

Background of Secondary English Language Arts Programming in BHM Schools**Buffalo Community Middle School**

English courses are required for all students in Grade 6, Grade 7, and Grade 8. The courses include instruction and assessment on Minnesota's English Language Arts standards. Instruction is focused on improving literacy skills in areas such as fiction/nonfiction, comprehension, organization strategies, listening, research, analyzing research and critical thinking.

Students are placed in English courses to match their readiness for learning. Both enriched and remedial courses are available, alongside the regular English 6, English 7 and English 8.

- Grade 6: English 6, Enriched English 6, Quest 6, Literacy Skills
- Grade 7: English 7, Enriched English 7, Quest 7, Literacy Skills
- Grade 8: English 8, Enriched English 8, Quest 8, Literacy Skills

Buffalo High School

Students are required to earn 4 credits of English for graduation. Each 2-term (or 2-quarter) course is worth 1 credit. English instruction at the high school level starts with two required courses -- English 9 and English 10 -- differentiated for various readiness levels through Quest, Arts Infused and Enriched courses. Because we are dedicated to providing students with self-directed and relevant learning, we offer a variety of elective courses that they choose in 10th, 11th and 12th grade for the remaining 2-credit requirement. These include a variety of opportunities for students to connect, collaborate and communicate, and an opportunity to earn college credit in CIS courses.

BHS Elective English Courses

Acting I - The Physical Actor

Acting I - The Vocal Actor

Advanced Acting - The Integration of Voice & Body

Speech Communications

Journalism I

Journalism II

Women in Literature

English Grammar and Usage

Publications Writing (Yearbook)

Mass Media I

Mass Media II

Classic Novel
Short Stories Seminar
Contemporary Literature
American Literature and Composition
College Prep Writing and Critical Reading
Creative Writing
Creative Writing II
eCIS Writing Studio
CIS Writing and Critical Reading
CIS Introduction to Literature
CIS Public Speaking
CIS Introduction to Theatre

Our courses are designed to meet the needs of the 21st century learner. This includes teaching problem solving, creativity, analytical thinking, collaboration, communication skills and inquiry.

Current resources for students in English high school classes include some Chromebooks, whole-class novels, plays and limited access to computers and Arts Magnet iPads. Phoenix Learning Center currently is using a set of 10-year-old laptops.

English Language Arts Standards

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, “The Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in English Language Arts, which include reading, writing, speaking, viewing, listening, media literacy and language standards, were revised in 2010 and were to be implemented by the 2012-2013 school year. The standards also include Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects and require that students learn to read and write across disciplines. The standards will be reviewed again during the 2019-2020 school year” (MDE).

BHM English Language Arts focuses on the following anchor standards in developing students for college and career readiness. These standards are used as a guide to chart growth and proficiency of students’ learning. We use scaffolding and a variety of instructional strategies to teach these skills, and a variety of assessment tools to evaluate their growth.

Reading:

- Students learn to read a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts, practicing the following skills: summarizing, inferring, analyzing, reflecting.
- Students interpret texts to understand the development of ideas, characters and themes
- Students gain empathy through exposure to diverse perspectives and voices in their texts.
- Students analyze texts to learn how word choice and structure shape perspective and purpose.

Writing:

- Students learn the standard conventions of language and apply it to their reading and writing; this includes vocabulary enhancement and development of figurative language.
- Students write a variety of informative, explanatory, narrative, analytical and persuasive texts, considering strategies to best communicate to specific audiences for a variety of purposes.
- Students learn to structure their analytical and persuasive writing around the concepts of claim, evidence and warrant.
- Students demonstrate a knowledge of different informal and formal registers in their writing.
- Students use digital tools to: interact and collaborate through peer conferencing and writing; produce and publish a variety of texts which require them to evaluate the validity of resources and learn a variety of research methods; and reflect on the writing process they have learned.

Speaking and Listening:

- Students learn to listen and respond to a variety of diverse ideas and perspectives.
- Students learn to express themselves clearly and effectively through conversation and collaboration in small groups.
- Students learn effective public speaking techniques.
- Students evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning and use of evidence.
- Students use digital media to give effective speeches and presentations, learning how to evaluate their own and others' rhetorical strategies.

More detailed information on the complete set of Minnesota's Academic Standards for English Language Arts can be accessed at this [link](#).

Summary of Process for Review of Instructional Resources

Secondary (Grades 6-12) English Language Arts teachers developed a cohesive vision statement to guide their exploration of instructional resources and their long-term impact on student learning.

The English department values the background and experiences of all students. To prepare for their future in a global community, students will independently and collaboratively:

- engage in inquiry;
- comprehend a variety of texts;
- think critically and creatively;
- value diverse perspectives; and
- communicate effectively for a variety of audiences and purposes.

An extended exploration, implementation and analysis of current practices and curriculum

revealed that the comprehensive curriculum used until now, did not have the intended positive impact on student scores and engagement.

As a part of an ongoing continuous improvement process, the English Language Arts Department has researched, reviewed and piloted a variety of resources, strategies and practices intended to improve learning, increase engagement and lead to success in college and careers. This process has included:

- forming professional learning communities to analyze data, discuss current practices and make improvements that move all students forward,
- designing learning experiences and assessments that emphasize collaboration, critical thinking, creative problem solving and communication,
- visiting schools outside the district to observe and experience instructional strategies related to workshop models,
- creating a thorough inventory of current materials and the way they are used,
- piloting the use of new materials and strategies with success,
- exploring culturally responsive teaching practices with a focus on facilitating equitable experiences, and
- consulting with outside experts on best practices in teaching literature.

In addition, English Language Arts teachers have integrated collaborative writing and presenting software, learning management systems, and digital creation tools into student learning. This process revealed that current technology resources are lacking; however, teachers collaborated to maximize the use of digital tools and create a plan to fill gaps with the goal of providing an equitable experience for all students. Researching 1:1 initiatives, revealed that model may not be sustainable or desirable; however, the current ratio of technology to students is inhibitive to students using collaborative strategies for learning and creating. This led teachers to explore ways to implement tools to help students in a sustainable way.

Our current text resources include materials that are dated, worn out and limited in perspective. We are also short on the number of copies of each text, and we are forced to use inconsistent versions of text, which can make discussion and organization difficult. A class of 37, for example, may only have access to 30 books; the result is the sharing of books and an inability for students to take materials home. Currently most of our classes use single anchor texts that provide a limited or singular perspective on themes and subject matter. Our goal is to follow best practice methodology, supplementing anchor texts with additional materials for the purpose of enhancing collaboration, discussion and critical thinking. This would expose students to a greater variety of voices, perspectives and ways of thinking about relevant topics.

Recommendations

Instructional Resources at Buffalo Community Middle School

In 2010, the English Department at Buffalo Community Middle School adopted a textbook resource that centered around the standards. Instruction and assessment through this curriculum resource was predicted to raise the student achievement as seen through MCA

scores and other data, as well as provide a more comprehensive curriculum for students as they progress through the middle school.

Adoption of this program by the middle school has not, in fact, had the impact on our students as anticipated. During its first year, it was implemented as intended, but it was soon discovered that it was not feasible to continue due to the overwhelming amount of assessing that was included. The English teachers at the middle school have since modified it to varying degrees, but it has become clear that the current, very-structured units are quickly becoming outdated and another route needs to be taken to engage students at a higher level.

There will be several elements to the implementation of the recommended curriculum. Because the English Department at the middle school believes that increased availability to technology will increase the ability to use technological tools such as Study Island, Google Classroom and Google Forms, etc., each grade level is proposing to have access to its own cart of Chromebooks, without losing the existing computers available.

In addition to greater access to technology, the English Department is proposing to work in themed units that encompass a variety of genres at once instead of units that exclusively focus on a single element. For example, instead of teaching mutually exclusive units such as Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry, etc., the recommended proposal includes teaching units that focus on the themes that make up the core values of our middle school such as integrity, character, attitude, empathy, courage and others. The publishing company Mackin is helping to provide us with such units. Under this proposal, each grade at the middle school will work from “bins” or units put together by theme, but including several genres at once. When we focus on “courage”, for example, we’ll teach fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and writing, all with that particular focus.

The materials we’re requesting are based on 30 total bins for 12 themed units (3 units for 3 teachers/grade = 27; 1 additional unit per grade=3). There are three teachers per grade with an average of 140 students each.

Instructional Resources at Buffalo High School

Primarily, the English Department is dedicated to preparing students to demonstrate mastery of 21st Century literacies. For this reason, our request focuses on equitable and increased technology. We need to put digital tools in the hands of students to equip them to create new things, make global connections, and share their work in ways that were previously impossible. While we understand that the district does not see the vision of BHS as a 1:1 school as practical, the English Department recommends that, if we are to compete with other districts and we are to embrace becoming an all AVID school in the 21st century, we do the following:

- Every Language Arts teacher at the high school and Phoenix Learning Center has a class set of computers that is equal to about 75% of a class' enrollment. That would mean 25 Chromebooks per classroom, with the necessary carts to house them safely and securely. This is the most equitable way to ensure all students have basic access to tools and a consistent connection to outside resources. Just as we wouldn't depend on students to “bring their own” in those

classes, a student's learning experience should not depend on their family's income.

- The purchase and use of technology could be maximized if we utilize software and applications that are platform agnostic, allowing students to access work across platforms, regardless of the tools being used and allow students to transition from analog to digital tools. This would increase the potential of all of the tools currently available to students including Google Apps, research databases and other tools that the district already employs. This change would also reduce the amount of printing needed and increase the ease of sharing resources.
- Students who explore the creation of digital media in any Language Arts class would benefit from the use of microphones, cameras and production resources. iPads combine microphones, cameras, production and publishing resources in intuitive ways that are accessible to students and staff. Currently, the majority of students who create and share digital products are only those who have access to the tools at home. The addition of these tools as a shared resource would help make the field more level and enable more students to explore and create regardless of their access to tools outside of school.

In addition to technology requests, we must provide a relevant and engaging experience that features a variety of voices. Therefore, we are asking for new texts in order to facilitate our commitment to giving students choices in their learning through literature circles and choice novels. We also request replacement of existing whole-class novels that will be more durable and lasting than our current paperback versions.

Rationale

- Even with partial access to shared school-wide computer labs, we find ourselves with larger classes than the number of workstations that either lab supports. Labs often support up to 34 students, but many English Language Arts classes exceed that number.
- While most students have access to a cell phone during the day, the use of cell phones for drafting and revision is problematic for a variety of reasons:
 - it is not an equitable approach to technology integration as students without consistent access to personal devices can fall further behind;
 - it is difficult to see the structure of a text on such small screens;
 - it is not conducive to peer editing for this same reason;
 - if students' devices do happen to work with our network, they cannot print;
 - it is more difficult to monitor if students are on-task, or to advise them while drafting and revising, if they are working on their cell phones;
 - this is not the most up-to-date way that students in other districts are learning to communicate in a 21st Century environment.
- Students have limited access to printers, both at home and at school; however, the department continues to rely on printed work because of inconsistent access to digital

tools. With access to technology, we hope to reduce the need for paper printing while enhancing the way students interact with texts. Students will be able to read, edit, and annotate each other's work digitally. This would reduce printing and paper costs significantly and use learning time more efficiently.

- Digital tools reinforce organizational skills and enable group collaboration that provides more relevant and work-related experience.
- Digital tools allow teachers and students to access relevant, current and important nonfiction texts, including articles, data and multimedia resources. These tools also can make full use the high school's subscription to research databases.
- Regarding replacement of technology materials in future years, the high school has a contingency fund for large purchases. In the event that we need replacement of broken Chromebooks, for example, we have the economic means to do so.
- Because the English Department values the background and experiences of all students, there must be a variety of texts that serve as mirrors and windows for students. We are invested in teaching texts with more diverse perspectives that are relevant and accessible to a wide variety of learners. We maintain rigor not by how challenging a text might be, but by what students are able to do with the text. We encourage creative and critical thinking in the way students explore links and authentic experiences between their lives and various texts. This investment will result in students who are more engaged with texts, aware of the world and empathetic.

Financial Implications

What will this cost?

The middle school portion of the proposal will cost approximately \$93,500. The high school portion would be \$77,300. Phoenix is requesting \$5,500.

Has sustainability been considered?

Administration at both the middle school and the high school have been included in the sustainability conversation. Matt Lubben and Mark Mischke have voiced support for the technology portion of the proposal. The district technology department has considered this proposal in their conversations about sustainability and infrastructure. The materials we're requesting in the units are primarily non-consumable; however, some books may eventually need to be replaced. We've placed a priority on ordering durable texts.

What comparisons have been made?

For literacy and text solutions, we looked at another company called Custom Ed Solutions, which did provide many of the same supplies as the Mackin Company, but not the same services the Mackin Company provides. Of course we have also compared the proposed program to what we have now, and we believe that the new program will afford us opportunities that the current program does not.

We've also examined the use of a variety of digital hardware and software, including iPads, Mackin's digital supplements, and other subscription-based services. Other departments who

have implemented digital tools were consulted in creating plans for the use, organization, and maintenance of hardware.

Will this get outdated?

Novels do occasionally become worn and need replacing, but the themes never will. If novels need to be replaced, that can be done through the regular department budget on a gradual basis. The district-recommended Chromebooks have a reputation for both durability and repairability. The carts will help in maintaining this investment. By the time the Chromebooks reach end-of-life, the technology landscape will have shifted, so it is difficult to predict what this looks like more than five years in the future.

What investment has already been made?

The district Technology Department has already made significant investments in infrastructure, including wireless networks, security and consistent access to the internet. The district also has management practices in place that make updating Chromebooks simple. The district currently offers robust support for Google Apps for Education, including collaborative document editing, digital publishing, classroom management and organization, data collection and website creation. Chromebooks allow students seamless access to these tools.

Evaluation

At BCMS, developing thematic units of instruction provides the PLCs the opportunity to collaborate very closely and gives ownership to BCMS English curriculum. The increased access to technology also provides for cohesiveness of instruction. At BHS, gaining access to updated text resources and consistent access to technology will allow BHS Social Studies teachers to collaborate and create lessons together.

Utilizing technology will allow teachers to more easily adapt instruction to meet state standards and stay connected to the world. With updated resources, teachers will work to create and evaluate common assessments across course areas. We will continue to adjust curriculum, instruction, and assessments as we move through the Continuous Improvement Process (CIP).

Next Steps

With board approval, the planning for purchasing of new resources will be put into place. Ordering of resources will take place after July 1, 2018 in preparation for implementation in the 2018-2019 school year.

In addition to the purchasing, this proposal will require BCMS English teachers to commit to summer curriculum development writing time and professional development to transition from the traditional units to the newer ones. The BCMS team will work with Mackin in the development of units and resources to support the units of instruction.

Significant curriculum development writing time is provided during the first year of

implementation and will be used to evaluate and enhance the curriculum as needed. Teachers will also participate in any necessary training and professional development to best utilize the curriculum resources that will be available. The implementation costs associated with curriculum planning and development, as well as training costs, are all budgeted within the Teaching & Learning Department's professional development dollars, separately from the curriculum adoption proposal.