

Email exchange between BOE Chairman Mike Lyons and Cranbury Elementary School teacher Jennifer Cobbs (Cobb's email address and phone number deleted)

From: Michael Lyons <lyonsm@norwalkps.org<mailto:lyonsm@norwalkps.org>>
Date: June 7, 2013, 12:31:26 PM EDT
To: Jennifer Cobbs
Subject: RE: Reading program

Thank you for updating me on your understanding of the curriculum situation. Let me provide some clarifications.

"I am concerned that although the ELA curriculum for 6-12 passed in committee it has not been sent to the full board."

We did not send the 6-12 curriculum to the full Board because at the time we approved it the City had not approved the capital budget funding to pay for it. Mr. Daddona and I spent a great deal of time lobbying the Mayor, BET and Council leadership to support funding for this in the capital budget, and finally succeeded in getting an appropriation approved for \$2.1 million. We decided to choose a K-5 curriculum also before going to the full Board so we could present a complete package and fully explain how it would be funded when asking the Board for approval. The capital budget funding will become available from the City on or after July 1.

"I am concerned about the lack of transparency in the selection of the new superintendent."

This doesn't have anything to do with the curriculum, of course, but to respond, we conducted the most extensive public outreach ever by a Norwalk Board of Ed regarding the qualities people would like to see in a new superintendent earlier this year, then (publicly) adopted a Superintendent Profile explicitly incorporating those qualities. That Profile has guided our search process since then. The decision to keep the process confidential was based on advice from our consultants that several high quality candidates might not stay in the pool if a public vetting process was included. Our choice was to go for the highest quality candidates that we could. I appreciate that members of the community would like to be involved in the actual choice, but by state law that decision is entrusted to the Board.

"I am very concerned that when the Core Knowledge team presented to the ELA team and did a poor job that they were allowed to return and present again. Frankly I think their first showing tells us that they are not ready. Our rep has told us that the other teams were all well prepared. If everyone had the same notice, why should Core Knowledge be allowed a do-over? Surely this can't be their first time presenting to a school district. This action makes me and others think that if we get any program, it will be Core Knowledge. That is why I made the "Scuttle" comment."

You have been misinformed about what actually happened; this misperception is widespread among our teachers, so I assume it is being communicated deliberately. Here is what happened. The Curriculum Committee began exploring the Core Knowledge Language Arts Curriculum because it was tested and was generating extremely impressive results in inner-city New York City elementary schools (see attached pilot results from the NYC Board of Education, and article from American Educator). We had Core Knowledge (CK) up here over a year ago for a presentation on their program to the Committee that was attended by many administrators, teachers and community leaders. The people in attendance were so impressed that we organized a visit to one of the CK schools by Mr. Daddona, principals and teachers to see it in action; they came back with favorable reports (note that this all happened LONG before the review committee you have been referring to was even appointed). The Committee made clear that we wanted the staff to seriously investigate such a successful program, giving the critical importance of early reading to everything else that follows in our children's education.

The review committee was formed to look into English curricula to adopt as part of the Common Core process.

They started with 6-12, and the Curriculum Committee reviewed and approved their recommendation to go with the Pearson materials for the upper grades. Following up on our long-expressed interest in the CK program for earlier grades, we requested and were assured that CK would be one of the presenters to the review committee.

After the presentations had been concluded, I inquired of Mr. Daddona how CK had done. He informed me that CK had not made a presentation. It turns out that for some reason the CK presentation date was changed at the last minute by the review committee, and CK couldn't make the alternate date that was set for them (no such rescheduling happened with any other bidder). I said this was unacceptable, given the Curriculum Committee's long interest in the CK program, and said we wanted them to have a chance to make a presentation. They were finally able to last week.

Your confusion on this point is understandable, because there WAS a presentation by a bidder (Amplify, from the same company we get Wireless Generation from) that USES the Core Knowledge curriculum. But the Core Knowledge FOUNDATION, which is the one the Committee had been assured would have an opportunity to present, was denied that by the last minute scheduling change.

This is where people are getting the 'why did they get to present theirs twice' bit from. Our feedback is that Amplify didn't do a good job, but the Foundation did. Of course, by the time the Foundation got a chance to come in and present, this myth that the Curriculum Committee was 'giving them two chances' and 'improperly interfering in the process' had already taken hold, so I suspect the review committee had probably already biased themselves against the Foundation before they got here.

"When is the next curriculum committee meeting."

It was going to be on June 13 (our regular meeting date), but we are interviewing superintendent finalists the 13th and 14th so I have to push it back; I'm working on dates with the Committee members now. The meeting will be publicly posted when scheduled.

Let me say one final thing. We HAVE to get this right -- nothing is more important to children's success than early reading. I am inclined to take more time, study things more, and get it right, than get it done fast. By state law the Curriculum Committee and the Board are charged with setting our curriculum, and we are entitled and obligated to do our own independent review of curricular materials submitted to us. While we of course should give great weight to the recommendations of the review committee, we are NOT rubber stamps of that committee, any more than we should be rubber stamps of the superintendent on budgets or other matters. The right thing to do here is choose the best curriculum for our children, and substance trumps process, in my opinion. The Core Knowledge LA program for grades K-2 has been recommended for adoption by both the New York State and the New York City Departments of Education, so this is not a program merely advocated by the "non-educators" we are pejoratively referred to as by some teachers. There is real heft to this program, and it deserves a fair hearing.

Mike Lyons

From: Jennifer Cobbs
Sent: Thursday, June 06, 2013 6:11 PM
To: Michael Lyons
Subject: RE: Reading program

Hello Mr. Lyons,
I am concerned that although the ELA curriculum for 6-12 passed in committee it has not been sent to the full board. I am concerned about the lack of transparency in the selection of the new superintendent. I am very concerned that when the Core Knowledge team presented to the ELA team and did a poor job that they were allowed to return and present again. Frankly I think their first showing tells us that they are not ready. Our rep has told us that the other teams were all well prepared. If everyone had the same notice, why should Core Knowledge be allowed a do-over? Surely this can't be their first time presenting to a school district. This action makes me and

others think that if we get any program, it will be Core Knowledge. That is why I made the "Scuttle" comment. When is the next curriculum committee meeting?

Jen Cobbs
Cranbury School - Grade 1

From: Michael Lyons
Sent: Wednesday, June 05, 2013 6:07 AM
To: Jennifer Cobbs; Steven A. Colarossi; Artie Kassimis
Subject: RE: Reading program

Thank you for contacting us, Ms. Cobbs. I can assure you that the members of the Curriculum Committee (who have been looking into ELA programs since the beginning of 2012) share your desire to get the best for our students (those Committee members are myself, Mike Barbis, Sue Haynie and Migdalia Rivas). I'm curious about your statement that you hope that "this issue is not being delayed so decisions can be made during the summer when teachers are not around, or scuttled until some future date." I think I can honestly claim to be the Board member who has most dedicated himself to getting us a new curriculum (including lobbying for inclusion of \$2.1 million in the City's capital budget to pay for it), so why would you even think that I might be part of an effort to "scuttle" the curriculum? I think stories are circulating about the Curriculum Committee that are untrue.

Mike Lyons, Chair
Norwalk Board of Education

From: Jennifer Cobbs
Sent: Wednesday, June 05, 2013 8:58 AM
To: Steven A. Colarossi; Michael Lyons; Artie Kassimis
Subject: Reading program

Good Morning,
I am a first grade teacher at Cranbury School as well as a Norwalk resident. I am writing to you to urge you to listen to the teachers who are on the language arts curriculum committee when choosing a new program for our district. These teachers and the supervisor are the people who will be implementing the program and they, as well as all teachers, want the best for our students. I am also asking that you decide quickly - it is already too late to have materials before school ends, but I am happy to come to Cranbury as soon as materials arrive in order to prepare to teach this new curriculum right away. I sincerely hope that this issue is not being delayed so decisions can be made during the summer when teachers are not around, or scuttled until some future date. We need a curriculum now. Thank you for your consideration on this important matter.
Jen Cobbs
Cranbury School - Grade 1