



## **Bemidji Middle School Curriculum Review (Our Journey at BMS)**

Throughout the 2017-2018 school year, the BMS Curriculum Review Committee and ELA teachers have had several meetings and much discussion about the needs of our middle school students regarding our ELA curriculum. When considering future needs for our building, we felt it was essential for us to think about the following questions:

1) Are we content with any of our current materials? Are there items that need to be updated or replaced? What inventory is available in each classroom? Do we need to update with all new materials or does it make more sense for us to improve and enhance what we are currently doing?

2) What are the results of our recent test data within the building and do those results indicate that we need to change what we've been doing? What should be our areas of focus over the next several years?

3) Are we following state standards? Have we selected materials that align to our standards? Are there some standards that we could be implementing differently or improving, or is there a need to update curriculum to effectively teach certain standards?

4) Do we see areas of weakness in the classroom that we could enhance through additional language arts curriculum resources? What skills do we see lacking in our students that would help them to be successful?

5) Are we using common terminology (Common Core) throughout the building as students transition to each grade level? How can we make improvements within each grade level so that teachers can communicate/support each other?

6) Are we implementing curriculum that reaches a diverse student population? What kinds of materials can we use to ensure that our students are being exposed to current information, a global perspective, and higher level thinking skills?

7) Our state testing focuses on reading, but are we teaching our students how to be good writers and using common terminology within the building and district? Are we using a specific writing process that our students understand?

8) Are we utilizing consistent technology in the classroom so that our students at BMS are learning and experiencing a 21st Century education through a wide variety of learning styles? As a bridge between grades 4-5 and the high school, how can we improve technology skills and provide the transition our students need such as Google Docs, Google Classroom, Google Slides, etc., while maintaining a balance of basic skills?

9) Are we selecting curriculum that focuses on diversity by academic level for our students with special needs, or reluctant readers?

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During our discussions, there were several key points that were defined and explored from the above questions.

**Current Materials** - Teachers at BMS pull their materials and focus on standards using several different sources. Textbooks are primarily used as classroom copies with some overnight checkout. Due to this factor, our current textbooks are typically in good condition (with the exception of the Read for Real books at the 6th Grade Level which need to be replaced). After doing inventory, there was a great deal of discussion. It was felt that although some of the new textbooks were very appealing, it was a lot of money to spend on new anthologies/textbooks when we have some excellent resources in our rooms right now. Also, textbook companies are moving to online resources as part of the package, but without consistency of computer availability, it would be hit and miss as far as what we would be using. We also have to consider that some of our students do not have access to technology at home.

**Test Data** - Recent test data for the middle school has been positive overall as we have beat the state average in reading proficiency. We continually need, however, to work hard and bridge gaps for our struggling students, as well as enhance critical thinking skills for students at a higher level. There seems to be a strong desire for more collaboration among our ELA staff to effectively teach standards, regardless of the materials we use. If our recent scores appear positive, does it really make sense for us to move into a whole new curriculum? Reviewing our curriculum initiated a discussion about curriculum vs. teaching strategies and how we can improve through collaboration. Even though the curriculum we use is important, we also need to work together, set goals for improvement, and make sure we understand the standards we are expected to teach.

**State Standards** - ELA standards are taught in a variety of ways, and some seem to be emphasized more than others. As we looked through the standards, we found some that need more attention than we have been giving them. Although we do quite a bit of writing, we feel that we need to make sure we are using common language (school-wide) in order to strengthen our students' writing skills. We also need to enhance skills that produce and publish (6.7.6.6, 7.7.6.6, 8.7.6.6). Presentations could be increased. Digital media and visual displays have not been a priority, but are clearly reflected in our standards (6.9.5.5, 7.9.5.5, 8.9.5.5), so we need to be doing more. We

would also like to see some focus on short research projects, like on an author or biography (6.7.7.7, 7.7.7.7, 8.7.7.7).

**Use of Novels** - All of our teachers teach a variety of standards through novels. Some grade levels within our building have specific novels which are read, and staff have been working on units. Such novels should be on a **NO READ** list for other levels. This would alleviate the problem of other levels reading them when curriculum money is spent for use in the classroom. Some of the novels (especially paperbacks) are overused and need replacement. Perma-Bound novels would be the preferred type to purchase. Some grade levels are beginning to collaborate units through a shared Google Drive. The hope is to increase that development as we move forward.

**Scholastic Magazines** - Scholastic magazines are very popular within our building. The Scope, Action, and Scholastic News magazines provide current topics/high interest for our students, and are issued eight times a year. Scholastic has made major strides in supplying Common Core Curriculum materials to be used in the classroom. Some of the skills emphasized in the magazines are: vocabulary, narrative nonfiction, paired texts, close reading, reading passage quizzes, constructed response, debate, mood/tone, inferences, etc. There are debates and plays in each issue as well as grammar checks and nonfiction narratives that picque student interest, and they do an excellent job with cultural diversity and gender equity. Scholastic also includes leveled tests (high level, low level) to diversify for high achieving and reluctant readers. These offer a unique way of teaching in the classroom. Materials are online for those students that need to utilize the resource from home. The cost of Scholastic magazines is low compared to that of a textbook.

**Cultural Diversity** - One of the areas where we want to work on improvement is in the area of cultural diversity. We need to make sure we are completing the standards in this area, and finding new ways to implement curriculum. There are some good examples in our current textbook, but we want to look for more options throughout the year. Scope magazine (Scholastic) does an excellent job enhancing cultural diversity and we have been doing some research on the novels we are reading. Jared gave a very helpful list of options. Sixth grade just selected the book Washaka, the Bear Dreamer by Jamie Lee. Seventh grade will be reading Touching Spirit Bear by Ben Mikaelson, and the eighth grade will be reading a new book, Sweetgrass Basket by Marlene Carvell. We will continue to seek help from Jared as we implement these novels.

**Technology** -The availability of technology continues to be a concern at the middle school because of the demands in our ever-changing world. We are very grateful to our technology committee members; they have done an amazing job trying to keep us current, but with MCA and MAP testing, BMS Science Fair preparation, online resources, research, Accelerated Reading, state standards, and the need to teach our students in a 21 century world (Google Docs/Google Classroom), it has been very inconsistent for us.

There have been numerous instances when ELA teachers have wanted to use Chromebooks, but were unable to get them because they were checked out elsewhere. Resources are limited or teachers are unable to keep Chromebooks for the duration needed to complete a project effectively. To paraphrase one of our teachers, "The curriculum does not determine our use of Chromebooks; the dates we can get the Chromebooks determine when and how we work on the curriculum." It has been a frustration for many. Often a Chrome cart is clear across the building and the teacher needs to go get them. We may only have it for a few days, then it needs to go back. Some students finish, some students don't. If a child doesn't have access at home, and we can't get the Chromebooks for two weeks, that leads to patchy completion and deadlines becoming very difficult to meet. It does not allow us to teach in a "quality" way.

There are so many more sources/activities online today that we can utilize. We can emphasize creativity through projects, and we can reinforce writing skills, and our writing process. Our teachers feel that this is an area where we need to help our students reinforce skills such as keyboarding. There still needs to be balance between classroom textbooks and technology, but this was determined to be a significant need for our teachers. We see ourselves as bridging the 4-5 school to the high school, and these are skills that students in the 21 century need to continually master. Google Docs, Google Slides, and Google Classroom should be part of our students' familiar genre.

These are some of the ways technology would be used in the classroom:

#### Chromebooks in classroom

Writing standards

Essay writing

Response to Literature

SCOPE magazine (online access)

MCA reading stamina (Students need to be used to reading passages on the computer since we test on the computer.)

Keyboarding

Science Fair research paper

Story writing

Multimedia presentations (within standards)

Variety of technology standards

MCA Testing

#### 6th:

AR tests

Scope magazine

Figurative language

Poetry

Science Fair (research and writing)

Short Story

Quizlet vocabulary

Speeches (Google Slide presentations)  
Vocabulary  
Special Ed-voice to text  
Read for Real: three paragraph paper  
Peer editing  
Author Study Project

7th:

AR tests  
Scope magazine  
Writing (formal, journaling, blog entries)  
Greek and Latin roots  
Google classroom: teacher/student collaboration  
BMS Science Fair (research and writing)  
Author Study Project  
Essays  
Greek Mythology Unit  
Schoology  
Quizzes  
Poetry  
Keyboarding  
Google Slide presentation  
Multimedia design project  
Creative Expression: play scripts and creative writing  
Read, Write, and Publish  
Response to Literature

8th Grade

AR Tests  
Writing - (formal essays, journaling, blogs)  
Poetry  
Scope magazine  
Keyboarding  
Google Slide Presentation  
MCA Prep  
Response to Literature

## Writing at Bemidji Middle School

### What does the writing process look like in 6th grade?

- Making connections to life, reading, etc.
- Brainstorming
- Pre-writing: expand their thoughts into initial rough draft
- Word process initial rough draft
- Editing process: trusted adult, peer editing
- Edited rough draft submitted to teacher for editing
- Teacher edited rough draft becomes final draft
- Final draft scored using rubric

### What does the writing process look like in 7th grade?

- Teachers follow Six Traits
  - Ideas
  - Organization
  - Word choice
  - Voice
  - Conventions
  - Sentence Fluency
- Begin with and idea sort/brainstorm
- Develop Outline for writing
- Pre-writing based on brainstorming/research following outline plan
- Expand pre-writing into rough draft format
- Word process rough draft
- Editing process: trusted adult/peer editing
- Edit rough draft based on suggestions
- New rough draft submitted to teacher for formal editing
- Teacher edited rough draft becomes final draft
- Final draft printed off or submitted on google for grading
- Graded using adjusted Six Traits of writing rubric

### What does the writing process look like in 8th grade?

- Discussion
- Brainstorm
- Outlining
- Rough Draft (Comp check with teacher)
- Peer Edit  
(share and reread)
- Final Draft

## Items for Order - Curriculum Review

Scholastic Magazines (Scope and Action magazines)

- One set of 40 per pod/inclusion
- 15 to share Kathy P/Kathy K
- 15 to share between Abby/Delinda/Rick  
(This is for six consecutive years.)

Read for Real Replacement -130 copies

### Novels

6th - Blackwater Ben - 30 copies

7th - Downriver - 50 copies

Memory Boy - 100 copies

Soldier's Heart - 70 copies

Touching Spirit Bear - 15 copies

8th - Call of the Wild - 45 copies

Sweetgrass Basket - 140 copies

The Outsiders - 60 copies

### DVDs

-*The Short Life of Anne Frank*

-*The Call of the Wild*

-*Diary of Anne Frank*

-*Anne Frank Remembered*

### Technology

Nine Chrome Carts (one per pod- 32 Chromebooks each)