

Section I - Examples of Detailed Responses to Highlighted Recommendations

Five-Year Progress Report of Sample High School March 1, 2016

1. Increase opportunities for teachers across the disciplines to dialogue and reflect about best practices, including curriculum planning and instructional practices.

Classification: Completed

Response: As a result of the accreditation process, the visiting committee and our own faculty recognized areas of concern involving teacher collaboration. A committee was formed, and through its work, we have improved our efforts to have teachers collaborate within and across disciplines. It is our belief that we have improved our collaborative efforts on curriculum and instruction which will, in turn, improve student learning.

The collaboration committee also worked with the administration to implement and pilot two new initiatives for teacher collaboration time and peer coaching. A teacher collaboration time request sheet can be filled out by faculty members for release time to develop and implement interdisciplinary lessons that will enhance student learning. The administration stressed to the faculty that effective teacher collaboration entails extended planning and therefore coverage time for teachers to collaborate with other teachers will be provided. Also, the collaboration committee created a peer coaching/peer visitation request sheet. This new program will give teachers the opportunity to visit each other's classes to broaden teaching and learning strategies. Again, in order for this program to work and be effective, providing coverage for teachers is critical.

The collaboration committee recommended more in-service workshops focusing on the creation and implementation of interdisciplinary lessons and units. Through the work of the collaboration committee, it was found that the faculty needs more training and instruction on creating interdisciplinary units. This is seen as a critical component to teacher collaboration, and its importance was shared with the central office administration. As a result, during our Fall 2015 in-service, a workshop entitled "Creative Approaches to Teaching in Lengthened Periods" was offered.

Another recommendation made by the collaboration committee concerns challenges faced by teachers who teach the same courses. Our faculty and administration are concerned with academic challenge in our curricula. Particularly important is the challenge of instituting similar standards of academic challenge for a course taught by two or more teachers. Although addressed by our academic challenge committee, it also ties into the task of the collaboration committee. In order to promote common standards of academic challenge, the collaboration committee has proposed increased time for teachers of the same course to create common instruction and assessment tools that will foster equitable academic challenge. As a result, we made more effective use of our meeting time, both at the departmental and faculty levels, during the 2014-2015 school year. For example, early in the year departments focused on our curriculum revision process and cycle while our January department meetings focused on sharing mid-year exams and discussing standards across grade levels. In our November faculty meeting we examined our rubrics, assessing which departments were undertaking primary responsibility for each of them. During the 2015-2016 school year, our professional learning groups will provide an additional forum for these discussions. More effective use of meeting time has resulted in significantly improved teaching practices.

The collaboration committee was also concerned with teacher isolation, especially for single-teacher or small departments. Better communication to promote the collaboration of small departments with larger departments is needed at our school. In order to begin to foster collaboration, small departments need to meet periodically with larger ones in order to address interdisciplinary concepts that can be integrated into the curricula. Encouraging teacher involvement in educational organizations related to their discipline also reduces teacher isolation.

In addition, since 2013 our faculty has been working on curriculum maps. Teachers have been developing curriculum maps for their courses and putting them on our school network. Faculty will have access to the curriculum maps of all courses enabling teachers to plan and create collaborative lessons and providing a wonderful resource for new teachers. Access to the network is now available throughout the school in both classrooms and departmental offices.

Several proposed recommendations regarding collaboration have already been implemented. Others will be studied as the faculty becomes more accustomed to the new school schedule. This schedule should promote further collaboration. Teacher isolation leads to stagnation; collaboration improves teaching practices and student learning. Thus, collaboration was a critical part our NEASC self study and its promotion as part of the follow up process is leading to an improved school environment.

One major initiative planned for the 2015-2016 school year concerns the creation of professional learning groups. These teacher groups will meet during the school day. In addition to a planning period, all teachers have a resource period. Once each week during their resource period, teachers will meet with colleagues in order to discuss teaching and learning. The agenda will be focused and will allow teachers to address school-wide concerns. Professional learning groups will keep a log of activities and issues for documentation purposes. As the year begins, we will be examining our expectations for student learning, our assessment process, state frameworks and the use of technology. Implementing professional learning groups will enable Sample High School to move towards reaching its goal of becoming a professional learning community.

2. Provide more opportunities for student self-assessment.

Classification: Completed

Response: As we began the self study process, teachers made a significant commitment to integrate student self-assessment within their curriculum. At that time we asked teachers to examine their curriculum and include opportunities for self-assessment at several points throughout the year. We shared tools and strategies for doing so and gathered samples of both instruments and student responses. Further, we discussed how to use the information in meaningful ways to improve teaching and learning. Now, we believe it is the individual teacher's responsibility to continue this process. As each semester draws to a close, examples of student self-assessment are shared at the departmental level. When the principal met with each of the elective areas in January 2015, student self-assessments and student reflections on the expectations for student learning were the major topic for discussion. These assessments will continue to be a topic of discussion not only at department meetings but also in our professional learning groups. Emphasis will be placed upon how we can use this data to improve the effectiveness of our curriculum. Likewise, administrators often include student self-assessment as a topic within the teacher evaluation process. In the fall of 2015, the high school faculty attended an in-service program on assessment practices that will include a component related to student self-assessment.

3. Provide representation on the leadership team from each of the elective departments to ensure appropriate involvement in the decision-making process.

Classification: Completed

Response: The leadership team consists of the high school principal, assistant principal, director of guidance, and curriculum leaders in the areas of English, science, mathematics and social studies. At this time fiscal constraints and the small size of most other departments impede the creation of additional leadership positions. To address this concern, the principal schedules bi-monthly meetings with each of the small departments and monthly meetings with the world languages department. This provides the same opportunity for access and input as those departments represented on the leadership team. This allows them to focus on curricular issues, share current initiatives and address problems or concerns that may arise in a given discipline. The teachers, working collaboratively with the principal, have a primary role in the decision-making process in terms of budget development, course offerings, and curricular revisions. This approach, initiated in the 2014-2015 school year, will be refined in the 2015-2016 school year as departments begin to assume more responsibility and develop meeting agendas collaboratively.

4. Provide support for technology initiatives that are integrated into instruction, including the necessary equipment and professional development.

Classification: In Progress

Response: As part of our addition/renovation plan, each classroom has updated technology that facilitates access and integration. Twenty-three Smart Boards are located throughout the building, providing increased opportunities for integration. During the in-service time in the fall of 2014, training in technology was a mandated teacher requirement at the high school. Topics covered included the use of "GradeQuick," Smart Boards, and other equipment available in each room. Also the process and procedures for putting information on the school website were reviewed. Teachers will receive additional training and updates on the Techpaths software already introduced for our curriculum mapping initiative. At this time, the project is not yet complete and therefore requires on-going monitoring.

5. Develop and implement a curriculum review cycle for all disciplines and commit the time, resources and funding for this process.

Classification: Completed

Response: Within departments we have created a five year plan for standardized curriculum revision and for the acquisition of necessary texts and support materials. The work was completed by the high school staff and, as such, reflects its perspective on student needs. Our district plan for curriculum will undergo revision during the 2015-2016 school year and we will participate in its development. During the summer of 2015 administrative in-service, a draft document was developed as the first step in this process. This draft is consistent with the indicators found in the Curriculum Standard. Currently we are in the middle of two district initiatives regarding curriculum development. The first is *Understanding by Design* and the other is curriculum mapping using TechPaths software that will facilitate improved articulation across grade levels. District in-service in 2014-2015 focused on providing the technical skills to utilize this software effectively.

In addition, at the high school we received training on the development of essential questions. In April, 2015 a district sub-committee met to assess progress on our district plan and to establish goals for the 2015-2016 school year. The high school principal has an annual allocation for the support of curriculum development that includes a component for resource materials as well as for curriculum work by staff members.

6. Review the level of challenge of the curriculum in terms of the extent to which it engages all students in inquiry, problem solving, critical thinking and the authentic application of knowledge, and report any resultant modifications.

Classification: Completed

Response: During the 2014-2015 school year, a committee of members from all departments reviewed our curricula concerning academic challenge and depth over breadth of coverage. A definition of academic challenge, taken from Strong, Silver and Perini, Teaching What Matters Most, was used to ensure consistency across departments. The committee members went to their departments and reviewed their respective modifications for the level of academic challenge and depth over breadth of coverage in accordance with the recommendations. Each department was then asked to present a report to the committee outlining its modifications, and each report was discussed by the committee to determine if the modifications were in line with the recommendations. To ensure ongoing consistency and alignment, we established this concern as a school-wide priority that will be addressed at the leadership level, within departments, and within professional learning groups. Certain modifications were common across departments such as implementing *Understanding by Design* and curriculum mapping, restructuring due to the new schedule, and increasing the use of student self-assessment. Others were unique to specific disciplines and/or courses. A file that includes departmental reports and modifications is available in the main office.

Section II – Examples of Responses to General Recommendations in the Accreditation Report

Five-Year Progress Report of Sample High School March 1, 2016

STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION: Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations

1. Develop a process for the regular review of the mission statement and student expectations.

Classification: Completed

Response: Following the completion of our accreditation visit, our steering committee recognized the need to establish a group that could develop a process for revising and updating our school Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations. The task began in the spring of 2013 and was completed in the fall of 2015. The plan was presented and discussed at two faculty meetings in order to ensure a balanced perspective. We will review our mission and expectations annually and communicate it regularly with all stakeholders via our School Council.

STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION: Curriculum

1. Develop a plan to broaden K-12 curriculum articulation across all disciplines.

Classification: Completed

Response: The district began a curriculum mapping initiative three years ago in order to increase and improve K-12 articulation. All teachers are involved in mapping curriculum utilizing TechPaths software. The maps are on our network in order to facilitate their accessibility across buildings, grade levels and departments. Individual teachers are encouraged to consult maps when planning units of study. In addition, we have been sharing our maps at grade levels and within departments to promote sequencing of skills across levels. Completed maps have been the focus for discussion at 7-12 articulation meetings and at district grade level meetings. We plan to continue this initiative in order to improve curriculum articulation and, as a result, student learning experiences. District level meetings are also held in the various subject areas to facilitate communication and provide the interaction needed to address areas of concern within a discipline. The development of curriculum maps will continue as a district initiative over the next several years, providing an important tool for articulation K-12.

STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION: Instruction

1. Formalize the process used to place middle school students in the appropriate high school course considering the importance of heterogeneity.

Classification: Completed

Response: Middle and high school teachers in core areas discuss student placement during annual fall articulation meetings. Specific placement criteria and guidelines are reviewed. Teacher recommendations and student level of success are key factors in the process. However, the final choice rests with the parents and the students. We want our students to enter high school with a positive outlook and a sense of confidence in their ability to be successful. A copy of the placement criteria for English is included in our files as a sample.

STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION: School Culture and Leadership

1. With the increase in enrollment, ensure appropriate class sizes in elective areas and at all levels.

Classification: In Progress

Response: Class size and number of staff members are clearly linked to the budget. The administration considers staffing a high priority and each year looks to add staff and provide more reasonable and equitable class sizes. While two and one-half additional positions were requested for the 2015-2016 school year, fiscal constraints eliminated that request entirely. The administration establishes class size limits for each course. These limits are imperative in courses that involve lab activities or the utilization of technology that must be accessible to all course participants.

STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION: School Resources for Learning

1. Publicize the student assistance process to staff, students, and parents and include regular education teachers and the school nurse on the team.

Classification: Completed

Response: As of the fall of 2015, two regular education teachers serve on our student assistance team. The nurse sits in on meetings for students who have medical issues/problems. This broadens the perspective of the team and promotes other links within the school community. In addition, the team developed a brochure for all parents, students and interested community members. The brochure explains the purpose of the team, the procedures for the student assistance process, the most frequently used strategies, and a list of the team members. This brochure will be updated each fall and the contents will be included in our Student Handbook.

III. Substantive Changes

There have been no changes since the school's last letter of substantive change dated March 14, 2015.

IV. Core Values and Beliefs about Learning

Attached

V. Examples of Initiatives

As noted below we developed a tutoring program to better meet the goal stated in our mission statement of "providing for students' individual needs." Similarly we instituted the orientation program in order to educate our students about, and to focus their attention on, their individual achievement of the school's mission and expectations

The school adopted a modified long-block schedule effective in September 2015 to better meet the values in our mission statement of "developing students who are cooperative learners" and "encouraging students to focus on essential questions in their learning."

We currently are developing a model that provides for a deeper level of participation by all stakeholders in school decision-making. Again, this initiative is driven by language in both the mission statement, related to "as part of a cohesive school community," and in one of our stated civic goals, "to contribute productively to the school community."

VI. Strengths/Achievements

A new, largely faculty-initiated tutoring program has been developed to supplement the existing tutoring center. The program will involve faculty volunteers in tutoring students who are referred by their teachers. This tutoring might be short-term and is independent of the special education program. It is particularly geared toward ninth grade students to provide them with success and confidence in their first year.

Additionally, a new orientation program for ninth graders has been developed in which teams of teachers, support staff, and administrators are trained to work with freshmen on their first day here. The emphasis is on leadership, self-esteem, and learning about the expectations and culture of the school.

VII. Restructuring or other Reform Initiatives

We plan to move to a fourth house in the near future, and transitional administrative changes have been made in order to prepare for this. In the proposed budget for the 2016-2017 school year, an additional .5 curriculum coordinator position and a full-time housemaster assistant position have been requested. The Long-Range Planning Committee will continue to guide the administration in keeping pace with increasing student enrollment.

The entire school community has been working diligently on strategies to help our students improve their performance on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test. As a result, on both the 2014 and 2015 tests, our level of student achievement was noteworthy. Student performance on the CAPT is linked to graduation; thus, test performance, as well as strategies for those who do not meet proficiency, becomes critical. In addition, we have been struggling over the last two years to maintain a high quality educational program in the midst of a major construction and renovation project. The faculty and staff have persevered and their dedication and efforts are commendable. Meanwhile, the construction project is nearing completion.

VIII. Follow-Up Program at Sample High School

As a result of the accreditation process and the restructuring initiative, the communication and organizational chart illustrates the program for follow-up, as most of the visiting committee's recommendations fit nicely into our restructuring scheme. Four pertinent study groups have been developed to meet the needs for school improvement. These groups meet twice monthly and each has an elected chairperson who is a member of the management team and participates in any school-wide decision-making process. All decisions of the committee are brought to the entire faculty for consensus.

The Parent-Community Group, which meets monthly and sets its own agenda, has two representatives on the management team. The student group meets monthly and also has two representatives on the Management Team. This ensures participation in both the Follow-Up Program and the *Re: Learning Project* which is our restructuring initiative.

Thomas Friedman, Social Studies
Bill Gates, Technology
Tony Bennett, Music
Maya Angelou, Speech
Alvin Poussaint, Guidance Director

John Nash, Mathematics
Linda Darling-Hammond, Assistant Principal
Carl Sagan, Science
Jonathan Kozol, Principal
Jane Goodall, World Languages