New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Report of the Visiting Committee for Needham High School

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STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS

The Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges located in Bedford, Massachusetts considers this visiting committee report of Needham High School to be a privileged document submitted by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to the principal of the school and by the principal to the state department of education. Distribution of the report within the school community is the responsibility of the school principal. The final visiting committee report must be released in its entirety within sixty (60) days of its completion to the superintendent, school board, public library or town office, and the appropriate news media.

The prime concern of the visiting committee has been to assess the quality of the educational program at Needham High School in terms of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting team.

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INTRODUCTION

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) is the oldest of the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States. Since its inception in 1885, the Association has awarded membership and accreditation to those educational institutions in the six-state New England region who seek voluntary affiliation.

The governing body of the Association is its Board of Trustees which supervises the work of six Commissions: the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), the Commission on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS), the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI), the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools (CPEMS), and the Commission on American and International Schools Abroad (CAISA).

As the responsible agency for matters of the evaluation and accreditation of public secondary school member institutions, CPSS requires visiting committees to assess the degree to which the evaluated schools meet the qualitative Standards for Accreditation of the Commission. Those Standards are:

> Teaching and Learning Standards
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>> Mission and Expectations for Student Learning
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>> Curriculum
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>> Instruction
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>> Assessment of Student Learning
>
> Support of Teaching and Learning Standards
>
>> Leadership and Organization
>>
>> School Resources for Learning
>>
>> Community Resources for Learning.

The accreditation program for public schools involves a threefold process: the self-study conducted by the local professional staff, the on-site evaluation conducted by the Commission's visiting committee, and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own self-study and the valid recommendations of the visiting committee and those identified by the Commission in the Follow-Up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school be reevaluated at least once every ten years and that it show continued progress addressing identified needs.

Preparation for the Evaluation Visit – The School Self-Study

A steering committee of the professional staff was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Needham High School, a committee of seven members supervised all aspects of the self-study. The steering committee assigned all teachers and administrators in the school to appropriate subcommittees to determine the quality of all programs, activities, and facilities available for young people. In addition to faculty members, the self-study committee also included a community representative. The self-study of Needham High School extended over a period of 18 school months from January 2008 to June 2009.

Public schools evaluated by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's mission, learning expectations, and unique student population. In addition to using the Self-Study Guides developed by a representative group of New England educators and approved by the Commission, Needham High School also used questionnaires developed by The Global Institute at Endicott College to reflect the concepts contained in the Standards for Accreditation. These materials provided discussion items for a comprehensive assessment of the school by the professional staff during the self-study.

It is important that the reader understand that every subcommittee appointed by the steering committee was required to present its report to the entire professional staff for approval. No single report developed in the self-study became part of the official self-study documents until it had been approved by the entire professional staff.

The Process Used by the Visiting Committee

A visiting committee of seventeen evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Needham High School. The Committee members spent four days in Needham, reviewed the self-study documents which had been prepared for their examination, met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents, shadowed students, visited classes, and interviewed teachers to determine the degree to which the school meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented public schools, teachers, building administrators, and central office administrators, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Needham High School.

The visiting team built its professional judgment on evidence collected from the following sources:

- review of the school's self-study materials

- 48 hours of shadowing students

- a total of twelve hours of classroom observation (in addition to time shadowing students)

- numerous informal observations in and around the school

- tours of the facility

- individual meetings with 32 teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning

- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers

- the examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

Each conclusion on the report was agreed to by team consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting committee appear in parenthesis in the Standards sections of the report. The seven Standards for Accreditation reports include commendations and recommendations that in the team's judgment will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and to better meet Commission Standards.

This report of the findings of the visiting committee will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Secondary Schools which will make a decision on the accreditation of Needham High School.

Overview of Findings

Although the conclusions of the visiting committee on the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation appear in various sections of this report, the committee wishes to highlight some findings in the paragraphs that follow. These findings are not intended to be a summary of the report.

Teaching and Learning at Needham High School

The mission and expectations for student learning was developed by a committee of six members. The mission and expectations document had gone through drafts and revisions that included a student task force, student focus groups, and both faculty and school board member involvement. It reflects the fundamental values and beliefs of the community. School rubrics with an expected level of achievement were developed for each of the academic expectations for student learning. However, no further work was done on the rubrics to tie them to education of Needham students.

The curriculum offered to students is both rigorous and challenging. While the curriculum can be found on-line, there are large portions that have not yet been completed. Now, as the curriculum is being moved to a more sophisticated and demanding program, much more time needs to be devoted to developing and revising the curriculum. This will also aid in the development of assessment tools for all teachers to use.

Teachers use a wide variety of instructional strategies in their classes. Most teachers require students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills. With class sizes that are generally reasonable, teachers are able to personalize instruction and accommodate those students who have varying needs. Teachers have great expertise both in their subject matter and in teaching methodologies. While teachers often make attempts to encourage learning across disciplines, there are very few formal opportunities for interdisciplinary instruction.

Teachers use a variety of assessment tools in their classes and rubrics for grading are very common. However, there is little formal connection between the school-wide expectations for learning and the curriculum being taught. In addition, with no requirements for students to meet school-wide expectations, there is no individual or school-wide assessment using the school-wide rubrics.

Support of Teaching and Learning at Needham High School

With a new high school principal, the leadership team is working hard to articulate a clear vision and direction for students and staff. The school is organized in a way to maximize learning and to allow opportunities for special programs. The mentor homeroom period is a notable vehicle to allow meaningful connections with adults who support student academic, social, and emotional well-being. The leadership team is making great strides in ensuring continual success for students.

The student support service staff, including the guidance, library/media, nursing, and special education departments, have all accomplished much for students. The guidance department has worked hard both to prepare students for success in high school and beyond while working with students to handle personal needs. The library/media program provides students with excellent research skills and provides valuable services to both students and staff members. The nursing staff works cooperatively with guidance counselors to help meet both the physical health and the emotional needs of students. The special education department has numerous programs to ensure that all students can and will be successful.

With a newly renovated facility and many successful funding overrides over the years, the Needham community has contributed to its school system in a tremendous way. The many community organizations and businesses that are involved in the school further enhance education for students.

THE COMMUNITY

The Town of Needham, incorporated in 1711, is a residential suburb located ten miles southwest of Boston within a loop of the Charles River. It is located in Norfolk County and has a total area of 12.70 square miles. Needham has a strong sense of community and provides a full range of services to its citizens including highly regarded schools, outdoor parks and playing fields, a vibrant youth commission, an active senior center, and a housing authority that owns and manages 435 units of affordable housing. Tax overrides have been passed over the last several years to allow for construction projects including now-completed renovations of the high school and the public library. Transportation authorities service the community with four Needham commuter rail stations going into Boston six days a week and bus route service between Needham and Watertown. Needham Center and Needham Heights are the two commercial areas in the town, each with banks, restaurants, and various retail shops. The town also has a hospital, assisted living facilities, rehabilitation facilities, a hotel, two colleges (Babson and Olin), and two industrial areas with large and small companies. Needham has 16 houses of worship representing a variety of faiths. Private schools include Walker Home and School (elementary special education), Monsignor Haddad Middle, St. Joseph Elementary, and St. Sebastian Country Day. Needham is also home to the Charles River Association of Retarded Citizens, a nonprofit social agency serving people with developmental disabilities.

According to the 2000 US Census, Needham's population of 28,911 is predominantly white with other ethnicities (African-American, Asian, Hispanic) comprising approximately 6% of the population. The US Census also shows that 26.2% of the population is 18 and under and 18% is over age 65. The majority of the citizens designates English as their first language, with 10.9% speaking a language other than English at home. Family income is derived mainly from business, professional, and semiprofessional occupations. Over 64% of the population 25 years and over hold bachelors or advanced degrees. The median income of all households in Needham is $88,079, while the median income of single family households[*] in Needham is $107,570. The percentage of families in Needham that have incomes below the poverty level is 1.6%. The state's Office of Labor and Workforce Development shows a current unemployment rate of 2.8%, while the state rate is 4.8%.

Needham has five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. It has a reputation for academic excellence and offers a range of co-curricular and out-of-school opportunities, including after-school and summer services. 85% of the town's school-age population attends Needham Public Schools. Needham is a long-standing member of

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*According to the U.S. census, family consists of two or more people (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption residing in the same housing unit. A household consists of all people who occupy a housing unit regardless of relationship. A household may consist of a person living alone or multiple unrelated individuals or families living together.

Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities (METCO), a voluntary desegregation program that provides educational opportunities in suburban communities for Boston children. Needham is a participant in The Education Cooperative (TEC), a collaboration of fourteen school districts that enables all of the communities to benefit from resources and courses offered outside of the school system. Needham is also a member of Minuteman Regional High School, a regional vocational-technical high school serving sixteen Massachusetts communities, and the Norfolk County Agricultural Cooperative. According to the town's Public Schools Profile, in 2006-2007, 4,979 students attended Needham Public Schools. Needham allocated 41% of local property taxes to its schools. The 2006-2007 per pupil spending was $12, 066 and the state average was $11,789.

THE SCHOOL AND THE STUDENTS

Needham High School is made up of 1,376 students in grades 9 to 12 including 694 males and 682 females. The enrollment has remained relatively stable over the last several years. In the 2007/2008 school year, the students were identified in the following manner: 88.6% Caucasian, 4.2% Asian American, 2.6% African American, 1.5% Hispanic Americans, and 3.1% multiracial.   For the past two years the average daily student attendance rate has been 95.5% and the dropout rate has been less than 1%. The number of in-school suspensions was five and the number of out-of-school suspensions was 31 during 2006-2007. There were 27 males and sixteen females with failing grades during 2006-2007.

There are 120 teachers at Needham High School, generating a teacher student ratio of approximately one to twelve. The average class size is 22; 82% of the high school teachers hold advanced degrees; 2.5% (3 teachers) are teaching out of their area of certification; 59 of the 120 teachers have either a Preliminary or Initial license issued by the Massachusetts Department of Education. According to the 2007-08 No Child Left Behind report card for Needham High School, teachers who are Highly Qualified teach 97.2% of core academic classes. For the past two years the average daily teacher attendance has been 96.6%. The teachers attend school 182 days per year; Massachusetts requires 180 days. Professional development of 87 hours per year includes faculty and department meetings, and professional development days. Many professional development opportunities are available to teachers and staff including Summer Technology Camp offered by the Needham Schools Department of Media and Technology, Teachers As Scholars, and Primary Source.

The high school uses a rotating schedule composed of five periods a day through which seven classes rotate (i.e. every seven days the cycle begins again). The first two periods in the day are each ninety minutes, and the other three are fifty minutes each. A ten-minute homeroom meets each day after the first block. There are three lunch periods of twenty minutes each during the third block.

High school students are placed in leveled classes, with teacher recommendations for the core courses in the academic areas of English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science and World Languages. The levels are Accelerated, Honors, and Standard. There are a few non-college courses offered in some core areas. In 2006-2007, 257 students were enrolled in fifteen Advanced Placement courses. Other classes are non-leveled. In the 2007-2008 school year

11.4% of the students were enrolled in special education classes. Ten students (approximately .73%) are currently receiving English Language Learner (ELL) services. There is no student ranking system and no published honor roll at Needham High School. Recognition of student achievement occurs through individual letters of commendation sent to the students' homes, membership in National Honor Society, and various award ceremonies. Other educational programs include Harvard Extension, Mass Bay Community College, American Friends Service exchange programs, TEC, and Minuteman High School. E-learning programs include BYU Online and University of Nebraska Online. In the 2007-2008 school year, twenty students took advantage of courses online or on a college campus.

Ninety-two credits are required for graduation. This must include four years of English, three years of mathematics, three years of science, three years of social studies, two years of world languages, two years of fine and performing arts, two years of health/PE, and 60 hours of community classroom work. All students must pass state-required Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exams in order to earn a state diploma. Graduation rates for seniors were 97.3% in 2007 and 97.8% in 2006. The state graduation rate was 80.9% for 2007.

With respect to the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), members of the Class of 2007 scored a mean of 577 in Critical Reading, 578 in Mathematics, and 576 in Writing. State averages for public schools were Critical Reading 505, Math 516, and Writing 501. Needham also keeps track of the best score achieved by each student (i.e. one set of tests per student). Using the best score method, members of the class of 2007 scored a mean of 588 in Critical Reading, 590 in Mathematics, and 591 in Writing. Additionally, 54% of the Class of 2007 took SAT subject tests; nationally 18% take these tests. In May 2007, 229 students took 399 Advanced Placement exams, with 93% scoring a 3 or better.

Needham High School was one of 23 high schools in the state to be selected as a Commonwealth Compass School. To be chosen, a school must have over 40% of its students performing in the advanced range of the 10th grade MCAS tests in both mathematics and English. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, of NHS students taking the 2007 English exam, 99% passed with 94% scoring in the advanced and proficient ranges. Statewide, in 2006, 40% scored in the advanced category and in 2007, 50% scored in the advanced category. On the mathematics portion of the MCAS test, 99% passed with 91% scoring in the top two categories. Statewide in 2006, 76% scored in the advanced range and 74% in 2007. State averages in 2007 were 95% passing in English with 71% scoring in the two highest categories and 91% passing in math with 69% scoring in the highest category.

Ninety-four percent of the NHS class of 2007 planned to go to a 4-year college, compared to a state average of 58%, with 61% planning to attend a private college and 33% planning to attend a public college. Two percent (2%) planned on attending a 2-year college, 2% planned to work, and 1% planned to join the military.

NHS offers an array of athletics and co-curricular activities, with 776 students participating in 60 different teams representing 32 sports during the 2006-2007 school year. In the same year there

were over 80 different student groups and clubs affording opportunities for involvement in academic, student government, performing arts, and service activities.

Students and faculty are supported through fundraising activities, grant awards, and contributions from organizations such as the Parent Teacher Council (PTC), Booster Club, Friends of Music, and the Needham Education Foundation (NEF). The NEF, an independent, community-based organization, contributed over $26,000 to the high school in the 2008-2009 school year to support projects that are outside normal public funding including special workshops for art students, a stress reduction program and development of a Global Competence Program. Needham High School also received $55,000 from Metrowest Community Healthcare Foundation to support a Substance Abuse Prevention Initiative. Steps to Success awarded the school $22,500 to help in providing services for economically disadvantaged students. The Needham community provided over $180,000 in scholarship assistance to the graduating class of 2007. Town residents voted to pass a $51.3 million tax override in 2003 and an additional $10.7 million override in 2005 in order to finance major construction and renovations at the high school. The Needham Youth Commission provides programs and services such as job listings, seminars for students and parents, and resources for mental health and adolescent issues. There is a yearly career day program for juniors; many presenters are Needham residents. Students contribute to the community through their 60 hours of required community service work. They volunteer in organizations such as the local hospital, the town library, nursing homes, youth sports leagues, peer tutoring, childcare centers, and programs for citizens with disabilities.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND PLANNING

Highlights of the recently completed $62 million renovation and construction of the high school building include a new media center, cafeteria, and gymnasium. Facilities have been upgraded with new equipment and technology including a television production studio, a graphic arts lab, updated language lab, and SMART Boards in each classroom. The entire building has access to the Internet through a wired network, and plans are underway for wireless access throughout the school.

According to its mission statement, Needham High School will promote high academic, social, and civic expectations and offer multiple opportunities for students to succeed. The NHS 2007-2009 Improvement Plan is directly related to the school's mission. The formal document outlines the following major goals:
 #1: Prepare for the NEASC decennial accreditation visit in 2009
 #2: Continue standards-based assessment and grade reporting initiative
 #3: Implement recommendations from the Stress Reduction Committee

Over the last few years, the high school has undertaken a number of initiatives to address these and other concerns. Administration and staff have been conducting a self-study in anticipation of the NEASC 2009 visit. In addition, departments have developed and continue to work on new standards-based assessment and reporting practices. The Stress Reduction committee has been organized and is examining the issue. Needham High School recognizes that there is an achievement gap as identified by an analysis of MCAS scores. Varied efforts to close the gap are being developed and put into action. The school has also launched a Global Competence

certificate program designed to foster students' global awareness. Other initiatives include student exchange programs, a mentor homeroom initiative, continuation of regular parent and student surveys, a community service fair, a career resource center, enhanced parent-school communications, and preparation for a public art installation in the new NHS lobby.

According to the former high school principal, future challenges for the school include:
- Ensuring that technology is integrated in a way that enhances instruction.
- Better meeting the needs of our senior students by preparing them for transitions after high school.
- Taking the standards-based work that is being done and developing a different method of reporting student progress.
- Incorporating more of a learning component into the community service requirement.

Needham High School Mission Statement

To Think; To Respect; To Communicate

Needham High School draws from the strengths of the community to create teaching and learning partnerships between faculty, parents, and students, both on an individual level and in groups, in order to provide a high quality education.

The school offers students a variety of opportunities to excel and a diversity of perspectives from which to learn in an environment that is both nurturing and challenging.

The balanced student is able to participate actively in school and society, be creative, and self-advocate while determining his or her unique path to fulfillment.

Expectations for Student Learning

Academic Expectations

A Student at Needham High School will:
- write effectively
- research effectively
- read critically
- solve complex problems
- think critically
- communicate effectively
- demonstrate effective organizational skills
- monitor and direct his or her learning using various feedback sources

Social Expectations

Students at Needham High School will:
- demonstrate integrity, character, and responsibility for one's action
- make healthy and responsible decisions
- understand and respect diversity

Civic Expectations

Students at Needham High School will:
- contribute positively to local, national, and/or global communities

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

CURRICULUM

INSTRUCTION

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

MISSION AND LEARNING EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

The school's mission statement describes the essence of what the school as a community of learners is seeking to achieve. The expectations for student learning are based on and drawn from the school's mission statement. These expectations are the fundamental goals by which the school continually assesses the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Every component of the school community must focus on enabling all students to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.

1. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall be developed by the school community and approved and supported by the professional staff, the school board, and any other school-wide governing organization.

2. The school's mission statement shall represent the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning.

3. The school shall define school-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations that:

    • are measurable;

    • reflect the school's mission.

4. For each academic expectation in the mission, the school shall have a targeted level of successful achievement identified in a rubric.

5. The school shall have indicators by which it assesses the school's progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations.

6. The mission statement and the school's expectations for student learning shall guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and shall be evident in the culture of the school.

7. The school shall review regularly the mission statement and expectations for student learning using a variety of data to ensure that they reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state and national standards.

CONCLUSIONS

The mission and expectations for student learning were developed by the school community and approved by the faculty and board of education and supported by the town. In October 2005, a representative committee began development of the school's new mission and student learning expectations, and the faculty approved the final draft in May 2006. A student task force, student focus groups, faculty members, and school board members were involved in a revision of the original document, and the mission and expectations was finally approved in May 2007. Survey results show that faculty members, parents, and school committee members are overwhelmingly supportive and aware of the mission statement and learning expectations (80%) but the students are less familiar with them (31%). Thus, while the faculty largely embraces the mission statement and student learning expectations, students tend to be less familiar with the mission statement and learning expectations so that the learning expectations are less likely to have a positive effect on student learning. (self-study, survey information, panel presentation)

The Needham High School Mission Statement reflects the fundamental values and beliefs held by the school community. These values and beliefs are based in the strength of the community to support active learning partnerships that promote achievement, personal responsibility, and reflection. Balanced students who participate in school and society are the goal. Students are able to take advantage of the wide range of learning opportunities and class activities offered to them. However, the school should use the mission statement to guide the practice of successful instruction to a greater degree that it does, and students should be practiced in using the rubrics as formative measures of their work. (self-study, teachers, students, parents)

Needham High School has defined school-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations. The expectations for student learning are measurable and represent the high academic learning expectations that Needham High School expects of all its students. These expectations are posted in every classroom. Although there are programs for achieving civic and social expectations, no indicators have been developed to assess so it is not currently possible to measure progress made in achieving them. (self-study, students, teachers)

The school-wide rubrics for the Needham High School academic expectations have a targeted level of successful achievement identified in each rubric which describes four levels of achievement: advanced, proficient, needs improvement, and does not meet standard. As these rubrics are implemented, it is the school's expectation that students will meet these goals with at least a proficient level of success. These rubrics are not yet formally used at the departmental and individual teacher level so their affect on teaching and learning is minimal. (teachers, school leadership team, self-study)

Needham High School has not developed indicators to chart student progress and success in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations. The school provides and supports many programs beyond the classroom. These include mentor homeroom, student support team, summer school, a stress reduction program, a community service requirement, Global Competency, and the alumni survey. Using the experiences and results of these programs, the school should be able to develop indicators to measure student achievement. Civic and social expectations must be measured and the results provided for individual student and school assessment. (mission standard committee, school resources, teachers)

Needham High School's mission statement and expectations for student learning guide procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and are evident in the culture of the school. The mission statement has been used to ensure that both longstanding and new programs are maintained. These include the mentor program, study abroad, student involvement in Habitat for Humanity, the personalized learning center, the discipline process, Ally week, attendance support board programs and the school-wide focus on global awareness. The impact of these programs and initiatives, in turn, further advances the school's mission. The mission statement is posted in the classrooms and printed in the program of studies, school improvement plan, and student handbook. (teachers, school leadership team, self-study)

Needham High School does not have a regular formal review process for the mission statement and expectations for student learning. The school needs to use the variety of available data to assess the mission statement and ensure that student needs, and community, district, state, and national expectations are met. The implementation of academic rubrics is only beginning. As these initiatives become part of the classroom and school culture, regular review of the progress and interpretation of the mission and expectations will allow for continual improvement. (self-study, teachers, panel presentation)

COMMENDATIONS

1.   Involvement of a wide range of school and community members in developing the mission statement

2.   A high quality mission statement that promotes community values and beliefs

3.   Clearly defined levels of achievement for each school-wide academic rubric

4.   A variety of programs, opportunities, and experiences beyond the classroom to meet the civic and social expectations

5.   Programs and opportunities that reflect the school culture and the beliefs and values of the community

6.   A unique variety of programs based on the school's mission and expectations for students learning with strong support from administration and the community

7.   School-wide vision of commitment to global awareness and community service

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Communicate the mission and student learning expectations to all students actively and consistently

2.   Utilize the mission statement in all public discussion of policy

3.   Develop measurable indicators for civic and social learning expectations

4.   Standardize and implement the use of school-wide rubrics within each discipline

5.   Create data management and responsibility for the rubrics assessment results

6.   Implement a thoughtful and comprehensive process to regularly review and revise the mission and student learning expectations

CURRICULUM

The curriculum, which includes coursework, co-curricular activities, and other school-approved educational experiences, is the school's formal plan to fulfill its mission statement and expectations for student learning. The curriculum links the school's beliefs, its expectations for student learning, and its instructional practices. The strength of that link is dependent upon the professional staff's commitment to and involvement in a comprehensive, ongoing review of the curriculum.

1. Each curriculum area shall identify those school-wide academic expectations for which it is responsible.

2. The curriculum shall be aligned with the school-wide academic expectations and shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations.

3. The written curriculum shall:

   • prescribe content;

   • integrate relevant school-wide learning expectations;

   • identify course-specific learning goals;

   • suggest instructional strategies;

   • suggest assessment techniques including the use of school-wide rubrics.

4. The curriculum shall engage all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.

5. The curriculum shall:
   • be appropriately integrated;
   • emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.

6. The school shall provide opportunities for all students to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings and the school campus.

7. There shall be effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district.

8. Instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, staffing levels, and the resources of the library/media center shall be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum.

9. The professional staff shall be actively involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations and course-specific learning goals.

10. The school shall commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum.

11. Professional development activities shall support the development and implementation of the curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

Every department is responsible for a particular academic expectation, but the practice and discussion of academic expectations by departments is inconsistent. Some faculty members are not aware or do not fully embrace the academic expectations for which their department is responsible. Thus, students in their classes are less likely to understand or respect the meaning or importance of meeting school academic expectations. Also, the departmental responsibility to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to learn, practice, and be assessed for mastery of the school's own academic requirements is not met. (teachers, department leaders)

The academic expectations at Needham High School are assumed to be embedded in the curriculum. There are many examples of students practicing all of the academic expectations, but there are no direct references to the academic expectations in curriculum documents. Therefore, the connections between the curriculum documents and the academic expectations are not explicit to those who may need to know, such as the new teacher, or the students. These curriculum documents must be revised to include the school's expectations as related to all curriculum materials at all levels so that all students have equal opportunity to learn and sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of the expectations. (shadowing of students, teachers, school leadership team)

Needham High School's curriculum documents can be found on-line at http://cdb.needham.k12.ma.us/, but the school has recently begun using Atlas Rubicon for its written curriculum. The transfer of material is a work in progress as most departments do not have their curriculum documents uploaded to Atlas. The organization of curriculum information differs in these two programs. The curriculum documents on-line specify the following categories: keywords, vocabulary, learning expectations, suggested assessments, and possible connections; while on Atlas, most curriculum pages are set up to include essential questions, content, skills, assessment, activities/strategies, and resources. In both cases, large portions of the curriculum are missing. Thus, even the Atlas format must be expanded to include the school-wide learning expectations that are relevant to that subject area and the suggested assessments that include the school-wide rubrics. (self-study, teachers, students)

Individual departments maintain paper curriculum documents and sample activities in department areas. Despite these gaps in the formal written curriculum, departments have a wealth of information and teaching suggestions that they share among department members informally. This information is contained in binders but lacks continuity from one department to the next. Additionally, individual teachers have syllabi and classroom expectations, but these vary widely from teacher to teacher and class to class. Because of these variations, there is no commonality across courses in terms of specific content or course-specific learning goals. Finally, school-wide rubrics were completed in the spring of 2009, but these have yet to be incorporated into individual courses or into the written curriculum. These recently developed school-wide rubrics should be directly tied to the written curriculum as suggested assessments. (self-study, teachers, students)

The diverse curriculum engages students in inquiry, problem-solving and higher order thinking. Examples of this higher order thinking can be found at all academic levels. Although teachers

and students acknowledge differences between academic levels, academic challenge and opportunity to practice higher order thinking are present in all academic levels. Many different examples of authentic application of knowledge and skills are used in a variety of classes. For example, math students build a kite to examine surface area, a guest speaker discusses Buddhism in an English class reading Siddhartha, the annual art show exhibits student work, and physiology classes examine and evaluate the characteristics of five different diet plans. Thus, students benefit from real world applications of skills and practice in using higher order thinking. (teachers, students, shadowing of students)

The curriculum at Needham High School clearly emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage. The faculty has made a concerted effort to organize concepts thematically across all academic levels. The consistent use of the same themes across all levels provides an opportunity for students to access the depth of the curriculum because ideas are reinforced and intertwined. Depth of understanding for all academic levels is supported by the special education program and other support services that address alternative learning. (self-study, teacher interviews, meeting with teachers)

There is a great interest on the part of the faculty to create interdisciplinary opportunities. Time constraints, however, prevent many faculty members from planning and coordinating interdisciplinary activities. Despite this obstacle, cross curricular connections are being made in the classrooms. Additionally, some teachers have independently coordinated interdisciplinary lessons. The administration understands the desire for interdepartmental collegial work and currently is considering several options to make this happen. (teachers, central office administrators, school leadership team)

Teachers frequently refer to "thinking globally" which is defined as an awareness of the world beyond the boundaries of Needham and Massachusetts. Therefore, students have many opportunities to extend their learning beyond normal course offerings and the school campus. Examples of this include travel opportunities and exchange programs, the community service graduation requirement which encourages students to engage in learning through service projects, and a wide variety of clubs and activities offered to the student body. Additionally, the school has engaged outside speakers and conducted assemblies to address particular concerns that fall outside the realm of the typical academic subjects such as suicide prevention. The homeroom period is designed to create another opportunity for discussion based around such topics. Thus, students are exposed to new programs and ideas and benefit from the concept of thinking globally. (panel presentation, facility tour, students)

There is effective curricular coordination across the district. A K-12 cabinet comprised of school administrators and department chairs meets throughout the school year. Middle school curriculum coordinators have just been added to the cabinet. Annually, staff members from the middle school and high school meet to discuss transition and student placement for the next school year. This cabinet has allowed for improved communication regarding curriculum throughout the district. In addition, the curriculum for each discipline is reviewed every seven years; review committees include teachers, administrators, parents, and students. This committee provides significant curriculum review, but at the high school, curricular coordination and articulation within disciplines is sporadic. Although there are curriculum materials, some

are out of date and disorganized, and there is inconsistency in overall format. Although there is collegial sharing within disciplines and a district mentor program, there is no sense of a formal procedure to ensure comprehensive consistency. (self-study, department leaders, central office administrators, teachers)

The high school has recently completed a 63 million dollar building project that provides an exemplary physical space for learning. Teachers have a wide variety of technology available to them for the implementation of curriculum, including interactive whiteboards in each classroom, computers at each workbench in science labs, several computer labs, a media lab with an instructional technician for teacher support, and a world language lab. Additionally, the library/media center has laptops that classes can sign out to work on in the library, a bank of computers, and an additional classroom space that teachers can sign out to aid in research projects. Funds are available for teachers to procure materials in order to implement curriculum. Currently, the student/teacher ratio is adequate so that it supports the delivery of the current curriculum. Thus, staff and students are able to make use of the technology to improve student learning, and there are adequate materials to support curriculum delivery. (department leaders, classroom observations, teachers)

Teachers are continually making adjustments to the curriculum presented in their own classrooms based on both formal and informal classroom assessments. However, evaluation and revision of curriculum based on assessments is not a formal process within departments or school-wide. While some departments have looked at student work and some have common assessments, these activities and assessments are infrequent and not formally incorporated into a curriculum review process. Additionally, the school's academic expectations are not integrated into the curriculum so that they are not being evaluated. (teacher interviews, department leaders, meetings with teachers)

There are sufficient financial resources and personnel to develop, evaluate, and revise curriculum. While there are options for curriculum development during the summer, the school does not provide sufficient time to develop, evaluate, and revise curriculum during the school year. Although half of the early release days per year are allotted to individual departments, much of this time is taken up by initiatives other than curriculum development and revision. As a result, curriculum has not been fully developed and revised. The school must continue to develop curriculum analysis and revision based on data derived from student assessment of the school's expectations. This system should have a time-line and include professional development. (teacher interviews, meetings with teachers, survey information, self-study)

Teachers are encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities. Time, scheduling, and cost can be prohibitive factors in taking advantage of these opportunities, however. In addition, required district-wide professional development for teachers in their first two years includes Skillful Teacher, Differentiated Instruction, and Empowering Multicultural Initiative. The district offers several opportunities for professional development in the summer. Professional development within individual content areas is lacking, and this deficiency affects curriculum development. (teachers, department leaders, school leadership team)

COMMENDATIONS

1. The adoption of a common format to organize a standards-base curriculum

2. The commitment to providing higher order thinking skills to all students

3. The consistent implementation of real-world application of knowledge and skills

4. High standards for all disciplines

5. Informal departmental collaboration that assists the teachers in creating a rigorous curriculum

6. The thematic approach in subject areas throughout the taught curriculum as well as depth of knowledge across all academic levels

7. Individual teacher initiative in creating cross-disciplinary connections and lessons

8. Variety of clubs and activities

9. Effective district-wide curriculum coordination

10. The impressive school facilities that fully supports the implementation of the curriculum

11. The wide array of available technology to enhance curriculum delivery

12. The support of teachers to pursue professional development offerings in order to improve curriculum design

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that each teacher is aware of the academic expectations for which the department has assumed responsibility

2. Include specific academic expectations within each written curriculum

3. Implement a formal procedure through which all departments will complete the Atlas upload of all their curriculum documents

4. Coordinate curriculum within departments to ensure that curriculum content is consistent in the same course taught by different teachers

5. Include instructional strategies and assessment techniques in all curricula

6. Use school-wide rubrics in all departments to inform curricular decisions

7. Establish a systematic process to ensure curriculum consistency within departments

8. Maintain current staffing levels to support the curriculum offerings

9. Provide sufficient time devoted to the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum

10. Provide additional opportunities for professional development in content areas

INSTRUCTION

The quality of instruction in a school is the single most important factor affecting the quality of student learning, the achievement of expectations for student learning, the delivery of the curriculum, and the assessment of student progress. Instructional practices must be grounded in the school's mission and expectations for student learning, supported by research in best practice, and refined and improved based on identified student needs. Teachers are expected to be reflective about their instructional strategies and to collaborate with their colleagues about instruction and student learning.

1. Instructional strategies shall be consistent with the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning.

2. Instructional strategies shall:

   • personalize instruction;

   • make connections across disciplines;

   • engage students as active learners;

   • engage students as self-directed learners;

   • involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding;

   • provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge or skills;

   • promote student self-assessment and self-reflection.

3. Teachers shall use feedback from a variety of sources including other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents as a means of improving instruction.

4. Teachers shall be expert in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective about their own practices.

5. Discussion of instructional strategies shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.

6. Technology shall be integrated into and supportive of teaching and learning.

7. The school's professional development program shall be guided by identified instructional needs and shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies.

8. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes shall be used to improve instruction for the purposes of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs.

CONCLUSIONS

Instructional strategies are linked to the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning. However, the self-study states "60% of the staff is either undecided (28.4%) or disagrees (31.6%) that the mission statement and expectations for student learning influence their repertoire of teaching methods." Connections to the learning expectations are not included in lesson design by all teachers so that the faculty does not consistently use the school's mission consciously to affect teaching. However, throughout the school, there is a great variety of opportunities for all; there are strong learning partnerships among stakeholders, and students are creative and self-advocating. With more collegial discussion of the mission, teachers may support its tenets more openly or change them. (self-study, student shadowing, student work, teacher interviews, meetings with teachers)

Teachers use a variety of strategies that personalize and engage students as active and self-directed learners. With current class sizes, varied instructional methodologies, and a variety of assessment tactics, students are able to actively pursue and demonstrate higher order thinking and understanding. Instructional tactics include direct instruction, peer teaching, student presentations, demonstrations, laboratory activities, project-based assessments, and cooperative learning. All teachers have been given professional development in differentiated instruction. Assessment samples consistently require students to analyze, synthesize, problem-solve, apply, and evaluate. The use of such a variety of instructional strategies and assessments makes learning more interesting and engaging for the students. Although students, when prompted, could articulate connections across disciplines, there are few courses that offer specific and formal interdisciplinary instruction. While many teachers use student self-reflection and self-assessment, this practice has not been adopted school-wide. Thus, although both interdisciplinary learning and student reflection are not consistent for many students and should be more widely implemented, students receive engaging, varied instruction at all levels. (shadowing of students, meeting with parents, examination of student work, teacher interviews)

Many teachers use formal and informal feedback as a means of improving instruction. Some department leaders actively encourage teachers to solicit student reflection and feedback on their instruction. However, students report that feedback to teachers about their instruction is not consistently solicited, and there are no formal methods for parents to comment on instruction. An alumni survey is conducted every other year by discipline that provides feedback on graduates' college preparedness. A formal mentoring program is in place that provides feedback to teachers new to the school. According to the self-study, "67% of new teachers indicated that their mentor improved their instructional practice." Further, supervisor feedback from primary and secondary evaluators is focused on instruction. Some teachers utilize peer observation and collegial discussions on instruction to improve instruction. Thus, teachers formally receive feedback from a variety of sources to improve instruction. While many sources of feedback are used, all teachers would benefit from formal student feedback. (self-study, shadowing of students, teachers, students)

Teachers are expert in their content area and knowledgeable about current research regarding effective instructional strategies. Over 70% of new hires have earned a master's degree or higher. Ninety-nine percent of all teachers meets the highly qualified designation under the No

Child Left Behind federal law, and 82% of teachers has participated in graduate courses in the past two years. Discipline-based professional development opportunities include "Teachers as Scholars," Primary Source, and department-based workshops to increase knowledge concerning current research on effective instructional approaches, but there is little content related professional development. Administrators and instructional leaders share research on best practice with teachers. These materials are often discussed at department meetings. Opportunities for reflective practices include a three-year professional status evaluation portfolio and the optional alternative evaluation procedure. Reflective practices and content expertise give all students the opportunity to benefit from rigorous and informed instruction. (self-study, meetings with teachers, school leadership team, teacher interviews)

While informal discussion on instructional strategies is a regular feature of the professional culture, there is a clear desire for more structured planning and professional development time to allow formal discussion around instruction. According to the self-study, "96.1% of teachers discuss instructional strategies with their colleagues." This discussion is predominantly informal. New teachers are engaged in discussions with mentors on many aspects of instructional practice. Faculty members consult often with special education teachers and guidance counselors on ways to improve instruction for specific students. Formal discussion around instructional strategies tends to be at the department level. Adequate and consistent time for formal discussions on a school-wide basis would allow for a broader understanding of instructional strategies. This would ensure that all faculty members, regardless of discipline, are exposed to current instructional practices and, thus, would make the discussion of instructional strategies an ingrained aspect of the professional culture of the school. A staff that formally and informally discusses current instructional practices is more likely to adapt instruction to the learning styles of all students. More structured time is necessary for the faculty to accomplish this important work. (self-study, teacher interviews, teachers, school leadership team)

Technology is a prominent feature in the school and is used to support teaching and learning. In a school of 1,400 students and 121 teachers, there are 747 computers. Every regular education classroom has a minimum of one computer, an interactive whiteboard, and a projector. In addition, each department has a workspace with computers and printers and access to a computer lab. There are four computer labs in the building dedicated for classroom instruction. The media center has a number of computers available to students and a classroom with laptops that is also available for student use. In addition, there is an instructional technologist available to assist teachers. According to the self-study, 88.5% of students reported that their teachers use technology in their classes, while 90.5% of staff members reported that they frequently integrate technology into their instructional practices. Staff, students, and parents have access to *PowerSchool* for information on attendance and grades. Also, more than half of the faculty members maintains websites where students can find assignments and class notes. The use of instructional software like *Geometer's Sketchpad* is used to facilitate learning. Students regularly use technology to research, write papers, and create multi-media projects. Technology training is available to teachers through programs like Summer Tech Camp. Because technology is a valued aspect of teaching and learning, the staff is current with the latest trends in education. The integration of technology has helped teachers meet the diverse learning needs of students. (self-study, teachers, shadowing of students, students, parents)

The school's professional development program is aligned with district goals. There is a district staff development committee that creates a program of offerings based on staff and district needs. The district's goal of advancing standards-based learning is supported by the fact that teachers are offered a standards-based education course. Additionally, all teachers new to the school must be involved in the formal mentoring program and must take the Skillful Teacher, the Empowering Multicultural Initiative (EMI), and differentiating instruction courses. The system-wide professional development committee made up of teachers and administrators develops the program of professional development offerings. The human resources department oversees the teacher utilization of these offerings through the mylearningplan.com resource. At the high school, there have been professional development offerings on standards-based education, common formative and summative assessments, and technology integration. School personnel utilize student performance data and survey data to identify instructional needs. Although the administrators have identified common assessments as part of a standards-based goal, they do not exist in many subject areas. A focus on department level discussion around common assessments to inform instruction has recently begun. While many individual opportunities exist for teachers, more consistent professional development within and between departments, targeting improved instructional strategies would benefit instructional practices. (self-study, school leadership team, central office administrators, department leaders, teachers)

The supervision and evaluation process provides opportunities for reflection and feedback on instruction and student learning. The school has adapted John Saphier's methodology on observation practices. The instrument focuses on instructional competence, professional characteristics, professional and personal growth, and evidence of student learning and growth. The process entails yearly observations for new teachers and a third year professional portfolio that demonstrates self-reflection on instructional practice. Teachers with professional status can opt to be formally evaluated or select self-evaluation or peer collaboration. The self-study states that 63% of teachers feels that the supervision and evaluation process provides feedback that can help improve instruction. A study group has been in place to examine other instruments focused on improving instruction. Regardless of the instrument used, it is important that targeted feedback pertaining to instruction and student learning be a component of the supervision and evaluation process so that instruction will continually improve. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team, central office administrators, department leaders)

COMMENDATIONS

1. Student demonstration of higher order thinking skills

2. Varied instructional strategies used widely by teachers

3. Formal structures that give feedback to teachers

4. The regular administration of a follow-up survey of graduates that provides information on student preparedness for college

5. Expertise of teaching staff

6. Varied opportunities for individual reflection on instruction

7. Widespread informal discussions on instructional strategies

8. Instructional discussions among general education teachers, guidance counselors, and special education teachers

9. Latest educational technology designed to improve instruction available to staff and students

10. The use of technology as a regular part of instruction

11. Availability of an instructional technologist to assist teachers

12. Professional development offerings designed to improve instruction

13. Student growth and learning component of the evaluation instrument

14. Reflective portfolio for third year teachers

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Require that all instruction be based on the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning

2. Develop formal opportunities for interdisciplinary instruction

3. Seek and utilize student feedback in all classes

4. Structure school-wide time dedicated to the discussion of instructional strategies

5. Increase departmental and school-wide professional development activities focused on instructional strategies

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Its purpose is to inform students regarding their learning progress and teachers regarding ways to adjust the curriculum and instruction to respond effectively to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates to the school community the progress of students in achieving the school's expectations for student learning and course-specific learning goals. Assessment results must be continually discussed to improve curriculum and instruction.

1. The school shall have a process to assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations in the mission based on school-wide rubrics.

2. The school's professional staff shall use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its civic and social expectations.

3. For each learning activity, teachers shall clarify to students the relevant school-wide academic expectations and course-specific learning goals that will be assessed.

4. Teachers shall base classroom assessment of student learning on school-wide and course-specific rubrics.

5. Teachers shall use varied assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.

6. Teachers shall meet collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessments for the purposes of revising the curriculum and improving instructional strategies.

7. The school's professional development program shall provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies.

8. The school's professional staff shall communicate:

   • individual student progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to students and their families;

   • the school's progress achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community.

CONCLUSIONS

Needham High School does not have a process for assessing school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations of the mission statement. While the school recently developed school-wide rubrics, these rubrics are not yet being used by teachers to assess individual student progress. School-wide progress is measured by Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) data, Scholastic Aptitude Test data (SAT), SAT II data, advanced placement test scores, and graduation rates. Teachers in most departments have developed and are utilizing content-based rubrics but are not yet integrating course-specific and school-wide rubrics. As a result, the school must create a formal system to measure student progress towards achievement of expectations. (school leadership team, self-study, teachers)

The professional staff determines the success of the school in achieving its civic and social expectations by using many sources of data. These expectations are measured by the use of various surveys and state and community feedback information. Students are very involved in co-curricular activities and are required to complete a sixty-hour community service graduation requirement. Data from various reports illustrates that students are aware of and comply with civic and social expectations. Although there are programs for achieving civic and social expectations, no indicators have been developed so the school does not know and report to the community its level of success. The faculty members need to create indicators for school and students, determine and document achievements, and report to students and community. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team)

School-wide expectations and course-specific learning goals are not consistently articulated to students. Few samples of student work included school-wide academic expectations. Many teachers distribute course-specific learning goals to students during instruction and as part of assignments, but students are not generally made aware of how classroom activities relate to school-wide academic expectations. Thus, the impact of school-wide academic expectations is diminished. Teachers must be encouraged by supervisors and administrators to support the school's goals by educating students about the relevance of over-arching principles in understanding achievement and in the connections between curricula and expectations. *(*student work, teachers, classroom observations, shadowing of students)

Rubrics are utilized in most classes at Needham High School. These are school-wide rubrics but they are not yet fully implemented. Some departments have created course-specific rubrics, assignment-specific rubrics, and hybrid rubrics that include course and school-wide expectations. Many teachers utilize course-specific rubrics for a majority of assignments. A specific plan needs to be implemented to integrate school-wide and course-specific rubrics into assessments throughout the school. Otherwise, classroom assessment will remain inconsistent, and students will not be able to relate their own success to the school's expectations. (self-study, teachers, student work, students)

A variety of student assessment strategies is used by teachers. The assessments vary from traditional paper and pencil tests to more project-based assessment, some including sophisticated use of technology, including podcasts, television broadcasts, mock trials, National History Day Project, and junior research project. Some student work is evaluated by standards-based rubrics while most student work is assessed using assignment or course-specific rubrics. Students may

choose to exhibit knowledge or skills through a variety of assessments that include examples suitable for varying learning styles. As a result, all students are given the opportunity to succeed. (student work, parents, teachers)

Teachers in some departments meet informally to discuss student assessments and then revise curriculum as appropriate. Some departments have either implemented new course offerings or have made changes to existing curriculum based upon these reviews. Monthly department meetings are the only school allotted time for teachers to do this work so they often meet during prep periods, before school, after school, and during lunch. While 80% of teachers indicates that they meet with colleagues to discuss student work and assessments, only 53% feels that curriculum changes are made based on these assessments. As a result, curriculum and instruction improvements are not necessarily related to student needs. A system must be created to ensure that student assessment results, particularly those related to school-wide expectations, are used to inform changes in curriculum and instruction. (survey information, teachers, self-study)

Needham Public Schools supports professional development opportunities to help teachers develop a range of student assessment strategies. During the school year, professional development takes place on early release days, full day professional development, and the opportunity to attend one-day workshops and summer programs. Currently, the school's professional development focuses on standards-based education, assessment, and skillful teaching. A few departments have used this to develop some course-specific assessments that include common mid-term and final exams. Common course-specific assessments do not exist school-wide, however, leading to inconsistent assessment strategies. Thus, departments need to spend some of their meeting time creating more consistent assessment vehicles. (teachers, self-study, school leadership team)

There is no current plan for communicating progress on school-wide academic expectations to students and families. Academic progress is communicated through a variety of methods that includes PowerSchool, report cards, progress reports, MCAS results, and graduation rates. The school also highlights student academic performance through various ceremonies, exhibits, and homeroom announcements. These varied methods of reporting academic progress keep students and parents informed and give opportunities to students to have dialogues with teachers about their individual academic progress. A plan must be implemented to assess student achievement on expectations, document the results, and inform students of their progress towards school-wide academic expectations. (self-study, parents, school leadership team)

COMMENDATIONS

1. Community service graduation requirement

2. Survey that illustrates student progress in meeting civic and social expectations

3. Clearly communicated course-specific learning goals

4. Hybrid rubrics that show integration of school and course expectations

5. The variety of assessment strategies that meet various student needs

6. Collaborative work done by teachers to discuss student assessment

7. Professional development opportunities in assessment variation provided to teachers

8. Various means to share academic progress with families

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish and implement a process to use the school-wide rubrics at the individual student level and inform students and families

2. Establish and implement a process to use the school-wide rubrics at the school level and inform the community

3. Align course-specific rubrics with school-wide rubrics

4. Develop and implement a plan for utilizing school and student data on civic and social expectations

5. Ensure that school-wide expectations are communicated to students along with assessment protocols and rubrics

6. Provide more opportunities for formal discussions about student work and assessments

7. Provide more professional development opportunities in the area of standards-based assessments

8. Create common course-specific assessments

9. Develop and implement a method of communicating student and school progress toward meeting school-wide academic expectations

SUPPORT STANDARDS

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

The way in which a school organizes learning for students, fosters leadership, and engages its members has a profound effect on teaching and learning. The professional culture of the school must be characterized by thoughtful, reflective, and constructive discourse about decision-making and practices, which supports student learning and well-being.

1. The school board and superintendent shall ensure that the headmaster has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning.

2. The headmaster shall provide leadership in the school community by creating and maintaining a shared vision, direction, and focus for student learning.

3. Teachers as well as administrators other than the headmaster shall provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school.

4. The organization of the school and its educational programs shall promote the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

5. Student grouping patterns shall reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

6. The schedule shall be driven by the school's mission and expectations for student learning and shall support the effective implementation of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

7. Meaningful roles in the decision-making process shall be accorded to students, parents, and all members of the school staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.

8. Each teacher shall have a student load that enables the teacher to meet the learning needs of individual students.

9. There shall be a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning.

10. The professional staff shall collaborate within and across departments in support of learning for all students.

11. All school staff shall be involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.

12. Student success shall be regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed.

13. The climate of the school shall be safe, positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.

14. The school board shall support the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The school committee and superintendent provide the principal with a high level of autonomy in decision-making and the authority to lead the high school. Informed by the district learning goals of advancing standards-based education, developing social and emotional skills for all students, and promoting active citizenship, the principal, who was hired in July 2009, has emphasized that the mission and expectations for student learning are central to his decision-making process at the high school. For example, within budget parameters set by the central office, the principal has the authority to allocate staffing and operating budgets items to realize the educational goals that he has articulated. As a result, the principal is empowered to make essential decisions that facilitate teaching and learning. (self-study, school committee, central office administrators, school leadership team)

The principal has articulated a clear vision and direction for the high school that is consistent with the district goals and the high school mission and learning expectations**.** The principal, assistant principals, and department leaders have worked collaboratively to develop a focused and coherent professional development program during bimonthly faculty meetings and early release days. Prior to these meetings, targeted short readings were given to faculty in preparation for presentations and small group follow-up discussions on standards-based education, formative assessment practices, and collaborative learning communities. Many teachers have noted that the principal is modeling best practice in designing and implementing these activities. Additionally, the principal has established new norms for open and honest discourse that have been implemented for the school leadership team. This has contributed to a sense of mutual accountability and shared leadership among the department leaders resulting in a consistent message to faculty members. The principal has made a concerted effort to be visible and interact with students on a daily basis. As a result of the principal's leadership, the entire school community has a stronger focus on student learning. (department leaders, teachers, panel presentation)

Teachers and administrators assume leadership roles that enhance school climate and improve the school. The faculty council has been an important forum for teacher leadership. Teachers can share their concerns about the high school and discuss potential solutions to resolve longstanding issues that impact student learning and school culture. The faculty council developed a new attendance policy that was adopted by the leadership team and has been implemented successfully. Most teachers value the fact that they are included in the problem-solving process and understand the critical role teachers play in the success of the committee work. Teachers volunteer to be advisors, most of which are not paid positions, and for the numerous after-school clubs that support a wide range of student interests. Assistant principals assume a wide array of responsibilities beyond day-to-day management of the student population and are valued by the faculty, but it is growing increasingly difficult for the two assistant principals to meet the needs of all students given the scope of their work. (teachers, school leadership team, self-study)

The organization of the school and its educational programs promote the school's mission and expectations for student learning. Currently, class sizes are maintained at reasonable levels to promote student success. There is concern that as enrollment increases over the next few years, class sizes may increase to a level that will adversely impact student learning. There are several programs in place that serve special needs and at-risk students in smaller personalized learning

environments: STRIVE provides socialization and vocational training for students with significant special needs; Return or Remain in a Supportive Environment (RISE) supports students transitioning back from psychiatric placements; Connections Transition provides an alternative setting for students dealing with a range of mental health issues; and the Connections Academic Program provides mixed-grade therapeutic instruction. The SKILLS center provides support in accessing the general curriculum for students with an individualized education plan while the personalized learning center is a structured program designed to assist general education students in need of support. The METCO program serves Boston-resident students who attend the Needham Public Schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade. There are significant supports for both regular and special education students, which enable students to access curriculum across all levels of instruction. (self-study, facility tour, teachers)

With four levels of instruction (AP/accelerated, honors, standard, and basic) available to students, the grouping patterns do not reflect the diversity of the student body. The enrollment in AP and accelerated courses do not mirror the demographics of the student population. There is a disproportionate percentage of minority students in the standard courses with significant under-representation in the highest level courses. However, there is comparable enrollment in honors courses with approximately 54% of African American students, 56% of Hispanic students, 52% of Caucasian students, and 51% of students with IEPs enrolled in these courses. The faculty council and principal have discussed the need for more direct support services to begin to close the existing achievement gap and increase minority enrollment in higher-level courses. (self-study, school leadership team, teachers)

The schedule contributes significantly to the effective implementation of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. With a modified block schedule that offers a mix of two 90-minute blocks and three 50-minute blocks in a seven-day cycle for each four-credit course, teachers and students are able to engage in student-centered and project-based learning in all disciplines. There is strong evidence throughout the school of varied instructional practices and more authentic and genuine assessment practices. Student projects are often displayed in departmental display cases and the library. Although the majority of teachers and students benefits from the schedule, the rotating nature of the block schedule reduces the opportunity for viable part-time teaching positions, inhibits collaboration within and across departments, and lacks the flexibility necessary for students to enroll in vocational courses at Minuteman High School or college courses at nearby colleges and universities. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team)

There are many opportunities for meaningful input into decisions for staff members, parents, and students, but there is still some dissatisfaction regarding the level of involvement. The self-study survey indicates that 55% of the staff agreed that the decision-making process promotes an atmosphere of participation and broad ownership. Over 28% of the students and 40% of the parents agreed that they have a role in important decisions. The main vehicles for formal involvement in decision-making are the cabinet, the faculty council, and the student council. These bodies serve in an advisory role to the principal. These groups recently developed an ethics policy on cheating, a revised policy on attendance, and created a student judiciary board to advise the assistant principals on discipline issues. A faculty committee to study ways to increase collaboration was also recently formed. The guidance department conducts surveys and gathers data from current students, parents, and graduates to guide their decisions on guidance programs,

policies, and procedures. Parents and students are also included on committees that revise or develop formal curricula. The school provides multiple vehicles for staff members to become involved in decision-making and to take ownership and responsibility. The opportunities for parents and students for input are somewhat less than those for staff members but are adequate to promote an atmosphere of ownership and responsibility among all stakeholders. (teachers, students, parents, self-study, Endicott survey)

The student load enables teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students and personalize instruction. Based on the 2009-2010 class size report, the average student load has increased in mathematics, science, social studies, and English as a result of a 2.5 teacher reduction across these departments. The average student load in these four departments has surpassed the target student load set by department chairs and program directors last year. There is a shift in class size as well. The number of classes with enrollment below 19 and in the 19-21 range has decreased significantly while the number of classes with enrollment in the 22-24 and 28+ ranges has increased. Based on the 2010-2011 through 2014-2015 five -year financial forecast presented to school committee recently, there is a projected need for 13.9 additional FTEs faculty members over the next five years as enrollment increases to about 1,740 students. Thus, there is concern that as student enrollment increases over the next five years unless the budgetary resources to increase staffing are provided, student load will surpass educationally sound levels, and teachers may not be able to maintain the current acceptable level of service they provide to students. (self-study, teacher interviews, meetings with teachers, school leadership team, central office administrators)

The high school has designed and implemented a four-year mentor homeroom program that provides each student meaningful connections with adults who support his or her academic, social, and emotional well-being. Each homeroom ranges in size from fifteen to seventeen students and meets for ten minutes per day. Eight times per year, homerooms are extended for one to one and one half hours for activities and discussions focused on topics such as goal-setting, resiliency, and self-reflection. At times, these precede or follow assembly programs on pertinent social-emotional issues. A committee of teachers, the social emotional learning team (SEL), designs the activities and discussions for these homerooms. Although teachers and administrators acknowledge some inconsistency among homeroom teachers in implementing these activities, they do provide the students with a more personalized educational experience and additional guidance and support for the social and emotional issues they may encounter. (teachers, school leadership team, self-study)

While the physical layout of the school, technology enhancements, and the initiatives of some teachers allow some collaboration within departments, there is no formal departmental or interdepartmental collaboration. The Teaching, Learning & Leading survey (TeLLS) referenced in the self-study report indicates that 71% of the staff feels that time provided for collaboration is inadequate. As it is, teachers of certain subjects in mathematics have designed projects with common objectives and rubrics, and there are summer curriculum development projects and an option for alternative evaluation that can facilitate collaboration. However, there is no scheduled time during the school day for formal collaboration within departments except for department meeting time once per month, nor is there any formal scheduled time set aside for interdisciplinary collaboration. The new principal is credited with opening up lines of

communication between departments and with increasing collaborative work among department leaders through the school's cabinet. A committee focused on improving collaboration has been formed, and the principal expresses an interest in developing a model for professional learning communities. While time for collaboration is still a factor, the new principal is credited with re-focusing the time already available on more collaborative work. (self-study, survey information, teachers, panel presentation)

All faculty and staff at the high school are genuinely concerned with the well-being and learning of all students. The guidance department is well staffed and provides comprehensive services in both academic and personal counseling. Six academic counselors and two personal counselors provide support in this area. In addition, the school nursing staff works closely with the guidance department , the assistant principals, and special education staff members to ensure the well-being of all students. There are weekly meetings of this group to discuss student needs and issues. The media department also provides a great deal of support for teachers and students on curriculum projects, research skills, and direct instruction in courses. Administrative assistants also enhance student learning by providing support for administrators, allowing them time to focus on leading the teaching and learning activities. Recent cuts in this area detract from the time administrators are able to spend on directing and supervising teaching and learning. In addition, there is no formal professional development for some support staff members. Overall, the students at the high school are provided with a supportive, nurturing environment by a wide variety of adults in the school. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team)

Student achievements and successes are acknowledged and prominently displayed at the high school in a variety of ways. The art department hallway and other display cases are lined with examples of student work. Hallway display cases also include examples of exemplary student work from other subject areas and commendations received by the school. The principal sends congratulatory letters to honor roll students, and assistant principals write notes of encouragement on final report cards. A weekly student-produced TV broadcast highlights the accomplishments of the students. The school newspaper, *The Hilltopper*, is published several times per year. Different departments hold a variety of academic award ceremonies. Seniors' accomplishments are highlighted in the annual Class Day Awards assembly. Coaches also hold annual banquets to acknowledge team successes. According to the self-study survey, approximately half the student body felt they had been recognized for accomplishments at school. As a result of the above efforts, many students feel honored and recognized. (facility tour, self-study, survey information)

The climate of the high school gives the staff and students many reasons to be proud. The self-study survey indicates 80% of the students and 90% of the staff feel safe at school. The students are very respectful of and friendly with each other and with the staff. Teachers are supportive of students and committed to providing a safe nurturing environment for all students. The atmosphere of the school is calm and focused on serious academic learning. The facility is kept neat and clean and is well respected by the students. The discipline and attendance policies are comprehensive and provided in writing for all in the student handbook. However, there is a concern over consistency of implementation of these policies although the new principal is credited with tightening adherence to the rules. As a result, there is a sense of ownership among

students and staff that reflects pride in their school. (self-study, survey information, classroom observations, panel presentation)

The decisions and policies approved by the school committee support the implementation of the mission and expectations for student learning. The school committee policies are used as guides for all administrative decisions, goals, and objectives. The district level goals of advancing standards-based education, developing social and emotional skills for all students, and promoting active citizenship help guide the school's improvement plans. The school committee members state there is trust and good communication between the administration and the committee. Administrators feel much supported by the school committee. This provides a productive working relationship between the committee and the school that supports a positive culture for implementing all teaching and learning goals. (school committee members, school leadership team, central office administrators, self-study)

COMMENDATIONS

1. Autonomy of the principal in decision-making and leading the high school

2. The Superintendent and School Committee for the overall support they provide to all areas of the school operation

3. The principal's clearly articulated vision and effective instructional leadership

4. The consistent and coherent message to faculty members about student learning communicated by the leadership team

5. The large number of teachers who volunteer to advise after-school clubs

6. The faculty council for providing a forum for teacher leadership and a strong advisory role to the principal

7. Reasonable class size that enables teachers to meet students' learning needs

8. The rotating block schedule that allows for student-centered learning and authentic assessment practices

9. Opportunities for meaningful input into decisions by faculty and staff members, parents, and students

10. The development of a focused mentor homeroom program by the SEL team

11. The efforts and commitment by the mentor homeroom teachers in implementing the program

12. Formation of a committee to promote collaborative work

13. Increased communication with all staff by the new principal

14. Very supportive and personalized environment provided by all staff members at the school

15.   Weekly TV news broadcasts developed by students in the media technology department specialized hoemroom

16.   The wide variety of methods to celebrate the achievements and successes of students

17.   Calm, respectful atmosphere of the school that supports a serious academic environment

18.   Trust and communication between the school committee and administration

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Provide additional school-based administrative services as enrollment continues to increase

2.   Establish a plan to decrease the percentage of minority students in standard courses consistent with the demographics of the student population

3.   Explore possible solutions for part-time teaching positions

4.   Explore possible solutions for college course opportunities during the school day

5.   Build common planning time into the existing schedule for intra- and inter- departmental collaboration

6.   Maintain current student load levels in all disciplines

7.   Provide additional scheduled time on a regular basis for departmental collaboration and examination of student work

8.   Provide professional development for non-teaching staff members to enable them to provide additional support for student learning

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

Student learning and well-being are dependent upon adequate and appropriate support programs and services. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of integrated resources to enhance and improve student learning and well-being and to support the school's mission and expectations.

All Student Support Services

1. The school's student support services shall be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

2. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.

3. Student support personnel shall enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and by utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.

4. All student support services shall be regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning.

5. There shall be a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and identified student needs.

6. Student records, including health and immunization records, shall be maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law.

7. There shall be sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library media services.

Guidance Services

8. The school shall provide a full range of comprehensive guidance services, including:

   - individual and group meetings with counseling personnel;
   - personal, career, and college counseling;
   - student course selection assistance;
   - collaborative outreach to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers;
   - appropriate support in the delivery of special education services for students.

Health Services

9. The school's health services shall provide:

   - preventive health services and direct intervention services;
   - appropriate referrals;
   - mandated services;
   - emergency response mechanisms;
   - ongoing student health assessments.

Library Information Services

10. The library/information services program and materials shall be fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program.

11. Library/information services personnel shall be knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation.

12. A wide range of materials, technologies, and other library/information services that are responsive to the school's student population shall be available to students and faculty and utilized to improve teaching and learning.

13. Students, faculty, and support staff shall have regular and frequent access to library/information services, facilities, and programs as an integral part of their educational experience before, during, and after the school day.

14. The library/information services program shall foster independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty to use various school and community information resources and technologies.

15. Policies shall be in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet.

Special Education Services

16. The school shall provide special education services related to the identification, monitoring, and referral of students in accordance with local, state, and federal law.

CONCLUSIONS

Student support services have been designed and implemented consistent with the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning. The mission statement is used to create an inclusive school community and inform decisions regarding outside referrals. While the school does not have a formal guidance curriculum, there is programming across all grades which is consistent with the school's mission. The library and media services are designed to ensure that all students demonstrate effective research and information literacy skills. The mission statement is used as a guiding factor when making changes to student support programming. (self-study, teachers, panel presentation)

A number of resources is in place to ensure that all students are able to access the curriculum. A wide variety of courses and levels is offered to meet students' interests and abilities. A personalized learning center is available to students as an elective course and is often utilized as a pre-referral intervention for students who are struggling in general education classes but are not identified as students with special needs. Additional special education services ranging from skills classes to a substantially separate classroom focused on independent living skills are provided for students. In addition to having a guidance counselor who assists them with academic and career planning, all students are assigned to a personal counselor who assists with personal or social issues that may impact student learning in the classroom. All counselors collaborate extensively to provide individualized services for each student in need. The school's allocation of resources, programs, and services ensures that each student has access to a balanced education. (teachers, panel presentation, students)

Student support services personnel work regularly and cooperatively with professional staff members to enhance student learning. The media personnel work with teachers who bring classes to the library to do research for projects and for lessons on information skills. Students also have access to the media center before and after regular school hours. The media specialist collaborates with the public library to supplement school resources and to promote the use of regional library services and networks. Special education staff members, guidance counselors, and health services staff members collaborate daily to ensure that students are receiving effective individual services that promote learning. Other outside agencies are used to support transitions and independent living. Comprehensive student support services ensure that student needs are being met. (self-study, teachers, classroom observations)

The guidance department evaluates and uses data from a student survey to drive program decisions. Health services are evaluated by periodic audits of monthly and annual reports. Special education is reviewed every six years, with a three-year mid-cycle review. Formal and informal evaluations provide regular feedback about the effectiveness of student support services. (self-study, teacher interviews, meetings with teachers, school leadership team)

The school utilizes a variety of tools to communicate with members of the school community. The school website features links to individual teacher webpages and student support services. PowerSchool is utilized to create a link between students, teachers, and

parents. Information regarding attendance, grades, and class assignments is easily accessible to students and parents. In addition to PowerSchool, listserv is utilized for mass communication on specific topics and news. Each student support service department has materials and brochures available. First-Class software allows teachers and staff members to communicate through e-mails, electronic conferences, and shared calendars. Students are referred to the student support team (SST) by members of the school community when additional support may be necessary. The culture of communication ensures that all members of the school community are aware of the extent of services provided to students. (teachers, self-study, support services)

Confidential information is treated respectfully and securely and is available on a need-to-know basis. All other student records are secured in locked file cabinets. An efficient and comprehensive process is in place that allows the district to maintain the security, integrity, and privacy of student records. (self-study, teachers, facility tour)

The school does not have sufficient library support personnel to meet the needs of staff and students. The recent loss of a .5 position and reassignment of other duties among existing library staff has had an effect on the scheduling of classes. The library is often extremely busy, and the needs of students and staff members cannot be met. Priority is given to the needs of classroom teachers. Students who have individual needs for classes may not always be accommodated. Guidance and special education departments are sufficiently staffed with an appropriate number of licensed and certified personnel. Health services, which has sustained cuts in funding, is staffed with two nurses. Health services is not staffed with secretarial support, leaving the school nurses with little or no assistance to complete the large amount of district and state reporting that needs to be completed by this department. (student support services, self-study, teachers)

The school offers its students a comprehensive guidance program, consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning. The department consists of six guidance counselors, two personal counselors, one community classroom counselor, and one school adjustment counselor. The school adjustment counselor serves students with counseling accommodations in their individualized education plans (IEPs). Every student is assigned to a guidance counselor and a personal counselor, and all students have access to the community classroom coordinator. Guidance counselors meet students several times each year to provide academic and career-related information in individual and group formats. While the school does not have a formal guidance curriculum with rubrics to assess student learning, there are programs in place for students across all grades. Counselors visit the freshman directed studies program four times each year to discuss issues such as time management, stress management, and study skills. They also utilize sophomore wellness classes as a vehicle to introduce the topic of career exploration using Career Cruising, an online career management system. Guidance counselors see juniors and seniors in small groups and individually to develop an appropriate post-secondary plan based on their individual career goals. Course selection is a self-directed process. Students self-select courses and levels based on their individual interests and abilities. Guidance counselors review each student's selection and make recommendations as necessary. Parents are able to override a guidance counselor's recommendations. As a result, some students may be enrolled in courses for which they may not be adequately prepared. This could impact the quality of student learning. (teacher interviews, meetings with teachers, self-study)

The guidance department collaborates effectively with outside community and mental health agencies and social service providers. Suicide prevention efforts are important to school and to the community. The Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention has offered the assistance of one counselor to perform evaluations and assessments. Many students volunteer with this organization and with the Samaritans. In addition, the school participates in a suicide prevention coalition. The social and emotional learning committee which includes teachers and support staff members also utilizes extended homeroom as a vehicle to bring related programming to students. While suicide prevention is a focus at NHS, students and staff members do not feel that it adversely impacts the school culture. In addition to these school-wide efforts to build a resilient student body, the guidance department has also participated in district-wide professional development in the area of Cognitive Behavior Therapy. (teachers, student support personnel interviews, students)

Guidance counselors collaborate extensively with special education teachers to provide comprehensive student support and classroom services to students who require special instruction. Guidance counselors may refer students to the personalized learning classroom (PLC) as an intervention and also participate in IEP meetings. Special education teachers at all levels provide regular academic and personal/social updates to guidance counselors, ensuring a consistent flow of information that counselors use to advocate for students. These departments also collaborate to bring school-wide information to the teaching staff. Last year, the special education and guidance departments developed a program to share effective teaching and classroom strategies to help students with Asperger's Syndrome succeed in the classroom. (teacher interviews, students, teachers, parents)

Health services is able to provide a full range of services which includes preventive health and intervention services, appropriate referrals, mandated services, emergency response mechanisms, and ongoing student health assessments. School nurses provide direct services to students on a daily basis with administration of medications and other health assessments and make referrals as necessary. Nurses are also a resource for teachers who have students with health issues and medical conditions that require individual attention. School nurses collaborate with guidance and special education personnel to assist with IEP accommodations and Section 504 plans and participate in re-entry meetings for students who are returning from an extended absence from school. School nurses work with the athletic trainer to conduct impact testing for student athletes who have sustained a possible concussion. Comprehensive health services ensure that students and faculty members enter a healthy school environment on a daily basis. (teachers, self-study, students)

The media program is integrated into the school's curriculum and instruction program whenever possible. Students begin to use the media center in freshman year with specific classes to learn information and technology skills and then add to the skills in other classes throughout their high school education. The media personnel collaborate regularly with the social studies department for many units including the National History Day project. All junior English classes are required to do a term paper emphasizing research skills. While the social studies department is the largest user of the media center for research, other classes such as Wellness incorporate a research and writing piece into their programs and will have students utilize the media center for projects. The instructional technology teacher works closely with the media specialist and supports teachers in the use of presentation skills training. Because the media personnel are so actively involved in the

instructional process, teachers are very comfortable bringing their classes to the library and multi-media lab to do projects. They find the experience an enhancement of the instructional process. (teachers, panel discussion, self-study)

The library personnel are very knowledgeable about the curriculum and the implementation of media strands within those academic areas. Media personnel are valuable in assisting teachers in the planning and implementing of course units. In the self-study, 89.9 percent of the staff reported media personnel to be knowledgeable in assisting them. The district level media and technology director keeps the media and technology staff informed of developments in curriculum. The school librarian is active in the Massachusetts School Library Association and attends the annual convention and is a leader in the field of school librarianship. With a knowledgeable and committed media staff, students and staff members find the media center an excellent resource and an asset to the learning process. Thus, they make better use of the library resources. (shadowing of students, self-study, teachers, survey information)

The library provides a wide range of materials, technology, and other information resources in a variety of formats. They include numerous computers for general student use, a conference room, and an additional classroom that can be used with a laptop lab. The school librarian works to keep the collection current. She regularly seeks alternative sources for materials such as library sales and bookstore donations to supplement the collection. For example, the purchase and acquisition of graphic novels and more contemporary young adult novels has led to an increase in circulation. (self-study, teacher interviews, meetings with teachers)

Students in social studies classes often utilize the media services to learn information skills. The media center is regularly scheduled with at least three classes per block as well as accommodating 25-40 individual students. Students also can access the media center before and after school. Students can take a television production and a web design class as part of the media department offerings. The library schedule is viewable on the internal First-Class calendar and then teachers can e-mail or call the media specialist to schedule classes. As there is limited supervision in writing labs throughout the school, the media center computers have been in higher demand for students. The busy and productive environment of the media center makes it a desirable place for teachers to bring students to do research and technology projects. (classroom observations, self-study, teachers)

The library readily provides the faculty and students with programs that foster independent inquiry. Through a district media and technology curriculum review process and the analysis of various curriculum areas, opportunities have been found to incorporate research in most curricular areas. A research rubric was developed and adopted by the faculty as an important part of the student mission and expectations. Students have many information choices that include print materials, databases, E-Books, and access to interlibrary loan through the regional library system. According to self-study materials, Needham High School has some of the highest use statistics for database use in the region. With a current rubric in place to drive the research process in a consistent and unified way, students report that they feel ready to do research in high school and college. (self-study, teachers, panel presentation)

There is currently an acceptable use policy for the use of the wide area network with a recently adopted addendum that includes access to the wireless network. The media and technology department has a re-evaluation of materials policy that was adopted in 1996

and a media review committee in place if materials are challenged. Student and parent acknowledgement of the policies of the use of materials and technology allow the district to establish clear guidelines on such use and any penalties that could be imposed. However, because the policy was reviewed over a decade ago, many changes in technology necessitate another examination of this policy to ensure it is up to date. (self-study, teacher interviews, meetings with teachers)

The school provides special education to students in accordance with local, state, and federal laws. Students are discussed at student support team (SST) meetings after being identified by teachers, faculty members, parents, and other students. At the SST meeting, the student's profile is reviewed to determine next steps. Possible interventions are put into place, including participation in the personal learning center. However, if testing is necessary, a referral to special education is made. Special education liaisons monitor their students by working with them in skills class for a specific number of classes per seven-day cycle, as determined in their individualized education plan (IEP). The liaisons also have access to teacher grade books via PowerSchool, which is helpful in tracking student work and progress in class. The special education department follows state and federal law by meeting requirements of the IEP process. Additionally, the liaisons write quarterly progress reports that address the student's progress towards meeting his or her individual goals and objectives. The individual skills centers are broken up by grade, but other programs are broken up by ability. The STRIVE program provides life skills and transition services for students of up to 22 years of age with more severe disabilities. It has a classroom that includes a fully functioning kitchen, necessary technology for communication, and speech and language support. The Connections program supports students with social/emotional needs who are unable to access the general education curriculum due to their disability. The Connections program also assists with students who have been away from school for a period of time for various reasons. In this situation, Connections is used to help students transition back to the general education classroom. Currently, the teacher of the Connections program does not meet with the general education departments although she feels her program would benefit from regular meetings with these departments to review curriculum. Teaching assistants are placed in some general education classes based on the level of need to help support students and give direct services as identified in a student's IEP. Multi-modal teaching and differentiated instruction take place in various classrooms, showing that teachers are aware of needs of the various learners who make up their class. With all these available programs and support, the school is better able to meet the needs of special education students. (teachers, self-study, classroom observations)

COMMENDATIONS

1. The commitment of student support services to fulfilling the mission and expectations for student learning

2. The high level of collaboration between guidance and personal counselors

3. District support for students who require life skills training

4. The accessibility and variety of library and technology resources

5. A strong culture of collaboration among student support services personnel

6.   The wide variety of communication tools employed by student support services

7.   Effective record keeping procedures

8.   The many services available to students and families through student support services

9.   Personalized counseling services for students

10.   Collaboration between school and community on suicide prevention and other behavioral issues

11.   The high level of collaboration between the guidance and special education departments

12.   The comprehensive health services offered to students and faculty

13.   The collaborative spirit between the library personnel that promotes and enhances student learning and the teachers' use of the media center

14.   Knowledgeable library personal

15.   The materials, technology, and information resources available for student use

16.   Efforts of the media specialist to secure supplemental materials

17.   A welcoming and flexible environment for learning in the media center

18.   The availability of the media center before and after school

19.   A research rubric adopted by the faculty and staff

20.   Extensive programs available to students with varying learning styles

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Formalize a guidance curriculum to be used with all students

2.   Include the guidance program in the ten-year cycle of curriculum review

3.   Increase library/media services to meet the needs of students and teachers

4.   Formalize procedures to better advise parents on course recommendations

5.   Review and revise the *Re-evaluation of Materials* policy

6.   Enable the Connections program to collaborate with specific departments regarding curriculum

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

Active community and parent participation, facilities which support school programs and services, and dependable and adequate funding are necessary for the school to achieve its mission and expectations for student learning.

1. The school shall engage parents and families as partners in each student's education and shall encourage their participation in school programs and parent support groups.

2. The school shall foster productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning.

3. The school site and plant shall support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning.

4. The physical plant and facilities shall meet all applicable federal and state laws and shall be in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.

5. Equipment shall be adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate.

6. A planned and adequately funded program of building and site management shall ensure the appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school plant.

7. There shall be ongoing planning to address future programs, enrollment changes, staffing, facility, and technology needs as well as capital improvements.

8. The community and the district's governing body shall ensure an adequate and dependable source of revenue to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, personnel, services, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning.

9. Faculty and building administrators shall have active involvement in the budgetary process, including its development and implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

Needham High School (NHS) engages parents and families as partners in their students' education and encourages their participation in school programs using various media. Parent teacher council (PTC) provides enrichment grants which are available to departments and extra-curricular student clubs. The PTC provides funds for the student exchange program and creative arts programming and sponsors the NHS All Night Party after graduation. Newsletters are sent out on a monthly basis informing parents and the community of activities taking place involving the high school. Parent surveys are used to help school personnel better understand the needs and concerns of parents and the school community. Principal coffees are held five times throughout the school year. Because of all these efforts, close ties exist between school and community that benefit students. (self-study, survey information, school leadership team)

The school uses e-mail and the principal's website to inform parents of school events; 90% of parents is actively enrolled for the e-mail listserv. However, since 10% are not receiving e-mails, it is necessary to look into other means of communication such as telephone messaging so that all parents receive important information. (self-study, survey information, school leadership team)

The staff fosters partnerships with community businesses and organizations to support student learning. There are partnerships among student clubs and community coalitions that work together on community and school-wide education initiatives. They include the NHS Suicide Prevention Association and the Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention. The community domestic violence committee works with the guidance department to bring the performance, *The Yellow Dress*, to junior students each year, and students then hold a Take Back the Night march in the community. These programs educate students so that there are fewer potential problems for students to encounter. (school leadership team, teachers, panel presentation, self-study)

A community service coordinator in the guidance office provides information to students regarding community service and job opportunities. A transition specialist with the NHS Students in Transition Requiring Instruction and Vocational Education (STRIVE) program works with community partners to ease the transition of these students into classes at Massachusetts Bay Community College and jobs in the community. Many students take driver's education classes on site through Brookline Driving School. Local media actively seek school and athletic news on a regular basis while the television teacher works part-time for the Needham Channel. The production printing facility of the graphic arts department prints for school events and small outside jobs, providing further connections between the classroom and the community. The NHS Senior to Senior program is a wellness and strength training program that connects senior students to senior members of the community, assisting them in the fitness center under the training of an area gerontologist. A pilot project currently runs for a community service learning program within the curriculum. Students benefit from the strong connection between the school and community organizations in helping them meet their community service graduation requirements and increasing learning beyond the classroom. (school leadership team, teachers, panel presentation, self-study)

The newly completed school renovations greatly enhance most aspects of educational programs and support services. The new library and computer labs allow extensive

research and project-based learning. Science labs are equipped with computers at every station and superior working areas and supplies. The language lab allows language students to practice speaking and listening and to receive feedback in effective ways. The art classrooms have space for digital photography, a dark room, ceramics, and extensive graphic design and printing. However, the design of the ceramics classroom is such that pottery wheels sit in the center of the room with exposed power strips and extension cords imposing a safety hazard. The new fitness room and gymnasium provide opportunities to strengthen the school's wellness program. Enhanced classroom technology such as reliable computer access and interactive whiteboards allow teachers to better demonstrate lessons within the classroom and to make notes available to absent students. Facilities are clean and encourage positive attitudes by students and staff members. There are new HVAC units throughout most of the school, providing a comfortable learning environment in all seasons. The new cafeteria is small for the present and future student population, requiring the school to reassess its lunch schedule. In addition, there are concerns regarding the auditorium size and the condition of the stage curtains. The new high school facility greatly adds to students' educational experience and demonstrates the commitment of the community to the school. (self-study, facility tour, classroom observations, panel presentation)

The physical plant and facilities fully meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations. All areas of the school are handicapped accessible with two elevators with Braille signage and audio signals. The science labs and dark room contain safe storage facilities for all chemicals, and all science labs have emergency eye wash stations. There are four defibrillators evenly distributed throughout the building. Fire extinguishers, fire alarms, and sprinkler systems are up-to-date. The older tar and gravel roof was replaced five years ago. Over 95% of the building (all areas except the gyms) has new HVAC units. There are construction items and appliances stored in the boiler and electrical rooms as a result of inadequate general storage space. The school facility provides a safe and comfortable environment for learning. (facility tour, self-study, classroom observations)

As part of the renovations, the school has updated technology, fitness facilities, and science and art classrooms. There is a district-wide equipment inventory list with a replacement plan for damaged and outdated equipment. Maintenance requests are sometimes not addressed in a timely manner. A new town-wide, online, work order system has been implemented to expedite repair requests. A cleaning frequency schedule drives the routine custodial care of all aspects of the facility. Kitchen equipment maintenance and repairs are outsourced by custodial management and are dealt with in a timely manner. The new technology, equipment, and facilities enhance educational programs and are properly catalogued and maintained to ensure a safe and healthy environment. (self-study, facility tour, department leaders)

There is ongoing planning to address some future needs of the high school and its future students. There are formal technology and library program plans in place. A committee of nearly 30 administrators, teachers, and school committee members conducted a thorough program review of current technology, including surveys of teachers and students. The technology plan calls for replacing technology over five years beginning in 2012, maintaining it as needed, introducing a "Learning with Laptops" program or other wireless devices to aid student learning, and creating professional development for the faculty. Each year, the district projects enrollment for the next ten years and adjusts appropriately. While the new school facility is designed for the current school population,

a plan must be developed to accommodate student population increases. The district finance director has recently proposed an amended five-year financial forecast FY2010/11-FY2014/15 because of the current economic climate, projecting to maintain a student-to-teacher ratio of 21.7. Increased needs for special education, transportation, physical therapy, and instructional expenses were also considered for this report. The town has a five-year capital plan that includes maintenance of athletic fields, a replacement cycle for school photocopiers and school musical instruments. Because of the new high school facility, there are no capital improvement plans in place for the next five years. In the current economic climate, the town has responsibly set in place plans to support the current and future needs of its students. (self-study, central office administrators, department leaders, school leadership team)

By design, the community and the school committee ensure an adequate and dependable source of revenue to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, personnel services, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning. The district's mission statement is "A school and community partnership that creates excited learners, inspires excellence, fosters integrity." The community's commitment to partner with the schools is evident in the FY10 Operating Budget Guidelines. The five-year financial forecast was created to best determine spending in light of the current economic situation and provides essential spending to maintain a high level of student learning. In past practice, Needham taxpayers have proven to be extremely supportive of the public schools, passing many overrides in the past ten years. Generous donors recently funded the Fields of Dreams project to renovate all high school athletic fields in conjunction with the building renovations. The town of Needham and the school committee provide a dependable source of revenue that positively affects student learning, and plans exist for continued support for the schools. (self-study, parents, teachers)

Faculty and building administrators are actively involved in the budgetary process on a variety of levels. Department leaders first meet with their faculty members to determine upcoming budgetary needs; they, in turn, set a proposal for the principal, who then presents the high school budgetary needs to the superintendent. The principal is given autonomy in allocating the high school budget. There is a sense of trust and transparency among the high school principal, superintendent, and school committee to determine realistic financial resources for the school. Administrators and faculty members collect and analyze data such as test scores, class sizes, and the number of students identified as requiring accommodations in order to distribute resources effectively for various programs. This transparency and involvement at numerous levels in the budgetary process ensure that student needs are adequately met. (central office administrators, school leadership team, department leaders)

COMMENDATIONS

1. Extensive parent and community support for school programs

2. Efforts by administrators to involve parents in the school

3. Effective partnerships with community organizations to increase educational opportunities

4. The collaboration of community organizations and school groups to help support students in need

5. Productive partnerships with local organizations for community service, internship and job opportunities, and the transition program for STRIVE students

6. NHS Senior to Senior wellness and strength training program

7. Exceptional new facility with enhanced science labs, fully equipped with all necessary supplies, safety precautions, and computers

8. New library with complete online databases, as well as print resources and workspaces

9. Functional computer labs to enhance student research and project-based learning

10. Language laboratory to facilitate student target language acquisition through speech and listening-comprehension exercises

11. New gym and equipment that is used strictly for physical education classes

12. State-of-the-art fitness center

13. Computers and interactive whiteboard technology in all classrooms

14. Art rooms equipped with kilns, dark room, digital photography capabilities, graphic design, and printing technology

15. Air-conditioning provided to 95% of school

16. Elevators and handicapped accessibility to all areas of school

17. Sufficiently equipped and safe science labs and art rooms

18. Up-to-code fire safety measures and automatic defibrillators throughout building

19. New roof

20. Clearly delineated cleaning and maintenance schedules throughout the building

21. Newly formed online work form for maintenance/repair requests

22. Responsible planning by the town to meet the financial needs of its educational programming over the next five years

23. Technology/library media plan to maintain and provide for future technology developments to enhance instruction

24. The community's strong commitment to provide for the schools

25. The school committee's commitment to the school

26. The district's five-year financial forecast

27. Level of trust among school committee, superintendent, and building administrators regarding the allocation of financial resources

28. Active involvement of faculty and department leaders in suggesting necessary spending

29. Use of data to appropriately distribute resources

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement other means of emergency and non-emergency communication beyond e-mail

2. Develop a plan to address the cafeteria size to comfortably fit the necessary number of students

3. Establish a timeline to make additional improvements in the auditorium

4. Rearrange the placement of the ceramic wheels and power cords in the ceramics classroom to eliminate safety hazards

5. Formulate a plan to meet custodial and maintenance needs by identifying appropriate storage space for equipment and materials from the boiler and electrical rooms

6. Remove all stored items and workspaces from boiler and electrical rooms

7. Develop a plan to accommodate in the facility anticipated student enrollment

8. Maintain current level of financial support for high school programming, personnel, facilities, equipment, services, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning

9. Continue to assess financial needs based on student data

FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES

This comprehensive evaluation report reflects the findings of the school's self-study and those of the visiting committee. It provides a blueprint for the faculty, administration, and Needham High School. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should also be apprised by the building administration yearly of progress made addressing visiting committee recommendations.

Since it is in the best interest of the students that the citizens of the district become aware of the strengths and limitations of the school and suggested recommendations for improvement, the Commission requires that the evaluation report be made public in accordance with the Commission's Policy on Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report.

A school's continued accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing valid recommendations of the visiting committee and others identified by the Commission as it monitors the school's progress and changes which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle. To monitor the school's progress in the Follow-Up Program, the Commission requires that the principal of Needham High School submit routine Two and Five-Year Progress Reports documenting the current status of all evaluation report recommendations, with particular detail provided for any recommendation which may have been rejected or those items on which no action has been taken. In addition, responses must be detailed on all recommendations highlighted by the Commission in its notification letters to the school. School officials are expected to have completed or be in the final stages of completion of all valid visiting committee recommendations by the time the Five-Year Report is submitted. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards are not being met in a satisfactory manner or if additional information is needed on matters relating to evaluation report recommendations or substantive changes in the school.

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that headmasters of member schools report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact which the change has had on the school's ability to meet CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix on page 55. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report which is required of each member school to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

The Commission urges school officials to establish a formal follow-up program at once to review and implement all findings of the self-study and valid recommendations identified in the evaluation report. An outline of the Follow-Up Program is available in the Commission's *Accreditation Handbook* which was given to the school at the onset of the self-study. Additional direction regarding suggested procedures and reporting requirements is provided at Follow-Up Seminars offered by Commission staff following the on-site visit.

 The visiting committee would like to thank the steering committee, the faculty, staff, administration, parents, and students in Needham for their hospitality during the four-day visit. The organization by the steering committee allowed the visiting committee to focus on the school, its many successes, and the ways in which it can improve. The visiting committee also appreciated the many personal touches provided throughout the visit.

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Needham High School

November 15-18, 2009

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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Commission on Public Secondary Schools

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change in the school which has a *negative impact* on the school's ability to meet any of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of a substantive change must describe the change itself as well as detail the impact of the change on the quality of education in the school. The following are potential areas where there might be negative substantive changes:

◆ available programs, including fine arts, practical arts, and student activities

◆ available facilities, including upkeep and maintenance

◆ level of funding

◆ school day and/or school year

◆ administrative structure, including the number of administrators and supervisors

◆ number of teachers and/or guidance counselors

◆ number of support staff

◆ student services

◆ the use of distance educational programs or courses

◆ educational media services and personnel

◆ student enrollment

◆ grades served by the school

◆ the student population that causes program or staffing modification(s), e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency.