

**Weston Public Schools
Weston, Massachusetts**

**K-12 Visual Arts
Comprehensive Program Review**

**Departmental Response to the Report of the
Visual Arts External Review Committee**

Submitted by:
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PART I: INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive Review Process

In the fall of 2012 the Weston Public Schools K-12 Visual Arts Department began its Comprehensive Program Review process with the implementation of a Self-Study. A committee comprised of representatives from the K-12 Art Department, was formed and co-chaired by Amber Bock, Assistant Superintendent, and Chris Fehl, Visual Arts 6-12 Department Head. The Self-Study committee was charged with completing an extensive assessment of the K-12 visual arts programs in the Weston Public Schools. This process required that they gather input from the broader department and other important stakeholders.

Throughout the following year the committee worked with the department to review current curriculum, research best practices, participate in site visits, and conduct extensive conversations regarding the strengths and needs of K-12 Arts in Weston. All of the committee's analysis and research culminated in the completion of a Self-Study report that was presented to the School Committee in June of 2013.

The School Committee finalized its Charge to the Committee in September 2013. The External team was comprised of arts educators at the college, secondary, and elementary levels, administrators, and a Weston Alumna. The External Review Committee conducted the site-visit on October 16, 17, and 18, 2013. They completed their assessment and the Chair, Dr. Barbara Milot presented the final report to School Committee in February, 2014.

PART II: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS BY THE EXTERNAL REVIEW COMMITTEE AND DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The External Review Committee commended the faculty of the Weston Public Schools for the self-reflection that guided the committee work, and they also noted that they enjoyed the time they spent in Weston. Dr. Milot spoke of the quality of what the committee experienced in the art being developed through Weston programs. This Departmental Response to the Report of the External Review Committee will provide updates regarding the work that is already underway by the department, and will provide an overview of future planning. This response is not a point-by-point response to the ERC's report, but rather it highlights key areas. The report synthesizes the key documents of the review process, the Charge of the School Committee, a tight summary of the External Review findings, and the Departments response and plan for changes. Over the next two years the department will complete the recommendations outlined.

School Committee Charge:

I. Instruction

- *How well does the art program meet the needs of all learners?*
- *How engaged are our students in art classes?*
 - *Do students have enough opportunities to share ideas and ask questions?*
 - *Do students have sufficient opportunities to work collaboratively?*
- *Is there an effective balance between teaching skills and fostering creativity in the K-12 Art program?*

ERC Major Points of Emphasis:

- Visual Arts team made up of caring, passionate, artist-teachers dedicated to providing their students a rich, authentic art experience.
- Clear evidence of collaboration across disciplines.
- Atmosphere of creative exploration and experimentation with materials and ideas.
- Students create work that is personal and meaningful.
- Strong student support for style and quality of instruction.

Recommendations:

1. Middle School and High School: Provide written feedback on student work (summative assessment) – clarity on why students received the grades they did.
2. Middle School and High School: Balance the development of technical skill-building with developing and evaluating meaningful, sophisticated content through formal discussion, brainstorming and writing. There seems to be a need for regular peer reviews through critiques, and sometimes through writing, to extend learning.

Departmental Response:

1. Develop K-12 art assessments that include using a baseline. Articulate the subtle distinctions between the goals of ‘feedback’ for instructional growth and “assessment’ as an attainment of specific objectives of art practice, for the purposes of curriculum analysis. Delineate which assessments will be anchor DDM’s (District Determined Measures) by summer of 2014 ready for fall implementation. Assessment changes will be developed and explored for the 2014-15 school year and finalized and shared in a departmental summary for the curriculum update report in fall of 2015.
2. Create purposeful feedback strategies that are authentic, effective, developmentally appropriate and encouraging to students. These should include critiques and self assessment. These remain focused on student feedback for growth of student skill and separate from assessment information gathered for teacher discussion of student performance that allows the department to discuss curriculum effectiveness. Summary document of changes to be

submitted by the Department Head spring of 2015, prior to the delineation of planning for summer workshops.

3. Assess and clarify the grading process for Middle School and High School course work. Articulate in course syllabi as part of class instructional process for each course. Underway. Complete for implementation fall of 2014.
4. Analyze the full accessibility of all K-12 art programming for students across the range of all learning needs to identify areas for improved access and improved instructional scaffolding to ensure successful and full inclusion in the art experience. Use data of high school participation to assess if students with special needs are electing to take art programming, and identify other clear data points to assess program success for all learners. Share in curriculum update report. Memo update to be shared with Director of Student Services fall of 2015.
5. Further explore the use of recording technologies to explore capturing art development and progress to support student growth and celebration of art. Ongoing.

School Committee Charge:

II. Curriculum

- *Are Weston's Standards & Learning Goals articulated in our curriculum maps and do they present a rigorous current art curriculum?*
 - *Does the K-12 Art Department define, deliver, and coordinate the art curriculum from school to school and within the sequential art courses?*
 - *Is the progression in art from K-12 clear and developmentally appropriate?*
- *Do students at all levels have opportunities to think critically, creatively, and to solve problems within the curriculum?*
- *Are students enabled to place their art-making activities into a larger cultural and art historical context?*
- *Is technology seamlessly and appropriately integrated across the program?*
- *What is the role of art history and exposure to contemporary art?*
- *Is the department's attention to diversity criteria sufficient?*

ERC Major Points of Emphasis:

Commendations:

- Dynamic, sequential course offerings.
- Vibrant, rigorous learning experiences that emphasize individual creativity.
- Clear evidence of creative problem solving, collaboration, and technology integration.
- Curricular support for self-directed study, especially at the high school level.
- Emphasis on personal investment, ambition, and risk-taking evident.

Recommendations:

1. K-12: Refine the curriculum maps for each course, beginning with courses that some teachers have in common. Focus on the purpose of the learning for each course and each lesson and communicate those reasons in the curriculum maps and syllabi.
2. K-12: Develop common assessments that are based on the same essential questions and learning goals for common courses. Develop a more descriptive common framework for assessment, a general grading criteria that is easily understood by students and parents and included in course documents (explanations, guidelines, or rubrics).

Departmental Response:

1. Before this Program Review, there were limited curriculum maps for Visual Art. The work to clarify learning goals and to reassess Weston's Standards was underway. The department began the process by listing what projects are taught and then described their relevance, goals, and objectives. Teachers have developed lessons and projects for very important reasons and have adjusted them over the years to maximize engagement and student learning. Creating curriculum maps by starting from the specific lessons was easier for the department to begin this process. With the feedback of the external review committee, the department will continue to refine curriculum maps to better describe what is taught, why it is important, and what students will learn and be able to do. This work will be backed up with the research conducted during the self study. Additionally, the department will assess the completed standards and learning goals to articulate areas where learning progressions need to be coordinated, i.e. concept work such as portraiture, landscape, sculpture, clay, collage, etc., experiences that require multiple experiences over time. Complete winter of 2015, with ongoing review.
2. Articulate within the Standards and Learning Goals, the importance of the studio setting as an anchor of instructional practice. Develop a well articulated framework describing the "Studio" approach for instructional delivery. (i.e. in Weston classes typically begin with a short demo followed by student practice).
3. Develop syllabi for all Middle School and High School courses. Include grading clarification discussed in the recommendation outlined in the section on Instruction. Underway. Working drafts will be developed next year with final implementation for fall of 2015.
4. Explore opportunities to provide shop based experiences at the High School for use by the art and science departments. Revisit the feasibility of utilizing the Middle School woodshop for High School Art classes. Weston would benefit from the option of sharing teaching spaces, as well. Continuing the Middle School Design and Construction experience at the High School has been the greatest request from parents and students each and every year. This provides the natural interdisciplinary connection between art and science through the design

engineering objectives articulated within both the Science Program Review and the Visual Arts Department Review.

School Committee Charge:

III. Program Design

- *Is there a purposeful application of time blocks for both the length of one contact period and the number of contact times for each school/grade?*
 - *MS quarter rotation*
 - *HS – look at impact of multiple sections/ multiple levels within single block;*
- *Would Weston benefit from an advanced art option with GPA implications?*

ERC Major Points of Emphasis

Commendations:

- Sufficient time is devoted to art at all levels.
- Adequate class size.
- Good selection of courses.
- Flexible scheduling allows for individualized instructional programs.

Recommendations:

1. High School: Consider the development of an advanced art course (perhaps an Advanced Placement course) that would warrant inclusion in a student's GPA.
2. High School: Consider the addition of Art History, or a team-taught Humanities course co-taught by art, music, and academic teachers.
3. Continue to develop interdisciplinary projects that emphasize the artistic benefits of the interdisciplinary projects, rather than using art solely to illustrate points of the other disciplines.
4. Consider renaming the Visual Arts Program to *Visual Arts and Design* Program.

Departmental Response:

Based on the recommendation of the external review, the department will re-evaluate the benefits of an advanced art course (perhaps an Advanced Placement course) that would warrant inclusion in a student's GPA. Since Weston is such a small high school a course like this will have few students and may be difficult to schedule. A few years ago the impact of adding AP Studio Art to the Program of Studies was evaluated but was found to be very restrictive for most of Weston's art students. Weston serves a population that benefits from the creative challenges of the visual art experience but tends to pursue non-art subject areas after high school. The Art

III/IV curriculum was developed to prepare students for college *and* art school. The AP course requirements may dictate changes in the nature and flexibility enjoyed in the current Art III/IV course. Students in Art IV always have the option of submitting their portfolio for AP Studio Art course review. Students who have explored this option have scored anywhere from a 2 to a 5. The AP score has not proven to be an indicator of future success in art school. Also, even a high AP Studio Art score results in no advancement for incoming art school freshmen.

1. The department will continue to provide the AP art experience through the independent study approach that has been used in the past to support students interested in AP Studio Art.

When the High School changed the graduation requirements to include credits within the arts, there was a request for an art history course to allow students “with no artistic ability” an art class in which they could be successful because of their ability to memorize and write clearly. The department firmly believes each one of us has artistic ability. The department focused attention on the wonderful tactile experiences in art, and opened their eyes to see through a lens, or understand proportion with a pencil. At this time, visual art students would benefit from the opportunity to investigate the history of art, providing a larger context for and a deeper understanding of their art work. Weston has just introduced “Film: The New Literacy” film history course, designed for any student, and enjoyed by students looking to improve their video production experience, as well.

2. The department will explore ways to enhance interdisciplinary connections between departments through the connections of art history. It would be ideal to create a course similar to World Studies that has direct connection to History and English classes. Working within the Program of Studies process the department will explore course options.

School Committee Charge:

IV. Facilities & Equipment

- *How do the current facilities and equipment maximize or inhibit the success of the program?*
- *Do our school buildings display and celebrate art?*
- *What will the future program of visual art/design look like?*

ERC Major Points of Emphasis

- Excellent facilities.
- Clearly adequate teaching supplies available.

Departmental Response:

Our students are fortunate to work in art studios that allow for a variety of exploration, adequate storage of student work, and effective technological appointments. Two recommendations not

mentioned by the committee but revealed through the self-study process are as follows:

1. Replace the small sinks in Woodland School and Country School art rooms with larger sinks to facilitate clean-up better.
2. Inspect the ventilation in the Middle School Art Rooms, including the Woodshop and assess effectiveness. Make improvements as needed.

School Committee Charge:

V. Communication and Community

- *Does the community have a clear understanding of what is accomplished in the K-12 Art program?*
- *Does the department interact and coordinate with regular classroom teachers?*
 - *Are there interdisciplinary connections evidenced?*

ERC Major Points of Emphasis

- K-12 art teachers are a true team of dedicated professionals who like working and learning together.
- Shared planning time is built into the block schedule at the High School.
- Central, prominent displays of student work in all schools.
- Annual K-12 Art Show highly valued/praised by students, parents, teachers and administration.
- Strong administrative and community support.

Recommendations:

1. Make use of the many art museums and sites in the area with more frequent field trips for students at all levels.
2. Continue to develop ways to communicate the value of the visual arts to the wider school community via web sites, web galleries, syllabi and newsletters.
3. Make site visits a regular part of the teachers' professional development.

Departmental Response:

1. Continue to explore ways to embed art experience into special trips. Field trips for elementary students are very challenging to organize and execute and require a commitment from the entire school. Country School has been able to take the entire 3rd Grade to DeCordova for an art and design investigative experience. This model may be replicated for the other elementary schools.
2. Research the feasibility of Middle School field trips. Analyze the pros and cons. Explore ways to enhance art experiences that can be found within existing travel and school based

experiences.

3. Develop a Visual Arts Mission Statement that clearly describes the impact of the visual arts program on Weston community, to be developed during the two year cycle of recommendations implementation. Completed fall of 2015 and posted to core documents.
4. Develop a practice of conducting a survey of the Visual Art Program within the student and parent community every four years. First survey 2016 after completion of two year implementation of recommendations.
5. Explore the possibility of repurposing the old photographic darkroom space into a community art gallery. The town of Weston has many accomplished local artists. An art gallery with monthly exhibitions of the artwork of adults and students would provide another opportunity for community connections.

Conclusion:

Over the next two years the K-12 Visual Arts Program will thoughtfully develop and implement the recommendations outlined in this report. As a department committed to excellence, the comprehensive review process provided a meaningful framework through which to review the K-12 program. The outcome allowed the department to set clear and meaningful goals to further improve and sustain a quality experience for Weston students while helping to clarify areas of strength.

As the completion of recommendations moves forward, the School Committee will receive updates during the annual Curriculum Update Report.