



# NEEDHAM HIGH SCHOOL

TO THINK – TO RESPECT – TO COMMUNICATE

*Joseph P. Barnes, Ed.D.*  
*Principal*

May 11, 2016

George H. Edwards, Director  
Commission on Public Schools  
New England Association of Schools and Colleges  
3 Burlington Woods Drive  
Suite 100  
Burlington, MA 01803

Dear Mr. Edwards:

Attached please find the Special Progress Report for Needham High School as requested by the Committee on Public Secondary Schools in response to our Five-Year Progress Report, which we submitted in March of 2015. You will find that the Follow-Up Committee has made progress in meeting some of CPSS' highlighted recommendations.

Thank you for your continued support and recommendations. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Joseph Barnes, Ed.D.  
Principal

Aaron Sicotte  
Assistant Principal,  
Follow-Up Committee Co-Chair

**Special Progress Report  
Needham High School  
May 2016**

Highlighted Recommendations from the Notification Letter:

- **Provide an update of the work of the “NEASC Follow-Up Committee” in developing a new core values statement pursuant to the expectations delineated in the 2011 standards.**

*Status: In Progress*

Needham High School’s “NEASC Follow-Up Committee” was formed in the fall of 2014 to address the remaining recommendations from the Committee on Public Secondary Schools. The committee is chaired by a teacher and an assistant principal, and is comprised one teacher from from each department and one student. The committee plans to add a parent to its membership during school year ‘16 - ‘17. The committee meets monthly, though its chairs meet more frequently. The focus of the committee’s work for the past two years has been developing new core values and learning expectations for the school. Last year the committee began its work with many robust discussions about the skills we expect all Needham High School students to learn and demonstrate during their time at our school. The committee members noted many similarities across the various disciplines and grouped like expectations to get a broader view of the expectations we have for students across the school. The conversations were thoughtful and passionate and helped the committee begin a draft of core values. In the early spring of ‘15, the committee presented a draft of the new core values to another faculty committee, the Faculty Council, and the statements were met with mixed reviews.

Then, in the late spring of 2015, the principal of Needham High School resigned, and at the same time, the assistant principal and the NEASC Follow-Up Committee co-chair accepted a principal position in another district. Due to the transitions in school leadership, the committee decided to postpone the presentation of the new core values to the faculty until the next school year once we had a better sense of the new school leadership team. During the summer of ‘15 an assistant principal filled the role as the second co-chair and worked with the existing co-chair to get up to speed on the committee’s work; together the co-chairs decided to resume the committee’s work on the revision of the core values, and in September ‘16 the follow-up committee—in an effort to make the process more inclusive and the statements a more accurate and genuine reflection of who we are as a school—decided to seek additional input in order to further refine the new core values before presenting them to the full faculty.

To that end, the committee developed a survey that was sent to all school faculty, all parents and a representative body of students to gather feedback on the school's old core values and to solicit ideas and opinions about the current values of Needham High School. The committee analyzed the survey results and created three wordles—faculty, parent, and student—to identify the values and beliefs that stakeholders used to describe the school. The survey responses were invaluable in helping the committee to develop a set of core values that it feels accurately and strongly embody the Needham High School community. At the March committee meeting, members voted to present the new core values to the full faculty at the May faculty meeting.

During the May faculty meeting, the committee presented its new core values statement, “A caring community striving for personal growth and academic excellence” to the staff, explained the process involved in creating the statement, and asked the staff to vote on the adoption of the statement. Overall, the staff responded very favorably to the committee's proposed core values statement. 82.1% of the 123 respondents voted to adopt the new values statement, with 95% of the respondents feeling “very” or “fairly” supportive of the new statement. The committee co-chairs will work with the school's principal to bring the values to the Central Office, the School Committee and the broader community for final approval. The committee hopes that the values will be formally ratified by the beginning of next school year.

- **Develop school-wide analytic rubrics to be used during assessing the student achievement of the school's already defined academic, social, and civic learning expectations.**

*Status: No Action*

The NEASC follow-up committee has engaged in dynamic conversation about the creation and implementation of school-wide rubrics. The leadership at Needham has been staying apprised of the standards review and revision process taking place within NEASC and has decided to wait until NEASC delivers more clarity around its expectations regarding school-wide rubrics before the committee and the school develops and implements a system for the use of school-wide rubrics.

However, there are rubrics being used consistently and with fidelity at department levels. For example, the English department developed and uses a common analytic rubric to deliver feedback and to measure student progress in writing and critical analysis. Similarly, the History Department uses rubrics to assess content knowledge, research skills and presentation skills; the World Language Department uses a set of common rubrics to assess writing, speaking and class participation; the Science Department uses a common rubric to assess lab reports; and the Visual

Arts Department uses a common rubric to assess student work; and the Wellness Department uses common participation and journal writing rubrics.

- **Establish and implement a process to use school-wide analytic rubrics to assess student achievement of the school's learning expectations.**
- **Establish and implement a process to communicate individual student progress in achieving the school's learning expectations to students and families.**

*Status: In Progress*

The school has defined learning expectations; however, the NEASC Follow-Up Committee is considering the development of new learning expectations that better align with the school's new core values. The committee has begun the preliminary work around refining our current expectations by looking at a list of current and new expectations and ranking them according to importance and relevance. In order to ensure the alignment of the learning expectations with the new core values, the committee is awaiting formal ratification of the new core values before it undertakes any additional development of the expectations.

With regard to reporting, Needham High School uses PowerSchool to communicate about individual student progress. Parents and students have access to PowerSchool, and it is an expectation that faculty update PowerSchool with student grades every two weeks at a minimum. Additionally, it is also an expectation that teachers contact home for any students whose grade falls below a C- or whose performance has dropped.