

# **Willow Creek Elementary School**

School Accountability Committee

Minutes for September 27, 2021

Meeting Held in Person and via Zoom

6:30 P.M.

Attendance: Mary Whitney (principal), Anne and Patrick Bonelli (parents), Emily Lewis (parent), Dana Sandberg (parent and chair), Alice Ireland (parent), Carolyn and Brian Pyron (parents), Fiona Maguire O'Shea (parent), Mike Murray (parent, former co-chair), Sandy Hueser (office manager), Travis Brown (parent), Catherine Krantz (Kindergarten teacher), Toby Arritola (Executive Director Elementary Education), Chris Domino (tech)

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

Dana introduced herself and thanked people for joining us. She reviewed the agenda for the meeting. Mary then introduced herself as the new principal and talked about why we were all there. She reviewed the school's Mission and Vision, particularly our dedication to social, emotional, and physical safety. Mary asked everyone to give Dana and her input about what they would like to discuss at the December 6th meeting.

Dana asked if anyone would be interested in running for co-chair. The job isn't a heavy lift — this year, the co-chair would partner with Dana to help create the agenda for the meetings and would run meetings if Dana were not available; the next year the co-chair would run the meetings and partner with a new co-chair. If anyone is interested, please contact Dana or Mary.

In response to a parent question about the meeting schedule this year, Mary replied that the law requires that the committee meet quarterly. Prior to last year (covid time), we were meeting six or seven times a year, and we can resume that schedule if the committee is interested.

Chris announced that we were recording this meeting, but not for publication. The recording will be available upon request for those who were not able to attend the live meeting.

## 2. Staffing Updates and Enrollment

Enrollment is an important issue for us since our total enrollment number is how our budget and staffing are determined. It's important to us to maintain the number of teachers we have now. This chart shows our numbers at the end of last year and the count right now.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>2021 EOY (20-21)</b>	<b>2021 BOY (21-22)</b>
Kinder	57	73
1st	68	77
2nd	88	81
3rd	69	94
4th	84	73
5th	82	87
Totals	448	485

Last spring, the district projected that we would have 523 students this fall, but as of two days ago, we only had 485. However, that's better enrollment than last year (448) when we had many students go to the online school. Since we get funding on a per-pupil basis, having fewer students does impact us. We will have to give some money back after October count.

*Parent question:* Why are we under projection? Is it an aging community problem?

*Mary's response:* She does ask Beth whenever we lose students. Some of our families moved for job reasons. Mary will dig into the issue further.

*Parent question:* How does the October count work at Camp Cheley? Will those students count?

*Mary's response:* We will be taking attendance at Camp Cheney. Our fifth graders will be counted.

While Mary was responding, Toby checked the district database and was able to report that we had 17 kids who were scheduled to be in person at Willow Creek who actually attended the online school instead because of the pandemic. Chris added that we also lost some kids to private schools because of the mask mandate. Toby also found that our current student enrollment is now 487.

### 3. PTO Report

We did not have a PTO representative present; Mary reported for PTO. The major action at the recent PTO meeting was the vote on teacher grants. PTO was able to fund almost all teacher grants in full. These grants are requested by teachers to pay for items that will benefit students in the classroom. For example, Catherine reported that Kindergarten was given funds to purchase additional reading books at a variety of reading levels for their classrooms.

4. DAC Report

Fiona gave the report on the September meeting. The meeting opened with the new superintendent, Chris Smith, talking about his journey and how he succeeded because of a teacher who made a difference for him. He believes that teachers can transform children’s lives; we must really love our kids. The priority for the district is to hire teachers of color because kids need to see themselves in their teachers.

This year, DAC meetings will alternate community forums with subcommittee meetings. The new leadership of the DAC talked about the three subcommittees needed this year:

- UIP (Unified Improvement Plan)
- Family and Parent/Community Engagement
- Budget

Leadership reminded attendees that the November elections included two races for the CCSD Board of Education. They encouraged everyone to check out the candidates’ bios and résumés on the CCSD website and attend candidate forums. Mary pointed out that she has listed the candidate forums in the Sunday Blast. Grandview hosts on Tuesday and Smoky Hill on Thursday.

5. CMAS Results

Mary reviewed the results from last spring’s CMAS tests. Colorado only gave one test per grade level in 2021.

**Grade 3 — English Language Arts/Literacy**

School Performance Level Summary		Colorado Measures of Academic Success										Spring 2021					
		School: WILLOW CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (9624) District: CHERRY CREEK 5 (0130)															
English Language Arts / Literacy														CONFIDENTIAL - DO NOT DISTRIBUTE		Grade 3	
Purpose: This report describes group achievement in terms of mean scale scores and performance levels.		Number of Valid Scores	Overall Mean Scale Score	Performance Levels								Met and Exceeded		Participation Rate	Total Number of Students		
Did Not Yet Meet Expectations				Partially Met Expectations		Approached Expectations		Met Expectations		Exceeded Expectations							
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%				
State	45,191	736	9,736	21.5%	8,114	18.0%	9,658	21.4%	15,770	34.9%	1,913	4.2%	17,683	39.1%	76.2%	59,306	
District	2,224	747	305	13.7%	301	13.5%	491	22.1%	1,002	45.1%	125	5.6%	1,127	50.7%	60.5%	3,674	
School	64	747	5	7.8%	11	17.2%	20	31.3%	23	35.9%	5	7.8%	28	43.8%	77.1%	83	

In reading this chart, note that the first line of data reports the results for all the third graders in the state, the second line is results for our district’s third graders, and the third line is just for Willow Creek third graders.

Our school had relatively good participation, but the results were not as good as we would wish; only 43.8 percent of our students met or exceeded expectations. We will be looking carefully at the 31.3 percent who approached expectations.

## Grade 4 — Mathematics

	<b>Colorado Measures of Academic Success</b>		<b>Spring 2021</b>	
	School: WILLOW CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (9624) District: CHERRY CREEK 5 (0130)			

**Mathematics** **Grade 4**  
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	Number of Valid Scores	Overall Mean Scale Score	Performance Levels										Met and Exceeded		Participation Rate	Total Number of Students
			Did Not Yet Meet Expectations		Partially Met Expectations		Approached Expectations		Met Expectations		Exceeded Expectations					
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
State	46,783	729	9,398	20.1%	11,668	24.9%	12,375	26.5%	12,278	26.2%	1,064	2.3%	13,342	28.5%	75.8%	61,732
District	2,353	738	299	12.7%	467	19.8%	718	30.5%	776	33.0%	93	4.0%	869	36.9%	62.4%	3,773
School	74	749	4	5.4%	11	14.9%	21	28.4%	34	45.9%	4	5.4%	38	51.4%	82.2%	90

We really are celebrating the results for our fourth graders, since we are hearing that nationally, math learning seems to have suffered heavily in the pandemic. Willow Creek’s performance certainly exceeded that of the state.

## Grade 5 — English Language Arts/Literacy

	<b>Colorado Measures of Academic Success</b>		<b>Spring 2021</b>	
	School: WILLOW CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (9624) District: CHERRY CREEK 5 (0130)			

**English Language Arts / Literacy** **Grade 5**  
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	Number of Valid Scores	Overall Mean Scale Score	Performance Levels										Met and Exceeded		Participation Rate	Total Number of Students
			Did Not Yet Meet Expectations		Partially Met Expectations		Approached Expectations		Met Expectations		Exceeded Expectations					
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
State	46,917	746	3,595	7.7%	9,015	19.2%	12,170	25.9%	19,966	42.6%	2,171	4.6%	22,137	47.2%	74.4%	63,060
District	2,175	752	133	6.1%	327	15.0%	530	24.4%	1,060	48.7%	125	5.7%	1,185	54.5%	56.2%	3,871
School	75	772	3	4.0%	1	1.3%	11	14.7%	50	66.7%	10	13.3%	60	80.0%	83.3%	90

The results for our fifth graders are really exciting — 80% met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts with a good participation rate.

Overall, we clearly have some celebrations, but also some work to do. One problem is that it is hard to draw conclusions from the data when the participation rate is low. We also have no data from Spring 2019, since CMAS was not given because all the students were learning from home. Thus, we can’t make year-to-year comparisons.

*Parent:* Is lack of participation a big factor?

*Mary:* Yes, because it affects data. Some of our strongest students did not take the test.

Since our CMAS data is limited, what we are doing this year is implementing a new set of school assessments, FastBridge, for all students in grades K–5 in both reading and math. We also put stock in our ongoing current assessments, including IRLA and the assessments in Bridges Math.

*Parent:* What is the plan for the loss of learning time? I heard that middle school teachers were told last year to only teach around 80% of the content that they would normally teach because of the hybrid schedule.

*Mary:* We will look at a body of evidence and all of our assessments to find any missing content or gaps. This includes more of the evidence within specific areas with IRLA for reading and Bridges for math. We will re-teach where it is needed. One of the strategies we have implemented to help with this problem is WINN Time (What I Need Now), which gives teachers extra time every day to address what needs to be addressed for those particular students at that point in time.

Our teachers are using their grade-level PLC (Professional Learning Communities) time to look at the data and choose their grade-level goal for the year — it will be a goal in the area that will make the most impact on student achievement. The early release time every Wednesday is so that teachers can do more analysis and planning.

*Parent question about Grade 3:* What are we doing about the almost 60% of kids who didn't meet expectations?

*Mary:* Grade-level teachers are looking for trends and patterns in the data to determine where the holes are.

Parent-teacher conferences are a great time for your child's teacher to explain if your student has learning gaps and for you to partner with your child's teacher to address them.

*Parent comment:* Early release on Wednesday afternoon is challenging — can you make it on Friday?

*Mary:* I know it's hard. (We all had a chuckle.)

## 6. New Social Studies Curriculum: Inquiry Journeys

### a. Introduction

Mary started by saying that she knows that rumors are circulating about Critical Race Theory in our schools, but we don't teach it. CRT is really a college-level law class. We don't teach it in the district, and particularly not here at elementary level.

The great thing about social studies and science is that they get kids interested in things from a global perspective and civics standpoint. The district has adopted Inquiry Journeys as the major new resource for social studies. It is not a curriculum. Instruction in social studies is based on the Colorado Academic Standards. Teachers use the parts of this website that support the standards for their grade level.

Mary showed a video from the Inquiry Journeys website that gives an overview of how this resource works. Each unit starts with a question which helps hook students' interest, then builds student knowledge in the subject, and ends with a collaborative

project. To get to this video, click the “Preview Inquiry Journeys” link on this webpage:

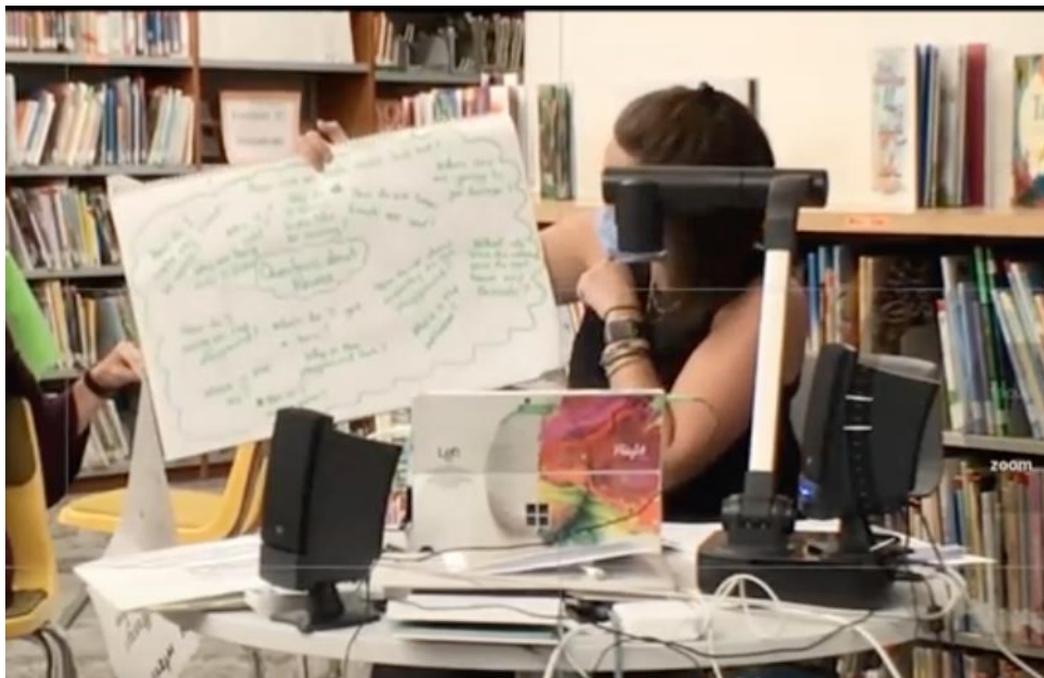
[www.inquired.org/inquiry-based-social-studies](http://www.inquired.org/inquiry-based-social-studies)

Mary then called on Catherine, one of our Kindergarten teachers, to give us an example of a recent social studies unit that she had taught.

b. Kindergarten Example

Catherine started by saying she’s enjoyed digging into Inquiry Journeys, although she still has a long way to go to be more familiar with it. So far, it’s been a fun way to engage the kids in some social studies concepts. One of the Colorado Academic Standards for Kindergarten is that students understand that rules are needed to get along in any kind of environment. The Inquiry Journey related to this unit is helping them investigate why this is true.

Catherine worked with our instructional coach Zelda Alao to teach this unit. The inquiry question for the unit was “How can we make school a great place for everyone?” We brainstormed what students like best about school. Since recess is the favorite of many students, we honed in on how to make recess everyone’s favorite. We used a question formulation technique from Inquiry Journeys, helping students develop higher-level skills in how to ask a question; it was a very powerful process. (Below is the chart of the brainstorming session Catherine showed in the meeting.)



The next day we started to create norms to understand that we have rules in place to make things work well for everyone. We went outside to discuss what it would look like to show empathy for someone on the playground. We used POWER words and ROAR words — ideas that are already school norms at Willow Creek — to discuss this. The students then came up with some ideas about what that would look like:

- Invite someone to play
- Include everyone
- Take turns
- Find a friend on the buddy bench

Then we went back inside and talked about responsibility and rules for our classroom. Our culminating project will be for each Kindergarten classroom to take one of our new “ROAR” words and illustrate it with a short video to teach other people about our school norms.

This has been a powerful way to engage students in social studies and to make sure the instruction is responsive to what they are interested in.

c. Summary and Questions

Mary spoke more about how this resource uses project-based learning, pointing out that what companies want our kids to know and be able to do is collaborate and work in small groups, research, and solve problems. It’s not like it was when we went to school, which was just memorizing facts.

Our job is to make everyone feel safe and welcome and included. Part of that process is working together to solve problems. This program also allows students some choice in displaying what they have learned. It reinforces using rigor and engagement in planning curriculum.

*Parent:* How do we as parents learn about what topics you are going to teach in social studies so that we can discuss this at home? What examples are you using to teach these topics?

*Catherine:* Our classroom newsletters have the topics we are working on currently; you can certainly reach out and ask for more info if you need more depth. We do thoughtful planning as we get ready to teach the next unit, so we can’t give you details for the entire year at this point. I will say that we try to keep things local and relevant to our students’ lives, so our examples would come from that. The examples we use are those that relate to what they know in their own lives.

*Parent:* Is Inquiry Journeys a curriculum or a unit?

*Mary:* Inquiry Journeys is the main resource for teaching the Colorado Academic Standards at each grade level. You can look at the standards on the Colorado Department of Education website to get more detail about what needs to be taught.

Teachers are welcome to bring in other resources as they plan their units of instruction. To answer the earlier question, would it be helpful to put the inquiry question for each unit in the newsletter?

*Parent question:* Is there something on the website that we can look at it?

*Answer:* One of the parents pointed out that the website has a scope and sequence that can be downloaded. Since that link requires the parent to enter a work email, not a personal one, Chris offered to post the scope and sequence on the Willow Creek Elementary website.

*Parent:* If we were in a state that did not allow the teaching of CRT, would we be using this curriculum?

*Mary:* I think we would be using it, since this curriculum is not CRT. Inquiry Journeys helps us prepare students for jobs that don't exist yet — industry needs graduates that can problem solve and collaborate, not just memorize. This resource is structured around project-based learning.

*Catherine:* What our district wants is engaging, rigorous, and responsive instruction.

*Parent:* Is critical race theory embedded in this curriculum?

*Mary:* I spent about three hours reviewing it and could not find anything that related to critical race theory. It's all about real-world applications; it shares multiple perspectives. The kids work together to make meaning. We in CCSD hold inclusivity near and dear.

We are just starting this program this year, so give teachers a little grace as they become familiar with it.

*Parent:* Why did you change what you were doing last year? It was adopted only a few years ago, so why was it changed? Is the change due to the bill that passed that mandated schools look at their social studies program?

*Mary:* I'm not sure how old it was, but it was a very old curriculum. It's not unusual for us to change a curriculum to meet changing needs or better instructional techniques. We do tend to hold onto curriculum for a number of years since the materials are expensive.

*Parent:* So we've changed the program because the old one was not meeting our goals; what are our goals and what do we intend to accomplish?

*Mary:* I was not part of the committee that made the decision to adopt this new resource, so I don't know the details. I would be glad to look more deeply into this subject, but Inquiry Journeys does offer much of what we want our kids to know and be able to do.

*Parent:* How do we measure the end goal?

*Mary:* How are they doing on the final project? We use rubrics to assess projects, and we also look at final assessments.

Mary asked if we as a committee want to continue this topic on December 6th since at that point we would be able to show you some of our students' work and assessments. Attendees agreed and the topic was added to the agenda.

*Parent question:* What will kids be measured on when they do projects? Students should know at the beginning of a project how they will be assessed.

*Answer:* There is a parent letter at the beginning of each unit that lays all that information.

*Parent:* The concept of inclusiveness is one we live by, but what kind of examples are you using? Are we using examples that exclude some children in the class? What kind of guidance are we getting from the district on the kinds of examples we should use?

*Mary:* We trust our teachers' judgment. Many of the examples teachers use arise naturally (such as a student encouraging optimism by saying "You can do it, Mrs. Krantz!"). We don't have a list of examples, but you can look at the resources on the website. The unit parent letters are very informative. Mary will make sure they get sent out.

## 7. Safety

Mary added this topic to the agenda because other than questions about masks, the most questions she received from parents were about the lockdown drill. "Lockdown" drills are relatively new to our kids and caused concern among parents. Mary found that once the parents heard the script for the drill, they were much less concerned.

Our school did very well on the recent drill. To further explain how a drill is run, Mary read the district script for elementary schools to all of us.

*Parent:* She wishes that Mary's letter home gave parents advice about exactly what to say to kids before the drill. She wasn't clear about how to prepare her child.

*Mary:* I will check with district and our social worker about adding some language to the letter. We will think about adjusting for grade level since what one says to a fifth grader would be different from what one says to a Kindergartner. Perhaps I could add the script to the parent letter.

Another parent commented that she didn't know whether it was appropriate to talk to her child about the drill and how it went.

*Parent:* How dark is it in the inside classrooms that don't have windows?

*Mary:* It's not very dark; they have skylights.

*Parent comment:* Thanks for the weekly newsletter and thank you for advertising PIN.

8. Closing

Dana stated that the agenda for the meeting on December 6, 2021, would include more on assessments and the content of social studies.

If you have any topics you would like to add, please send them ahead of time to Dana and Mary. If we need to have another meeting before December, we can arrange that. The call for agenda items is in the Sunday Blast.