

MEMO

To: Alan Hawkins, Superintendent
Cape Elizabeth School Board

From: Jeffrey Shedd, Chair of ELA K-12 Committee, and Members of K-5 Literacy
Assessment Task Force

Date: November 30, 2010

Subject: Status Report on Progress of K-5 Literacy Skills Assessment Task Force

The Committee would first like to thank the Board for its financial and other support of the committee's work with our outside consultants, Clare Landrigan and Tammy Mulligan. It is fair to say that the task force has made more progress towards accomplishing its mission--defining a systematic assessment system measuring student attainment of all foundational reading skills in order to inform teacher instruction--than any of us envisioned at the outset of this project. Indeed, the committee has taken upon itself *another charge* that surfaced through task force discussions: building stronger coherence and understanding between Instructional Support and regular classroom teachers concerning reading curriculum and instruction. Task force members are confident that when this project is complete, both regular classroom and support instruction services will be more effective and responsive to clearly identified student needs. A measure of the effectiveness of the task force approach we have employed is that elementary teachers, some of whom were understandably skeptical of the task force at the outset, have embraced it. Many are eager to join!

The committee would also like to thank the many teachers whose classroom work has been impacted by the pilot projects currently under way as a result of this task force's work. New assessment tools are being piloted with students, which involves time, careful preparation, and reflective follow-up by classroom teachers. Influenced by our consultants, the task force is not making final decisions about which are the best assessments to use until we have tried several. The results of this pilot have informed our decision-making, as some initial "leanings" have been altered by actual experience. Each part of our pilot involves work by Cape's teachers and students. We appreciate their efforts.

This task force grew out of the report of the K-12 English Language Arts committee and its report to the Board dated November 9, 2009. That report included these two recommendations:

3. Examine alternative models for use of support resources to ensure that resources are being spent strategically to maximize impact on student learning....

9. Implement an assessment that includes an explicit measure of students' phonics/phonemic awareness skills in early grades (K-2) both to determine whether there is a need for more systematic instruction in these skills areas and to inform our examination of our current, district literacy support and curricular programs.

At the time of our report to the Board, we discussed the possibility of engaging consultants to help guide us in this important work.

Although the two recommendations above were initially separate, visits to school systems in Falmouth, Maine and Wayland, Massachusetts surfaced their connections. Specifically, both schools districts' reading curricula are grounded in coherent assessment systems. In those systems, 1) each foundational skill is assessed, 2) assessments allow for triangulation of data, i.e., each measure of performance can be compared with other measures to get a better, more reliable, overall picture of student strengths and weaknesses, and 3) the assessments that are used K-2 are only one part of a broader plan that bridges across all elementary grades and into middle school. Neither school system has a "perfect" answer; indeed, both were in the middle of reexaminations of their own assessment practices at the time of our visits. Nevertheless, both stressed how grounded, balanced assessment practices have had beneficial results in building effective regular instruction and support programs and in improving student performance.

Inspired by these two visits to other school systems, the committee quickly reached consensus to expand on recommendation nine in our report by examining our literacy skills assessment system in grades K-5, not just K-2.

Supported by the Superintendent and Board, the committee engaged consultants Tammy Mulligan and Clare Landrigan to guide our work. Several members of the committee had seen presentations by Tammy and Clare in connection with their work with the Wayland school system. Cape Elizabeth and Wayland were formerly partners in Project Blueprint, a consortium of small, high-performing schools. Cape Elizabeth left the consortium due to budget constraints two years ago, but the positive impression made by Tammy and Clare during Project Blueprint meetings lingered. Fortunately, Tammy and Clare were available and willing to take on this challenge.

The first step in forming the task force was deciding on membership and process. Working with the core group of Tom, Jeff, Linda Alfiero, Jamie, and Angela, Tammy and Clare stressed the need to create a system that was fully transparent so that the task force mission and responsibilities, as well as the selection process, were communicated to all teachers who might be affected by the task force's work. We believe we succeeded in meeting the goal of transparency. Membership includes representatives from the following stakeholder groups: teachers at each grade level K-5, Instructional Support, non-Special Education reading support, ESL, literacy leaders, administration,

and School Board. A complete list of members and their roles is attached.

Attached to this memorandum is another document that synthesizes the meetings and conference calls with Tammy and Clare that have been held thus far. Also attached is a glossary of reading skills, subskills and assessment types that will help the Board follow the task force report at the workshop. For purposes of this overview report, it will be helpful for the Board to examine, particularly, the glossary definitions of the six foundational reading skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and disposition of a reader. The major work of the committee is to create a system of assessments that reliably measures student attainment of each of these six foundational reading skills.

Working with Tammy and Clare, the task force adopted criteria for determining the components of a balanced assessment system. Those criteria are:

1. Matches task force goals (i.e., assesses each foundational skill with assessments that can be used for different purposes--screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring-- and allows for triangulation of data)
2. The data provided by the assessment yields useful information
3. Ideally, the assessment mix would include a single assessment that measures *both* phonics and phonemic awareness
4. Affordability
5. Teacher-friendly directions
6. Ease of administration in the classroom.

We are delighted by how much progress the task force has made to date. We have inventoried the reading assessments in grades K-5 that predated the task force, using that inventory to identify areas needing work. That is, we used the inventory to identify assessment gaps (skills areas not being assessed), assessment overlaps (skills areas being over-assessed), and assessment inconsistency (teachers in different classrooms in the same grade level using different assessment tools or practices). We have been introduced to a theory of change process that gives equal weight to both process and substance, as well as to both technical (the specific answer adopted to the question asked, i.e, the specific menu of assessments we eventually adopt) and adaptive (cultural) barriers to change. Two charts in the Appendix introduce the Board to those change theories. We have read professional literature that helps us understand the different types and uses of assessments and the RTI (Response to Intervention) process, since any assessment system we adopt must comply with that process to identify student struggles and needs.

And now Pond Cove's teachers are embarked upon an exciting journey, piloting assessments with students in their classrooms. While the pilot work is time-consuming, the experience is invaluable, generating information that will inform task force decisions.

So where are we in the overall work of the task force? Our hope is to adopt a coherent, comprehensive assessment plan to be implemented next year that will begin to inform curriculum and instruction immediately. Initially, we envisioned this work would take two years. In the second year of the task force, assuming we are funded for the second year, Tammy and Clare will work with teachers in plan implementation, data analysis, and curricular and instructional decision-making. We will continue to use our purposeful assessment system to build bridges of understanding and coherence between regular education and reading support positions in both regular education and Instructional Support.

What support does the task force need from the Board? As the pilot project helps us narrow our selection of assessments, some may require budgetary support for purchase of the assessments themselves and/or professional training related to implementation. We will need support from the Board for continuation of the contract with our consultants for next year. A table with projected costs next year is attached.

The final support we will need from the Board is your understanding of this reality : no assessment system we adopt will end the need for supplemental reading support for Cape Elizabeth's most struggling, young readers. Our curriculum and reading support systems may look different, and they will certainly be better informed; there are, however, no magic bullets, and there will always be struggling readers. Wayland and Falmouth, for example, have extensive support systems in place to support their struggling readers.

In conclusion, we are thrilled to report on the progress that the reading assessment task force has made to date. We are ahead of schedule. We are working hard, and we look forward to presenting our work in more detail to the Board at the November 30 workshop.

Appendix

1. Committee Members and Roles
2. Glossary
3. Synopsis of Meetings with Consultants
4. Managing Complex Change--Two Charts
5. Budget Needs for 2011-2012

Committee Members and Roles

Member	Role
Dawn Rioux	Kindergarten Teacher
Karen Dow	First Grade Teacher
Linda Siegmund	Second Grade Teacher
Cameron Rosenblum	Third Grade Teacher
Sally Connolly	Fifth Grade Teacher
Erik Neilsen	Fourth Grade Teacher
Linda Alfiero	Literacy Lead Teacher, Grades K-5 Pond Cove Teacher Leader
Tom Eismeier	Pond Cove Principal
Jamie Michaud	ELA, Former Lead Teacher, CEMS
Joni Hewitt	ELL Teacher
Deborah Jordan-Pearson	Reading Support Teacher
Susan Pillsbury	Instructional Support Teacher, Pond Cove
Dominic DePatsy	Instructional Support Administrator
Angela Schipani	Literacy Lead Teacher, Grades 6-12
Kate Williams-Hewitt	School Board Member
Alan Hawkins	Superintendent
Jeffrey Shedd	ELA K-12 Committee Chair

Glossary

Foundational Skills and Sub-Skills

Phoneme - the smallest unit of sound in the spoken language that distinguishes one word from another in a language. The English language has more than 40 phonemes.

Phonemic Awareness--the understanding that a word is made up of a series of discrete sounds. This awareness includes the ability to isolate out and manipulate sounds in spoken words by adding or deleting sounds, and by exchanging or combining sounds using the spoken word.

Phonics--the relationship between sounds and the spelling patterns that are used to represent them in print (phoneme-grapheme relationship) using the alphabetic code.

Encoding-- spelling a word by hearing discrete sounds and writing the graphemes (alphabetic symbols) in the correct sequence to represent the spoken word.

Decoding--the process of changing a printed word into a spoken word by mapping a sound to each letter or spelling pattern in the word. Decoding also occurs when the reader applies sight-word recognition, structural analysis and uses context clues.

Fluency--the ability to recognize words accurately, rapidly and automatically, and using expression when reading continuous text. Oral reading fluency may be timed to determine the number of words read per minute. Efficient fluency is required for effective comprehension

Comprehension--the ability to understand and infer meaning from text passages, either read in print, or listened to orally.

Vocabulary--the ability to recognize, understand, and use words correctly

Disposition of a Reader-- how an individual sees self as reader, is able to identify strengths and establishes goals for improving one's reading skills, is able to identify preferred texts, is essential for reading persistence through the grades

Types/Purpose of Assessment

Universal Screener--an assessment given to all children to quickly identify those who are struggling. Screeners do not diagnose particular reading difficulties; they identify students who require further assessment and specific diagnosis

Diagnostic--an assessment that identifies particular strength and weakness areas in reading; diagnostic assessments help to focus support for the student around weak skills areas

Progress Monitoring--an assessment that can be given repeatedly and quickly over a period of time to track the progress of reading skill development, particularly useful for struggling readers to assess effectiveness of support programs

Curriculum Based Measure (CBM)-- a short, quick, often external, progress monitoring assessment that is required to be part of any intervention monitoring program under the RTI law; progress monitoring assessments can also serve as CBM's

Outcome Measure--a "final," end-of-term assessment that more fully identifies student progress in the development of reading skills over a longer period of time (e.g., end of year)

Miscellaneous

RTI (Response to Intervention)--a regular education (non-Special Education) law that requires schools to systematically identify struggling students, their skill/knowledge deficits, and support strategies; purpose is to reduce referral rates for Special Education by providing more support in regular classroom.

Benchmarks--grade level and month "goals," defined by particular assessments, to facilitate progress monitoring; defined with reference to a larger "norm" group and based on statistical sampling techniques

PLC (Professional Learning Community)--a collaborative, structured system involving teachers working with assessment data to guide and inform curriculum and instruction work; involves teachers working together in a collaborative way to improve student learning results

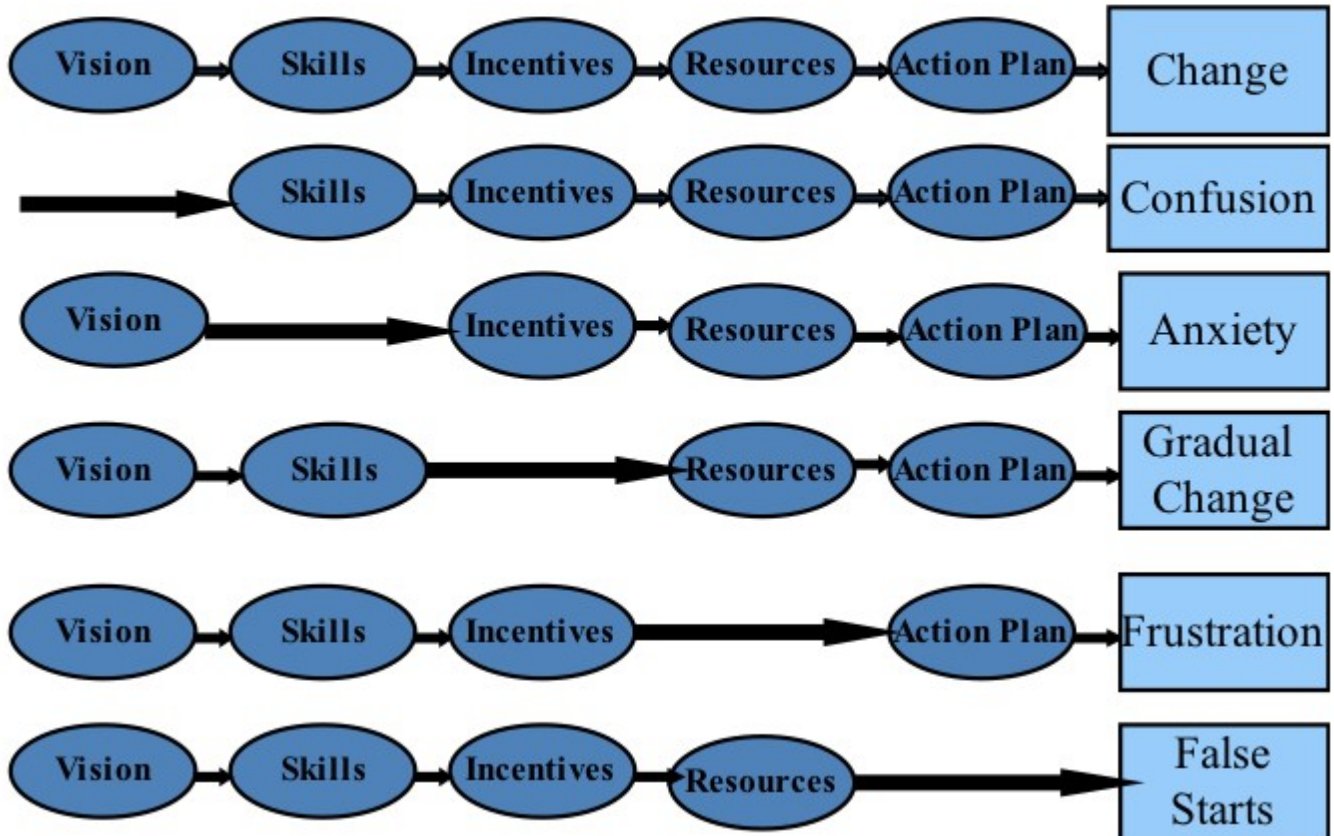
Synopsis of Meetings with Consultants

April 9, 2010	Phone Conference. This was an initial planning meeting, including Tammy and Clare via telephone, with Alan, Jeff, Linda, and Angela. The first date for a full day workshop was selected. A brief discussion about assessments used at that time occurred, and Tammy and Clare asked that we send them current DRA2 and NWEA data regarding the number of students at Spring benchmark. A considerable amount of time was spent discussing the creation of the Task Force. We were charged with having the team established, using a transparent process, and including a balance of staff members. Plans were made to shadow first grade students, in an effort to understand the school day 'from the eyes of the child'.
May 2010	Planning meeting with full task force.-Jeff organized a meeting with the newly formed assessment task force to aid in planning and preparing for the workshop on 6/17. We reviewed articles that Tammy and Clare had asked us to read prior to the June workshop. The articles included <i>Aligning Curriculum with Our Struggling Readers in Mind</i> , <i>From Data Drowning to Data Wise: Helping Teachers Make Sense of Assessments</i> , "Building Assessment Literacy" from <i>Data Wise</i> , and <i>Organizing for Collaborative Work: Pond Cove Elementary School Lays the Groundwork</i> , from <i>Data Wise in Action</i> .
June 17, 2010	First whole day workshop with Tammy and Clare and full task force. This was a highly energized and productive workshop. There was a discussion about what assessments are meant to do, and how they can be used. The assessment plan that was in place for Pond Cove was reviewed; samples of assessments were distributed and reviewed in small groups. Samples of phonics and phonemic awareness assessments that were not represented in the original assessment plan were given to Pond Cove for review during the summer. Pond Cove task force members also agreed to research additional assessments for review and be prepared to suggest to the task force assessments which could be piloted during the 2010-2011 school year. Additional next steps were: to research surveys for the "Disposition of a Reader" for grade 5, continue to document the assessment plan (which assessment is give and what time of year, which students shall be assessed, etc.), look at cohesion of instruction between Regular Ed students and those receiving Instructional Support, develop and refine a referral procedure for RTI, continue to use collaborative time to link assessments and instruction, and continue to use triangulated data (formal and informal) in our PLC's to understand the needs of students.

August 19, 2010	<p>Small group of task force members met to research and review phonemic awareness assessments for grades K-1, intervention grades 2-3; and phonics assessments for grades K-3, intervention grades 4 and 5. We also looked at a few disposition of the reader surveys for grade 5. The group established norms for reviewing the assessments. By the end of the work day, the small group had selected 3 phonemic awareness assessments and 3 phonics assessments to suggest to the full task force as potential assessments to be piloted during the 2010-2011 school year.</p>
August 30, 2010	<p>Tammy and Clare met with full faculty, K-5, during the morning. The goal was for all staff to meet them, witness their energy and hear our plan for the work we will undertake during the school year. Following the K-5 meeting, Tammy and Clare then met with the full task force.</p> <p>A review of 2 chapters from Allington's <u>What Really Matters in Response to Intervention</u> occurred, as well as a review of an exercise completed by Angela and Linda during May/June 2010. The exercise was a shadowing experience of grade 1 students, observing their day from the child's point of view. A discussion followed regarding cohesion of instruction during the day.</p> <p>The small group that met on 8/19 presented their review of assessments, and made recommendations to the large group. It was determined that the phonemic awareness pilots would begin as soon as reasonable, K-1. Teachers were to select 4 or 5 students to administer the assessments with, and be ready with that information to share by the next workshop on 10/18. Staff should have had time to discuss each assessment in their grade level PLC's so that the task force member representing each grade could speak on their behalf.</p>
September 2010	<p>Phone conference with Tammy and Clare, and with Alan, Jeff, Tom, and Linda. We discussed how the phonemic awareness assessment pilots were progressing, and had a conversation about types of assessments (screeners vs. CBM's, for example). An article from the 'rti4success' website was requested to be distributed and read by all task force members prior to the next workshop on 10/18. The article is titled, "Essential Components of RTP". The schedule for the next workshop was established.</p>

October 18, 2010	<p>Tammy and Clare began the day @ 7:45 by meeting with and observing a Student Support Team (SST) meeting at Pond Cove. At 8:45, the K-members of the task force met with Tammy and Clare to go over the results of piloting the phonemic awareness assessments and determine which would provide the best information. At 11:30, the full task force convened. An analysis of the K-5 common assessment plan, revised to that date, occurred. The phonics pilot for mid-year, K-5 was organized, with a request that 'assessment literacy' be addressed prior to the phonics pilot. The phonics pilot must be given during the same time frame, to 5 students per teacher. The objective is to look closely at the assessments, as with the phonemic awareness assessments, to determine which of them yields the most useful information, and therefore can be adopted into the overall assessment plan. Later during the afternoon, the task force continued to work on developing cohesion between Regular education and Instructional Support, and developed actions to be completed (other than the pilots, which have been addressed) prior to the next, and final, full day workshop with Tammy and Clare.</p> <p>All task force members are asked to shadow one student for one day, observing how the student accesses each area of the curriculum, while noticing cohesion of instruction (is the child able to access the curriculum?). A schedule of shadowing is being prepared. Task force members are also asked to schedule an observation of an SST meeting, and an IS team meeting.</p>
<u>Planned Future Meetings</u>	
December 16, 2010	faculty meeting at Pond Cove; the topic will be 'assessment literacy', in preparation for the January piloting period. Phonics assessment will be piloted K-5 during a 2 week window - from January 10 through January 21, 2011.
January-March 2011	anticipated phone conference(s) with Tammy and Clare
March 14, 2011	final full workshop day with Tammy and Clare

Managing Complex Change



Technical and Adaptive Challenges

KIND OF CHALLENGE	PROBLEM DEFINITION	SOLUTIONS & IMPLEMENTATION	PRIMARY FOCUS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORK
TECHNICAL	CLEAR	CLEAR	AUTHORITY
TECHNICAL & ADAPTIVE	CLEAR	REQUIRES LEARNING	AUTHORITY & STAKEHOLDER
ADAPTIVE	REQUIRES LEARNING	REQUIRES LEARNING	STAKEHOLDER>AUTHORITY

Budget Needs for 2011-2012.

Support Needed for...	Amount
Continued Work with Consultants	\$12,500 (4 days professional development--\$11,200--plus transportation and hotel expenses)
Assessment Costs	\$5,000 (this is a rough estimate for now)
Teacher time	\$8,000 (this is approximation--should be able to be covered by current professional development budget if that is sustained)