

Kensington Elementary Town Hall Meeting  
Monday, February 28th, 2022

**We have two huge focuses: literacy and SEL**

Literacy update: overall of programs used for literacy, phonic based instruction is what helps students learn the best. In the past, whole language was used (sight words). NC has made the shift to LETRS training which is a pedagogical strategy of how to teach phonics based instruction. All teachers are in graduate-level classes to learn more about this. We have been using Heggerty and FlyLeaf in lower grades (K-3) and Morpheme Magic in upper grades (4-5). We reviewed MCLASS data from BOY and MOY and we are seeing so much progress. Specifically in decoding words - learning how to read - students are making a lot of growth. Nonsense words - being able to read sounds such as KIB - students now have all the sounds to be able to read out these words will translate to reading longer words. 26 kindergartners were not at grade-level expectations at the beginning of year but now are on level. Small group intervention has often been based on decoding and with this improvement, we hope to see less of a need to fill this gap. Teachers got to meet with teams, admin, and coaches to discuss the ways they are teaching to better meet all kids' needs. We are looking forward to having vertical walkthroughs - see grade level below and above - to see great strategies that are happening so they know how to better prepare for the next year's group.

SEL: Morning meetings focused on soft skills. There is a focus on why the whole child needs to be taught. Employers are looking for problem solving, critical thinking, out of the box thinkers. This can look like kindergartners identifying their feelings. In upper grades, executive functioning such as using a planner. These are skills that are beyond reading and math. We want to make fun in school a priority. We want to plan activities that kids will remember. We can do a lot more when kids want to be in school.

COVID Update: masks are no longer required on buses. We are moving students back into the lunch room. We like to do things very systematically. Grade levels are inching back in, creating a safe space and a smooth transition. Right now, 3rd-5th is in cafeteria, others will be added in slowly. This will help the custodians. Recess is now mixed with other classes. This creates a different dynamic but it is fun to see all friends.

**Please read with your kids. Let them read any book, read with them, listen to them read.**

We are in the middle of Books and Brackets. Kids record time spent reading and we compete against all other UCPS schools. This is a way to promote them getting into books.

Questions:

There is a lack of curriculum (no textbooks)...will UCPS ever get textbooks like CMS?  
Standards and structure comes from UCPS instructional team from the district. The teachers can see the standards unpacked and how to best teach each standard, as well as resources for different standards. We have purchased resources for teachers to use alongside students. We don't want to overload teachers with math resources when our current, primary focus is literacy.

UCPS gives teachers autonomy but you will see more structured materials come through in layers. We do spend some funding on things teachers want, but those are local funds and not provided through UCPS.

Will you add homework back for 4th and 5th grade to better prepare them for middle school? With the exception of teaching responsibility/good habits, which we can teach within the classroom as well, there is no data that homework will increase scores/abilities. When we had these conversations in the Fall, we thought about how many hours outside of the work day we are already committed to. Kids have after-school sports and activities, eating dinner on the road, we want them to get a good night's sleep. We are not trying to create a system where they do work outside of work hours. They need to be kids. We are still on board with having a parent meeting with 5th grade parents to let students know what is coming in middle school.

Can parents have lunch with kids yet again? No, that won't return to KES for a few reasons - we are too big of a school and seating is at a premium, plus it's a safety issue. Parents did not have to go through background checks like volunteers. It also tied administrators to being in the cafeteria. We don't think parents have ill intent, but we just can't focus on this.

Follow up: Can approved volunteers eat lunch with kids? When parents come in to volunteer, they are helping. We just don't see it coming back as the time and effort are overwhelming. PTO has lunch monitoring options, while you can't sit and eat with your kid, you can help relieve teachers.

Will clubs and activities be back soon? We used to have enrichment clubs afterschool. It would be an outside organization that comes in and parents paid for it. PTO found that a lot of organizations didn't survive through COVID. We are worried about getting resources and connections with organizations that want to be back in schools. We might be able to get that in around Spring Break time. We still have Girls on the Run and Let Me Run which prep kids to run a 5K. We are still looking for parents volunteers for the boys' program.

Will after-school be back? Our guess is no based on space. We have to meet state guidelines which require a designated space. We don't have that. We would love to have it at KES, but space and the lack of staffing county-wide are prohibiting that. With increased staffing, it would not be impossible, just highly unlikely.

How is 5th grade performing with the new team teaching model? We have reading and math/sci/SS team-teaching classrooms this year. We used ISTATION last year and we use IREADY this year. EOG scores will be a good depiction, but even that is hard because EOGs are one point of data and don't show all. We think it's been a super success for kids and staff from our subjective feedback so far.

Will walkers be allowed? Yes, they are. We just ask that you genuinely walk because we now use Nesbit Park.

Could we have a 5th grade safety patrol? Our student council has already made some great changes so maybe this could be something in the future. We recently even had them help in asking questions with teacher candidates. We would love to leverage them in different ways around the building, as long as it doesn't get in the way with their learning and it's deemed safe.

Boosterthon playground - when will kids get the playground? We have to figure out vendors, PTO is tackling that. We have asked the town to consider clearing out the land where the town hall will be. We asked them to clear trees on our side for us to create green space. We do have some space at Nesbit but it takes too long to walk to. The town is open to the idea. We will have to get everything approved from the district. It may not be ready by Fall 2022.

What was the deciding factor in eliminating Mandarin? Staffing is really difficult. We are having a hard time finding teachers for general classroom jobs, it is even harder to find overseas teachers. We weren't getting the same quality of interviewees. We had to ask how we could sustain a high-quality program. It will continue in the Marvin cluster but since we are not a MR feeder school, it was hard for families to decide where their child would continue. New Town Elementary will now also have a Spanish Immersion program, and Cuthbertson will continue the program for both.

Will parents be able to participate in classroom celebrations? We only have two planned parties, winter and end of year celebrations. Room parents are still able to come in for both. When we allowed all parents, we saw issues in other ways. Our parking lots are already full, kids' behaviors may be challenging, and the safety issues of parents everywhere would still exist. We are trying to keep things as safe and reasonable as possible.

Do we know anything about the summer programs for UCPS? We will have a Read to Achieve camp in June. We don't know locations yet. This will be for 1st-3rd graders who are identified as struggling. UCPS also has a Summer Bridge program in July (last three weeks to kick kids back into school mode). They will focus on rising 3rd, rising 6th, and rising 9th. We don't have guidance on what "at-risk students" look like yet. Cabinet members are talking about it. It may be coming to the Board soon.

Car line: Afternoon pick up has some families waiting over an hour. Some cars come at 11:00am. We are looking really good at 2:30pm. Come later and there's no wait. In the morning, around 6:50-55 is the best time to come and not have to wait. We open our doors around 6:58am. Most kids get in by 7:35am.

Will 5th grade parents get information about middle school soon? We don't know, but on April 26th, 5th graders will visit Cuthbertson. We don't have a date yet for Marvin Ridge for Mandarin families.

Field trip for 5th grade: April 29th, 2022. We will focus on room parents first, then open it up to others.

June 2nd is the promotion ceremony at Cuthbertson in the evening.

Father Daughter Dance is now April 1st, 2022. This got shifted because of 5th grade trip.

KES Dads: Waxhaw Dads Cornhole on April 21st at Waxhaw Taphouse.

Final thoughts: Seek to understand teachers. Sometimes we get questions and it may have already been handled. Ask questions first to find out more.

Fences are back around the playground. We stopped at the woods so we can extend fences in the future (for new playground hopefully).

Don't forget to buy your KES yearbook at [Jostens.com](https://www.jostens.com).