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Wellness Education Department  
Comprehensive Program Review

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

Weston Public Schools  
Weston, Massachusetts

October 2012

Submitted by:  
Mitch Finnegan  
Director of Wellness Education

Mission

The programs of the Wellness Education Department foster habits of mind and body that lead to physical and emotional strength and the ability to make healthy decisions for lifetime wellness.

## **PART I: INTRODUCTION**

### **The Comprehensive Program Review Process**

In October 2010 the Weston Public Schools Department of Wellness Education began the implementation of the new model of the curricular Comprehensive Program Review process. Amber Bock, Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Curriculum and Instruction, and Mitch Finnegan, Director of Wellness Education, began a series of meetings to plan the CPR process. On December 1, 2010, Amber joined the Wellness Education Department for a professional development meeting, at which the CPR process was explained, the initial schedule was reviewed, and the department began the Self-Study phase of the process by conducting a brainstorming session to identify strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum and delivery of instruction. At the conclusion of this meeting a Program Review Committee (PRC) was established that included representation from each level of the department, the department director, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, and a building principal to represent the Administrative Council.

Throughout the following months all members of the department reviewed the current curriculum, identified and reviewed literature on current best practices within the academic discipline, participated in site visits to exemplary programs in other districts, and held level-based meetings to review this information with each other and to share it with the Program Review Committee members. The PRC met several times to review all of this information, to discuss emerging issues and identify challenges within the department, to develop survey instruments to gain feedback from students and parents, and to oversee the implementation of these surveys and analyze the results. The department continued to meet as a whole during professional development time to review the progress of the program review committee, to identify potential members of the External Review Committee, to gain consensus or identify issues relating to curriculum and instruction, and to review the results of the student and parent surveys. This work included the development of a departmental mission statement, which was finalized in May 2011. Utilizing all of this information and data, the PRC developed the Self-Study report which was reviewed and revised with input from all department members, and presented to the School Committee on May 25, 2011.

During the spring and summer of 2011, the Chairperson of the External Review Committee was identified and the other members of the ERC were recruited. The School Committee finalized its Charge to the Committee in September, 2011. This committee was comprised of Health and Physical Education faculty at the college, secondary, and elementary levels; Health and Physical Education district administrators and curriculum developers; high school administrators; college-level teachers of Physical Education professionals preparation, and a Weston High School alumnus who was completing a graduate degree in Physical Education.

The External Review Committee (ERC) conducted the site-visit on October 27 & 28, 2011. During their two-day visit the members of the ERC reviewed all available curricular material; met with students, parents, other department heads, district administrators including all five building principals, community members, and each individual teacher; and observed every teacher in the department, and classes in every grade level. The committee members continued to work after the site visit, completing their individual reports and collaborating on the writing of the final Report of the External Review Committee. This report was presented to the School Committee by the ERC chair, Dr. Patricia McDiarmid, on March 26, 2012.

Simultaneous with the External Review component of the CPR process, the department members continued their work on the next phase of the CPR process throughout the 2011-12 academic year, including the development of comprehensive curriculum mapping and ongoing revision of the curriculum and instructional practices, both of which had been identified as needs through the self-study process. The members of the department received the ERC final report following its presentation to the School Committee, and began the work of developing this response. This effort included use of department meetings, professional development time, and workshops throughout the spring, summer and early fall of 2012.

## **PART II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS BY THE EXTERNAL REVIEW COMMITTEE & DEPARTMENT RESPONSE**

The External Review Committee commended the faculty and leadership of the Weston Public Schools for the comprehensiveness of the program review process. In particular, the ERC noted the seriousness of purpose illustrated by the Self-Study process, including the numerous site visits of department members to exemplary programs and the extensive review of research-based literature in the discipline. In the executive summary of its final report, the ERC noted the following:

- Departmental Strengths
  - Innovation in research and use of technologies within program.
  - Strong internal assessment of strengths and needs.
  - Instructional practice with program differentiation was observed across the system.
  - Effective use of departmental meetings to shape collegiality.
  
- Important Recommendations
  - Articulation of a written curriculum K-12 with focus on scope and sequence.
  - Develop broader assessments and feedback frameworks to parallel written curriculum.
  - Explore Health curriculum K-12 using guiding recommendations for focus.
  - Continue to develop consistency in philosophy and program implementation that reflects newly developed mission statement.

The final report contained detailed responses to each of the questions asked within the Charge that the ERC received from the School Committee, and extensive lists of commendations and recommendations related to each of these items. This Departmental Response to the Report of the External Review Committee will provide updates regarding the ongoing work that has continued to address identified issues, and will provide an overview of current and future planning needs. This response is not intended to be a point-by-point response to the ERC's report, but rather to highlight areas that will continue to be focused upon in the near term future.

### **School Committee Charge:**

#### ***I. Curriculum***

*Do the current Weston Public Schools Wellness Education Learning Standards and Big Ideas support the realization of the Wellness Education Department's mission statement?*

- *Does the current curriculum in grades K-12 reflect the best practices in Health Education and Physical Education?*
- *Does the current curriculum support an appropriate balance between skill development, activity, and content?*
- *Do the units of instruction reflect current practice in the discipline, and do they maximize student participation?*
- *How are formal and informal assessments currently being utilized, and in what ways can assessment of benchmarks be improved?*
- *Does the alcohol, tobacco, and other drug education strand of our Health Education curriculum reflect current best practices and instructional methodology?*

ERC Major Points of Emphasis:

1. The Wellness Education Department has done an admirable job of remaining current with latest trends/best practices through departmental initiatives (SPARK PLC work), ongoing professional development, and site visits. “Lessons presented to reflect current best practice and they did lend themselves to helping maximize student participation.” – ERC Report.
2. Concern that Standards & Benchmarks document be updated on a regular basis, and used to inform decision-making regarding the delivery of instruction.
3. Recommendation that curriculum mapping be completed as soon as possible, with particular emphasis upon alignment with national and state standards.
4. There is evidence of informal assessments being conducted regularly during lesson and teachers using this to adjust lesson to meet students’ needs; increased use of formal assessments and rubrics suggested. Formal fitness assessments are conducted regularly at the secondary level; use of such assessments as motivators for improved student performance should be explored.
5. Health Education, “a one-of-a-kind academic discipline,” does address many of the most relevant topics needed by students and is commended for using evidence-based curricula wherever possible. However, depth of learning, actual skill development, and likelihood of real behavior change is significantly hampered by:
  - a. The absence of any Health Education in grades K-5 and Grade 12.
  - b. The limited number of classes per student per year at the secondary level (approximately 30 classes per year in Grades 6 & 7; 9 classes per year in grade 8; 20 classes per year in grad 9-11; no HE classes in Grade 12)
  - c. The infrequent meeting time of such classes at the secondary level (usually 1 class per week or less).

Departmental Response:

- A. Following the identification of the need for a clearly written and documented curriculum during the self-study process in 2010-12, the department began a curriculum mapping

process even before the ERC conducted their site visit. This process continued throughout the 2011-12 academic year, and will be concluded during 2012-13.

- B. The department is committed to continual assessment and revision of curriculum and instruction.
  - i. Elementary level teachers are working on developing user-friendly technology-based assessment for basic skills.
  - ii. Middle School staff has been discussing significant revisions to the activities conducted in Physical Education, especially during the eighth grade year. MS staff are pilot testing several new activities during 2012-13, and will use information from these to formally revise curriculum during the summer of 2013.
  - iii. High School staff is exploring revisions and lesson planning to continue to increase student activity levels.
  
- C. Department staff at all levels have committed to a re-emphasis upon the use of common assessments. Work began on these assessments in 2011-12, and some are already being utilized. The design and implementation of such assessments will continue to be a focus of available professional development and common planning time in 2012-13.
  
- D. The department is committed to the most effective Health Education curriculum possible for all students in grades K through 12, and believes that given the current physical, emotional and social health needs of all students, this must be considered a priority at the district level.
  - i. In response to both state-mandated reporting and Western Youth Health Assessment data, workshop time was utilized in the summer of 2012 to review anti-bullying and human sexuality curriculum, and to expand information related to the prevention of marijuana use.
  - ii. Efforts to create opportunities for Health Education at the elementary level should wait until the publication of the soon-to-be-completed Massachusetts State Frameworks for Science Education, which are likely to include some topics related to Health Education.
  - iii. Opportunities for the infusion of Health Education information into other curricular areas should be explored throughout all of the academic disciplines and at all levels. An exemplar of this has already been utilized in a senior-level Anatomy & Physiology course, which has utilized a National Institutes of Drug Abuse & Addiction (NIDAA) curriculum to teach brain anatomy and function through a study of drug addiction.
  - iv. The department urges the consideration of additional class time in Health Education at the secondary level, the need of which seems readily apparent given recent data and anecdotal evidence.
  - v. A significant and no-cost improvement in the delivery of Health Education at the secondary level could immediately be accomplished through adjustments and scheduling, such as increasing the frequency of class sessions, even without increasing total course time.

## **School Committee Charge:**

### ***II. Instruction***

*To what extent does classroom instruction reflect curricular goals and best teaching practices?*

#### *Physical Education:*

- *How successfully is skills instruction embedded in movement-based activities to provide a balance of vigorous activity and skill work in each class session?*
- *Is instructional time used effectively at each building level?*
- *How well are all students accessing the curriculum?*
- *How well are differentiated student needs being identified and met in both the adapted physical education setting and in the general physical education setting throughout the K-12 program?*

#### *Health Education:*

- *Are students engaged as active learners in each class session?*
- *How well does the current class structure and method of instruction balance the need for information acquisition and skill development?*
- *How well do teachers make use of authentic experiences, technology, and primary sources in their classroom instruction?*

### **ERC Major Points of Emphasis:**

1. An embrace of the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning was evident in several areas of both Health and Physical Education. Health classes included a balance between lecture and cooperative active learning strategies. Elementary school PE classes showcased high levels of learner centered ownership in all grades.
2. Some evidence of the balance between vigorous activity and skill acquisition in PE classes being done extremely well, but this balance should be revisited and reassessed regularly in lesson planning and execution.
3. High student engagement is promoted through such teacher practices as use of music, clear and concise language and clear specific teaching cues, calm teaching demeanor, consistent and warm connecting with students upon arrival to class, use of Smart Boards to post lesson objectives and content information in Health Education, and connection of learning to authentic applications for learners throughout the delivery of instruction.
4. Learning goals and objectives should be posted and re-emphasized regularly to students in all classes and inherent value of each activity should be made clear to students in order to increase level of learner ownership and provide clarity for each instructional session; some evidence of this being done, but should become standard practice for entire department.
5. Effective use of instructional time is hampered at the elementary level by classes reporting late, and at the high school level by staggered arrival of students. Effective strategies to address this should be developed within each building.

6. Manner of fitness testing should be revisited so that such testing does not take away from instructional value of every class.
7. Differentiation of instruction is apparent at all levels, allowing for high levels of curriculum accessibility for all students. Both APE and GRASP classes seem to have goals geared to maximizing student involvement in the regular Physical Education curriculum, although with slightly different areas of focus. Clear entrance and exit criteria for students in need of adapted physical education services, including GRASP, should be developed.

Departmental Response:

- A. Through such a use as the department-wide PLC activity focused on SPARK and other information related to the role of physical activity on a wide array cognitive, physiological, and emotional effects, the department had begun a major emphasis upon maximizing activity time within each class session. The department is continuing to refine the balance between skill acquisition and time in activity. This will continue to be addressed regularly within level-based meetings as well as at department-wide discussions.
- B. Staff will clarify expectations relating to activity level on a unit by unit basis, and will include this information in unit and lesson planning.
- C. Use of enhanced visual aids, including posting of lesson objectives, class agenda, video instruction, and instructional posters will be a point of emphasis throughout 2012-13. This will be monitored as part of the evaluation process for all department staff throughout the year.
- D. The department director will explore the possibility of using trained volunteers to assist with testing to minimize the loss of instructional time. In particular, this will be an area of exploration in collaboration with Regis College during 2012-13.
- E. High School staff will pursue professional development activities with a special focus on maximizing the use of available space and on mass group games so that maximum student activity will be insured, even during "rainy day" situations with multiple classes using the gymnasium simultaneously.
- F. It is a goal of the department to have all PE teachers trained in the administration of the Adapted Physical Education Assessment Scale II (APEASII) by the beginning of the 2013-14 school year. This will insure the proper identification and assessment of students needing Adapted Physical Education services. Following this training, department staff will clarify and revise exit and entrance criteria for APE and GRASP in consultation with the Special Education department.

**School Committee Charge:**

**III. Program Design**

*Is adequate time and institutional support given to the study of Health Education and Physical Education from K-12?*

- *Does the current program provide an adequate variety and sequence of activities to enhance an understanding of and commitment to lifetime fitness and activity?*
- *Does the current scheduling of Health Education and Physical Education in each school maximize their effectiveness in providing meaningful instruction and learning in the academic discipline, and benefit to the entire learning process within the school?*

**ERC Major Points of Emphasis:**

1. Self-identification by the department for the need for a rigorous and stringent curriculum mapping process is commendable. Such a process should include strategies for use, a year-long plan by week, expectations by grade level, evaluation process, and alignment with both state, NASPE, and National Health standards.
2. The department should consider using the Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT) and the Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (PECAT) as part of the curriculum mapping project. These tools assist in assessing curricular alignment with national standards.
3. Weston Public Schools, led by the Wellness Education Department, should be commended for conducting a Comprehensive School Health Assessment several years ago. This has led to ongoing improvement in the CSH program of the schools, and has included significant community involvement, primarily through the continued functioning of the Weston Community Health Coalition.
4. The staff wellness/health promotion program at the Middle School is "... a superb collaborative initiative that fosters opportunities to improve levels of overall wellness."
5. The activities related to the Grant to Reduce Alcohol Abuse include noteworthy activities, such as the social norms marketing campaign, are important in addressing substance abuse among teens.
6. The instructional leaders for Wellness Education display the utmost interest in serving Weston students with high quality lessons and messages.
7. There is a clear need for additional instruction in health topics, particularly at the elementary level. However, it is strongly suggested that time does not come from the existing PE program, as suggested at the meeting with the school principals.

**Departmental Response:**

- A. The curriculum mapping process was begun in October 2011, and is continuing throughout this year. The department plans to have this process completed by February 2012. The department explored use of the HECAT several years ago, and determined that

the possible benefits did not outweigh the prohibitive investment of time and effort. The department director will explore the PECAT to determine if it may be useful in assessing the Physical Education curriculum.

- B. During 2013-14 the department staff will explore the possibility of replicating the Middle School Staff Wellness Program at each of the district's other schools.
- C. During 2012-13 the department staff will explore and implement strategies for improved communication to educate and inform students, parents, administrators, and the community on the importance of daily physical activity to the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development of all students. Aspects of this effort may be included in some staff evaluation plans.
- D. The department encourages the investigation at the building and district administrative leadership levels of both the total class time allocated and the scheduling with the school day of Health Education and Physical Education. The department feels strongly that:
  - a. The creation of a health education curriculum at the elementary level is essential;
  - b. Every effort should be made by school administrators to schedule Physical Education at all levels as early as possible in the school day for each child, and of regular physical activity breaks throughout the day. There is clear and incontrovertible scientific evidence that such scheduling is of tremendous benefit to students, and produces physiological changes in the brain that improve brain function and learning.
  - c. Increased time for Health Education should be seriously considered a district administration, particularly at the Grade 8 and Grade 12 level.
  - d. Scheduling of current Health Education courses should be modified as soon as possible so that classes meet more frequently and regularly than the one time per week schedule that currently exists in Grades 6-7, and 9-12. Curricular continuity is a major difficulty given the current schedule.

**School Committee Charge:**

**IV. Facilities & Equipment**

*How do the current facilities and equipment maximize or inhibit the success of the program?*

- *Is safety being adequately addressed in instruction, and ensured through facility design and usage?*
- *Is use of available indoor and outdoor space maximized?*
- *How can scheduling/layout of current space promote maximum use by students and adults throughout the day?*
- *What inadequacies in space and/or design and usage need to be addressed?*

**ERC Major Points of Emphasis:**

1. Adequate storage space for equipment and inventory control should be given careful consideration. Current storage space and several of the schools are either inadequate and/or compromised by accessibility of equipment by non-PE staff.
2. The indoor facilities at Country School, Woodland School, and the new Field School meet the standards to maximize the success of the program. Safety is also adequately

addressed through instruction and facility design, and use of space is maximized.

3. The use of outdoor space at the elementary schools should be expanded to insure maximal benefit for students in the Physical Education curriculum. This would require coordination with classroom teachers and building administration. Also, design consideration for both the new Field School and Woodland and Country should include attention to field proximity and gym egress to maximize learning time. The schools might also consider use of other facilities such as the pool.
4. The use of outdoor space at the Middle School and High School exceed standards for safety, maximization of use.
5. The indoor space at Weston Middle School and Weston High School is deficient. The gymnasias at each school and the pool at the Middle School do meet standards for maximization of the program, and safety is adequately addressed. However, the scheduling of multiple classes into this space simultaneously compromises safety and quality of instruction due to inadequate separation and sound issues. In addition, the Weight Rooms at each school, and the Aerobic Room at the High School (and absence of one at the Middle School) are inadequate to insure safety, lack adequate security, and inhibit the success of the program. The Weight Rooms also need updated equipment that can be used by both males and females; the current equipment is designed for use by males.
6. Building design and enforcement of expectations of student behavior should ensure that “Physical activity space is designed to facilitate instruction free of distractions and pass-through traffic patterns.” (*National Association for Sport and Physical Education Standards*) This standard was not met during observations of high school classes, which often had so much “pass-through” traffic that safety of class participants was compromised.
7. Current locker room set-up at the Middle and High Schools present challenges to proper supervision and safety.

Departmental Response:

- A. The department concurs that maximal use of outdoor space presents challenges due to proximity, maintenance, and sharing of space with recess. We will explore what changes we might make, and would welcome suggestions from administration and the community.
- B. Adequate and secure storage continues to be an issue at the secondary schools, and needs to be addressed through district/school efforts to modify existing spaces for this. Of special note is the use of the Middle School gymnasium by both after-school and community-based programs. Inadequate storage of equipment creates both cleanliness and safety issues for PE classes on a regular basis, as well as inventory loss through unsecure storage spaces.
- C. The department encourages the district to consider planning for adequate indoor space at

the high school level. The current inadequacies compromise student safety and program delivery. If excellence is considered a goal for curriculum and instructional delivery, the district should also consider it a goal for facility design. Such improvements would not only improve the Physical Education program, but have significant benefit to the WPS Athletic Department, which serves approximately 70% of all students, and to the community as a whole, who uses the facilities extensively throughout the year.

### **PART III: REFLECTIONS ON THE COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM REVIEW PROCESS**

As the first academic discipline to participate in the new comprehensive program review process, the Wellness Education Department would like to contribute our reflections on the process itself, and offer some suggestions for those departments that shall follow us.

**Self-Study** –Members of the department found the self-study phase to be the most useful portion of the entire Comprehensive Program Review. Staff became truly engaged and invested in assessing our own strengths and weaknesses; researching the most effective methodologies and promising practices in our discipline; utilizing site visits and professional development to gain new ideas and reflect upon our own professional practice; and in having thoughtful, in-depth, and sometimes challenging conversations with ourselves about our mission, philosophy, methodologies, successes, and failures. Members of the program review committee also appreciated the opportunity to review and assess all of the information being gained from the activities above, and to provide meaningful feedback to and from the entire department. The entire department participated in reviewing and revising the final Self-Study report, which further increased the level of engagement in the process. The only recommendation to improve upon this phase of the CPR is to provide even more time for its thoughtful completion.

**Site Visits**- All members of the department felt that the opportunity to pay site visits to colleagues in other districts was tremendously beneficial. The members of the department are particularly grateful to building administrators for allowing this to happen. Staff benefited tremendously from a thoughtful department-wide discussion of areas of interest (i.e., rubrics, scheduling, activity level, units of instruction, etc) to explore through the site visits, and of outstanding programs to visit that would provide us with the highest level of information. This has led to an increase in “internal” site-visits within the district, with staff visiting each other’s classes. One suggestion is to consider how external site visits might become a regular practice within the district.

**Surveys** - The value of the survey process was evident at each step along the way. The development of the survey instruments by our own staff was important in helping to refine our own thoughts regarding teaching and learning within our discipline. We asked ourselves a simple question: What aspects of what we do is so essential to our mission that we should be gathering data and feedback on it? This was quickly followed by a second question: If something that we do is not important enough to measure, is it a wise use of resources to continue to do it? These were among the most useful conversations of the process. The analysis of the data we received was another essential component of the entire process, and led to some immediate changes to curriculum and professional practice, as well as providing extensive information for long-term development within our department.

**External Review Committee Site Visit** – The visit by the External Review Committee provided several useful opportunities for professional growth. By scheduling time for each member of the department to meet with at least one member of the ERC to discuss curriculum and instruction, department members were required to thoughtfully reflect upon these. These meetings also allowed for a free exchange of ideas between professional colleagues with different perspectives. One other very positive result was the tremendous amount of positive feedback that members of the department received from the ERC members.

The ERC visit did point out, however, several areas that could be improved for future program reviews, such as the following:

- **Length of Visit** – Both members of the ERC and the department felt that a two day visit was not nearly enough time for the visiting committee to get a full view of the department and the curriculum. The ERC members, in particular, needed quite a bit of additional time to synthesize all of the information reviewed and observations that were conducted. Fortunately for us, the ERC members were diligent in their efforts to provide the most useful possible feedback, and worked for several weeks after the visit to complete their writing and revisions. **RECOMMENDATION:** *All future ERC site visits are a minimum of three days.*
- **Structure of Visit** – In an effort to allow maximum observation of the curriculum in action, ERC members were scheduled for multiple classroom visits on both days. Reflecting upon this schedule, both ERC members and district administrators believe that the first day of the ERC visit should be devoted to a thorough review of the written curriculum and supporting documents, which should also include the availability of the department head/director and selected staff to help provide explanation and/or answer questions. Only following this opportunity should the ERC members then visit classes to observe this curriculum in action. **RECOMMENDATION:** *The first day of any ERC visit be devoted to review of curriculum materials and other supporting documents. Department and district leadership should also be available at this time for extensive consultation to the ERC.*
- **Defining Purpose of Class Observations** – There was some confusion regarding the purpose of the classroom observations by ERC members, despite efforts to define this at the initial ERC meeting on the first day of the visit. By the end of the visit, and in the writing of the ERC report, these issues were addressed, but more detailed planning by the department director/head, assistant superintendent, and ERC chair should eliminate this in the future. This planning should include teleconferencing or email exchanges with the ERC members prior to the visit to explain this information. **RECOMMENDATION:** *Purpose of the classroom observations should be clearly defined for ERC members and communicated to them prior to the site visit.*
- **Providing Documentation to ERC Prior to Visit** – Members of the ERC greatly appreciated the chance to review the Self-Study document prior to the visit, and had clearly spent time reviewing this. One improvement would be to also provide other materials in advance, without overwhelming the committee members, so they could review these as well. **RECOMMENDATION:** *The department director/head, assistant superintendent, and ERC chair should work together to provide as much relevant documentation to ERC members prior to the site visit.*

## **PART IV. CONCLUSION**

The members of the Department of Wellness Education would like to thank the district administration and School Committee for devoting such substantial resources to the Comprehensive Program Review process. We have found this process challenging, enlightening, at times demanding, but ultimately incredibly rewarding. Engagement in the process has already led to substantial clarification of the department's mission and philosophy, the implementation of changes to the curriculum and instructional practice, and an extensive and useful list of areas of investigation to improve teaching and learning within our academic discipline.

Of special note, we would like to thank Amber Bock, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for her leadership, prodding, and support throughout this process. Finally, as department director, I would like to thank all of the members of our department for their hard work, and the students, parents, and WPS staff who contributed their time, thoughts, and suggestions to us throughout our entire review process.

J. Mitchell Finnegan  
Director  
Department of Wellness Education  
October 9, 2012