principals said, “The new books have created a new culture. When the students open the books, they are excited by them.” Bookmatching is taking place with both striving and thriving readers.

**Kindergarten Early Literacy “Lift”**
In identifying a set of non-negotiable skills and/or benchmarks that our youngest learners must achieve in Kindergarten -- such as letter identification and sound recognition -- the District has been placing an emphasis on reading instruction, assessment and intervention in the early years. Wright explained how reading growth among students is a community-wide issue and one that all staff members throughout the district, at all grade levels, are involved with. “Collectively, we have a shared responsibility for the reading growth of all of our students,” she said. Reading interventions begin in grades K-2 and continue in the upper elementary grades for those who need them.

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