



Lincoln Public Schools

Mary L. Sterling, Ph.D.
Assistant Superintendent of Schools

To: School Committee
From: Mary Sterling
Re: Report on the Research Process, Grades 3-8
Date: February 6, 2014

One of the priorities in the Curriculum and Instruction strand of our Strategic Plan is:

“Continue refining curriculum to align with new Massachusetts curriculum frameworks in ELA, math and science.”

Several aspects of aligning the ELA curriculum have been the focus of collaborative work. The most far-reaching activity this year -- outlined in our strategic map for this priority -- has been to develop a description of consistent practices in "the research process" for our teachers and students to use from grades 3 to 8. The Instructional Technology and Library /Media specialists have collaborated with curriculum leaders in ELA, science, and social studies to describe practices in student research and the use of digital resources that span several grades and multiple disciplines.

Lincoln Learning Expectations in several subjects describe different components of the research process. English Language Arts Expectations -- recently revised to align with state standards -- spell out Key Outcomes in informational reading and writing. In social studies at grades 6-8, the standards-based report card descriptors list "Skills" such as "Uses print, visual, and/or digital resources to gather, evaluate and understand information from primary and secondary sources." Science inquiry practices are part of Learning Expectations and listed on the report card at every grade. Finally, three out of four strands in the Learning Expectations for Library /Media address the research process. Given all these different sources that describe understanding and skills that students must learn, it is important to bring the pieces together in a coherent process that is clear to teachers and valuable to students.

The teachers, specialists, and curriculum leaders have agreed on a research process involving six steps:

1. Identify information need
2. Seek information
3. Locate information
4. Use and interpret information
5. Synthesize and communicate information
6. Evaluate research and process

In the younger grades, each step is done on a small, developmentally appropriate scale in order to guide student thinking and develop research skills. By the time students reach grade 8, they develop more complex understanding and greater skill for each step in the process. Students at every grade must develop the ability to identify the information they need and then search for that information in strategic ways. Once the search is underway, students learn to figure out how to evaluate the worth of a source and its relevance to their research topic. The acquisition of knowledge and skill in this research process can also be understood

as the development of “information literacy,” which is critical to our 21st-century learners given the remarkable expansion of resources and information that students can now access.

The recent Institute Day professional learning on guiding students to ask their own questions has added to the discussion about the investigative aspect of the research process and the authentic learning inherent in having students conduct research on questions that are important to them. On February 13, 2014, Judy Merra and Mary Sterling will make a presentation to School Committee to discuss the key points in this report, respond to questions, and discuss next steps in our work on this interdisciplinary, multi-grade research process.