

THE NEEDHAM HIGH SCHOOL

School Improvement Plan 2005 - 2007



Needham High School

To Think; To Respect; To Communicate

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To Think, To Communicate, To Respect

Needham High School is a community and a school partnership whose focus is learning. The curriculum, programs, and extracurricular activities are designed and structured so that students recognize that learning is a process, understand that they are active participants in this process, and accept that they must demonstrate progress and achievement as learners. To achieve these goals, we are committed to meeting the learning needs of all students.

We believe that students should have a variety of experiences, academic and social. We also believe that students have a responsibility to show respect and understanding for the values and beliefs of others. As a community and a school partnership, we recognize that our primary purpose is to strengthen the bonds of unity among all our members – students, staff, administration, and parents – and to work together toward the realization of our major goals; to create excited learners, to demand excellence, and to foster integrity.

NEEDHAM HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS

NEEDHAM HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:

1. Think effectively:

- acquire, evaluate, integrate, and apply knowledge
- identify and solve complex problems
- think critically and reason effectively
- think imaginatively and creatively
- generate and evaluate ideas
- apply learning to life situations
- understand and apply mathematical and scientific concepts

2. Communicate successfully:

- vary forms of communication to meet the needs of different audiences
- express ideas across disciplines
- listen actively and critically
- read with understanding a wide variety of materials
- speak effectively
- write effectively
- use a variety of forms – print, media, technology, art – to gather, synthesize, and present knowledge
- understand and express ideas in at least one language other than English

3. Contribute responsibly:

- work both independently and collaboratively
- demonstrate concern and caring for self, others, and the environment
- respect diversity and individual differences
- understand their relationship to local, national, and global communities

4. Direct their own learning:

- set high standards and well defined goals
- work toward achieving their goals
- determine priorities and manage time effectively
- evaluate their own processes and achievements
- demonstrate knowledge and skills in a variety of forms

Preface

The School Improvement Plan for Needham High School has traditionally addressed three distinct agendas with a common purpose, that is, to improve Needham High School.

Section 53 of the Massachusetts' Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1993 requires each school to address needed improvements in specific areas including: Student Performance Standards; Impact of Class Size; Student to Teacher Ratios; Supportive Adult Resources; Staff Development; Enhancement of Parental Involvement; Extracurricular Activities; Safety and Discipline; Respect and Tolerance for All Groups; and Development of Means to Address Diverse Learning Needs of as Many Children as Possible.

The Needham School Committee has adopted a mission statement reflecting the work of a broad based committee:

NEEDHAM SCHOOL SYSTEM VISION
A community and school partnership that creates excited learners,
demands excellence, and fosters integrity

The committee expects that all aspects of the school improvement plan should embody, reflect, and be consistent with this vision. To this end, the Needham School Committee articulates goals for the school system. The goals are:

- Goal #1 Construct and implement an approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices that ensures that all students meet clearly defined high standards.
- Goal #2 Establish, implement, and assess community and school practices that respond to the wellness needs of Needham students and staff.

The third agenda for school improvement is based on the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Standards for Accreditation. These Standards provide the means for determining the degree to which a school possesses the ingredients necessary to provide a quality education. Each standard is accompanied by a number of conditions or characteristics that are essential to assuring quality. These indicators guide the assessment of a particular standard and are useful in developing strategies for improvement. In November 1998, Needham High School hosted a committee from the NEASC, which evaluated the school's adherence to these Standards. In 2008, Needham High School will again host a committee, which will conduct the important NEASC decennial visit. The visit will measure newly revised Standards.

A fourth agenda has been created by the results of the Graduate Survey. The Graduate Survey, an expectation of NEASC, has provided the school feedback from the Classes of 1999 through 2003. The survey includes opinions on academic preparation for college and work, preparation in specific skills areas, preparation from specific academic departments, perception of co-curricular and athletic activities, and school climate.

School Improvement Plan - Academic Years 2005-2007

There remains substantial overlap in all agendas for school improvement. In reviewing the data, the Needham High School School Council determined the following three goals or actions to be our focus for the academic years 05/07. The driving force of school improvement will remain the high school's Mission Statement and Expectations for Student Learning.

Goal/Action #1: Prepare for the NEASC decennial accreditation visit

Background Information: A team from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges will visit Needham High School in 2008. Two significant tasks will take place in preparation for the visit:

1. Update the school's Mission and Expectations for Student Learning to the revised 2005 Standards. A steering committee will gather input from the school community to determine expectations of what students should "know and be able to do" upon graduation from Needham High School. The committee will create a revised Mission Statement as well as create rubrics to measure the Expectations for Student Learning. This work will take place during the 05/06 academic year.
2. Conduct the Self Study in anticipation to the 2008 committee visit. This work will involve all staff members in assessing the degree the school achieves each indicator under the seven accreditation standards. The work will take place primarily during the 06/07 academic year.

Activities: Create steering committees as needed. Involve entire NHS community in a series of activities to collect feedback.

Person(s) Responsible: High School administration and staff

Evidence of Accomplishment: Mission Statement and Expectations for Student Learning document (with rubrics) in place at close of 05/06 academic year; Self Study essays approved by faculty at close of 06/07 academic year.

Goal/Action #2: Implement a standards-based reporting system for student progress and achievement.

Background Information: This past summer, the district's administration developed this objective with a timeline for implementation set for the 08/09 academic year. Due to the comprehensive nature of this task, this timeline appears too ambitious to meet on a school-wide basis. Nevertheless, the staff will begin moving toward meeting this objective.

Activities: Create committees as needed. Offer professional development opportunities. Pilot a reporting system with select teachers and courses.

Person(s) Responsible: High School administration and staff

Evidence of Accomplishment: A standards-based reporting system in place for select courses for 08/09.

Goal/Action #3: Foster a bias-free school culture and climate.

Background Information: A multi-year Anti-bias Initiative began in the 04/05 academic year to address concerns with the school's culture and climate around discrimination issues.

Activities: Offer professional development opportunities for staff. Continue to implement "A World of Difference" program in classrooms. Communicate and educate the high school community. Conduct Surveys. Continue Civil Rights Review Board and other student-based organizations. Attempt to hire educators-of-color. Curriculum review.

Person(s) Responsible: High School administration, staff, and student leaders

Evidence of Accomplishment: Anti-bias Initiative programs well established. A longitudinal study via surveys will show improvement in school's culture and climate.

Reference to Achievement Gap

Needham recognizes that there is an achievement gap. Efforts to close the gap at the high school have been varied:

- Department Heads have analyzed placement patterns and encouraged students of color to challenge themselves in upper level courses.
- An anti-bias initiative was implemented at the high school to educate students on these issues.
- Adult mentors were assigned to select students.
- "Career Day Plus" was added to the 2005 Career Day to help students of color articulate and focus their future academic/career plans.
- Academic supports have been arranged for students who need the extra attention.
- Administrators and teachers communicate actively with parents to build school/home academic achievement partnerships.
- Staff development has been provided on differentiated instruction, anti-racism, and multicultural education topics.

Reference to Social and Emotional Competencies

The 03/04 academic year was the last for the Freshmen Seminar program, which provided the most direct impact on social and emotional learning. The Mentor Homeroom Initiative, an advisory-type program has attempted to fill the void left by the seminars. In the 04/05 academic year, a committee (led by Rachel Poliner and Dr. Alixe Callen) has developed a proposal to strengthen the program. We believe a revamped mentor homeroom will complement the wellness curriculum in PE/Health courses to meet the social and emotional needs of our students.

Additional Initiatives

The high school will continue to work on several smaller school-wide initiatives in an effort to continually improve our policies, practices, and student achievement:

- Senior Year Revision
- Mentor Homeroom Initiative
- Senior Project
- Academic Stress Reduction
- Homework
- Plagiarism & Cheating
- Assignment Feature of PowerSchool

Reference to Previous School Improvement Plan

Considerable gains were met via the prior School Improvement Plan through coordinated actions:

1. *Continue to respond to the NEASC recommendations.* The high school construction project has broken ground to resolve the facilities problem identified by the NEASC and the resulting probationary accreditation status.
2. *Improve parent satisfaction with school/home communication.* The most recent parent survey (2003) showed an increase in parent satisfaction, moving to 78.6% from 71.8% in 2001. Two significant actions have taken place that will likely further improve parent satisfaction:
 - a. The creation of a parent e-mail listserve by the high school PTC. The current list contains over 1600 parent e-mails and is used frequently by the administration.
 - b. The creation of a “Communication Expectations” document. The document sets expectations for student, parent, and staff communication (e.g. seeking grade information).

The administration recognizes the need to work with parents to reach an effective balance with the number of teacher/parent communications in any given time period (i.e. technology has resulted in a sharp increase in parent inquiries via e-mail).

3. *Improve the satisfaction rating for World Languages.* Although there is still room for improvement, the satisfaction rating from the Class of 2003 rose to 3.11 from 3.02 (Class of 2002). At this time, the school anticipates each of the dozen staff to return for the 05/06 academic year. In addition, the work of the administration and teachers should continue to have a positive effect on this rating.
4. *Provide an additional career exploration opportunity.* In the 04/05 academic year, a Career Counselor position was added to the high school. This professional has facilitated many new opportunities for students, including an expanded “Career Day”, career software, and a proposal for a Career Center in the Guidance Suite.