

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE

Newtown High School

Newtown, Connecticut
September 18 - 21, 2005

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Edmund C. Higgins, CHAIR
Christine Woodman, ASSISTANT CHAIR
Arlene Gottesman, PRINCIPAL

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 considers this visiting committee report of Newtown 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 Newtown 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 that 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 body 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

- Mission and Expectations for Student Learning
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment of Student Learning

Support Teaching and Learning Standard

- School 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 Newtown High School, a committee of 18 members including the principal/principal's designee 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 committees include students and parents

The self-study of Newtown High School extended over a period of 34 school months from

August 2002 to June 2005. The visiting committee was pleased to note that students and parents joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations. 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, Newtown 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 18 evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Newtown High School. The Committee members spent four days in Newtown, 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, the state department of education, and central office administrators, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Newtown High School.

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

- review of the school's self-study materials
- 55 hours shadowing - students for a half-day
- a total of 18 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 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 Newtown 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.

The eighteen members of the Newtown High School Visiting Team were grateful for the school's excellent hospitality. The team was impressed with everyone's responsiveness as the team sought to get to know and understand this excellent school. The community should be justifiably proud of the Newtown High School teachers who were so responsive and the students who, throughout the four days of the visit, consistently demonstrated very responsible behaviors. The students' active involvement in their school and their contributions to the Newtown community and beyond are certainly noteworthy.

The team was very strong in its belief that this report identify many of the things that make Newtown High School such a special school and that its recommendations enable the school community to fulfill its promise of excellence for every Newtown student.

As the visiting team got to know the school and to see the teachers' dedication to teaching and learning, it appeared that the significance of the new accreditation standards may not have been fully understood or appreciated. For a renowned school so dedicated to preparing its students for post-secondary education, it was surprising to observe that the keystone expectations of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges' accreditation standards had not been met. Every public high school in New England is to have a mission statement and a set of expectations for student learning that are organized into academic expectations as well as social and civic expectations. Each of the academic expectations is to be aligned with the curriculum and to have a set of performance standards by which student progress in achieving those expectations can be assessed and measured over time.

These accreditation standards also expect a school to have a mission statement that truly drives the school's practices and guides its decision-making. While it was clear the faculty holds high expectations for their students and does seek to prepare them for college and other post-secondary study, the majority of teachers stated that the school's mission did not effect what they do as teachers.

The NEASC accreditation standards and abundant research strongly support the concept that academic expectations should be clearly articulated so all members of the school community understand what is expected, and, as a result, students are more likely to work to achieve those expectations. Second, those expectations must apply to all students, not just those perceived to be college bound or able to meet them. Third, to know how well students are achieving those expectations, all students must be assessed using a set of performance standards or rubrics that clearly describe varied levels of achievement. Finally, the school and teachers are to use those assessment results to adjust curriculum and instruction so all students can be more successful in achieving the school's academic expectations.

Instead of one set of articulated academic expectations clearly aligned with the school's curriculum, Newtown High School has three sets of expectations for student learning: one, preparing students for post-secondary study; two, the performance-based graduation requirements developed in compliance with Connecticut's law for the class of 2006; and three, the expectations listed in the school's mission statement. While these latter expectations may be embedded in the school's culture, they are not clearly aligned with curriculum to ensure that all

students have the opportunity to learn, develop, and be assessed on their progress in achieving them. These expectations do not have an aligned set of performance standards by which to assess student performance and thus student progress in achieving those expectations. Without assessing student progress, there are no results that can be used to revise curriculum and improve instruction in order to foster improved student learning.

The second set of academic expectations derived from Connecticut's requirement for the class of 2006 include information literacy, writing, oral communications, and problem-solving. These expectations do have aligned performance standards, are identified as graduation requirements with a clear benchmark for success, and are used throughout the curriculum to assess some students' progress in achieving these four expectations. However, all students are not required to demonstrate an acceptable level of performance on all four expectations in order to be graduated.

Students who achieve the goal standard on each of the four components of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test [CAPT] are exempt from these expectations even though the CAPT does not assess spoken communications and the graduation requirement rubric for information literacy describes a much broader and higher set of expectations than what is assessed on CAPT. Thus, these expectations do not strictly apply to all Newtown High School students, but only to those who do not achieve goal on the CAPT. The high expectations for information literacy and oral communications do not technically apply to those students who achieved the goal standard on CAPT.

A school that prepares almost all its students for post-secondary education should have higher expectations for all of its students than what is assessed on a tenth grade test. The school's expectations should also explicitly include and assess learning experiences in the students' junior and senior years.

The Newtown High School community needs to revisit and revise its mission and expectations so they meet the requirements identified in the NEASC accreditation standards.

As much as Newtown is focused on students' academic achievement, the importance of personalizing all students' learning experiences is as important. At a stage in an adolescent's life when the increasing pressures and challenges of growing up are magnified by the physical, social, and emotional changes students are experiencing, the school and community must provide adequate resources and support to enable them to successfully weather these significant challenges. With a student population of almost of 1,700, special efforts must be taken to insure that every student believes they are known, respected, and valued as both an individual and a student. Small classes, especially in the freshman and sophomore years are vital in this effort. The newly initiated advisory program should be a valuable asset in this school's efforts to insure each student is well known and supported throughout their high school careers. The advisory program can provide excellent opportunities for all students to be actively involved in discussing school issues as well as providing an arena in which the student assistance and guidance programs can more affectively address the personal and academic needs of the students.

The Newtown High School community can be justifiably proud of the achievements of the majority of its students on the various standardized tests and college admissions. However, from an outsider's perspective, it is clear that some students believe they are not valued by the school, teachers, and even peers. Even the grade weighting system, while it certainly highlights the high achieving students, actually hinders college admission opportunities for those students in the middle, and magnifies the unintended inequity against the lower achieving students. Changing the name of courses does not address the needs of these students to graduate

possessing the skills, competencies, and attributes needed to continue their education after high school. Life-long and post secondary learning is a requirement for all students to be successful and contributing citizens in the 21st century.

On the other end of the student achievement spectrum, full participation in the higher challenges of both advanced placement and student activities appears to be open only to those who can afford it. While this implication may be unintended, students with economic needs are prevented from participation in courses and activities that require students to pay a fee. In a democratic society that guarantees a free public education for all, to require a student to pay a fee to be enrolled in a course in the school's curriculum is unacceptable. If the school wants to require all students in AP classes to take the AP test, then the school should pay for it. No student should be deprived of higher academic challenges because they will not admit to being financially needy.

Newtown's advanced placement scores are impressive, but their current management raises the question about why a school that sends so many students on to college does not open the doors to those advanced placement opportunities and encourage and enable more students to experience these very challenging "college-level" learning opportunities. Concern about the percent that 'pass' those tests should not be blocking students from being encouraged to undertake this high challenge of taking the courses.

It would serve the students well if the Newtown High School community looked at ways to increase the academic challenge for all students across all levels of achievement. The school community should investigate ways to open doors to learning for all students rather than being gate keepers preventing improved learning for all.

For Newtown High School to be successful in fulfilling its potential and truly preparing all its students for a knowledge-based, technologically driven world, the community of Newtown must do much more to support the teachers' efforts to improve learning for every student. The overcrowded facility, the lack of adequate numbers of teachers, the overworked staff, and the limited technology are all issues that the community must address quickly.

The significant increase in student population over the last few years has stretched the facility, the faculty, and the staff to almost the breaking point. There is no question that the resulting huge classes have a negative impact on the quality of student learning. That in one school year hundreds of students were not enrolled in courses of interest to them because there were no available teachers to teach those classes and no available rooms in which to hold those classes are just examples of the seriousness of the lack of adequate resources experienced by the Newtown students. The cafeteria is totally inadequate to feed almost 1,700 in a timely manner and, as a result, has a significant and negative impact on the content and delivery of the educational program. A facility or facilities that can feed close to one-half of the students at one time would eliminate many of those issues and allow for the more effective delivery of the existing educational program.

The lack of an adequate number of classrooms is certainly having a significant and negative impact on the scope and sequence of the educational program and severely limiting the opportunities for student learning. These facility limitations impede the delivery of the educational program and prevent offering increased learning opportunities that would appeal to the widely varied interests and goals of Newtown's students.

The lack of adequate technology and the means to maintain it inhibits the school's ability to properly prepare all its students to live in an information-based, technologically-driven world

in which they will be studying, living, and working with others who have had those resources and opportunities.

To serve a student body the size of the student population in Newtown High School, there is a glaring need from more teachers, not only to maintain reasonable and productive class sizes, but also to offer varied learning opportunities that better meet the diverse needs and interests of the individual students. So many students enrolled in over-crowded core academic classes and hundreds of students denied access to creative and authentic learning opportunities should not be the case for a school community that can certainly afford to provide an excellent education for all of its students and that prides itself on preparing its students to meet the challenge of college.

With the rapid rise in number of students, the personnel infrastructure needed for a smooth running and responsive school has not kept pace. The clerical staff of Newtown High School can not continue to do all that is expected when the enrollment has increased 25%. Those more than 400 students significantly increase the demands addressed by the clerical staff, whether it be schedule changes, attendance, parent notifications, college applications or simply trying to make an appointment. It is unreasonable to expect this increased demand to be handled by the clerical staff that served when there were 1,100 students.

It is hoped that this report will help the town better understand the seriousness of this good school's needs and, as a result, immediately begin to address and resolve these identified issues. This report should encourage the Newtown school community to reflect on existing practices to identify changes that will encourage all students to achieve the school's high expectations for them. With the faculty's increased understanding of NEASC's standards and its experience in developing and using performance standards to assess student progress in achieving explicit academic expectations, the teachers will be able to quickly review and articulate the school's academic expectations that apply to all students and to develop and implement school-wide performance standards and techniques to assess student progress in achieving those expectations.

The visiting team applauds the professional dedication to the school and to teaching and learning that go well beyond the classroom and the school day. The faculty definitely wants its students to succeed.

Newtown High School is a good school. It has a dedicated faculty, a student body that wants to succeed, and parents who support their students and the school. While there are significant facility and personnel resource problems that are close to crisis, the visiting team is confident that Newtown High School will be successful in preparing all its students to be life-long learners and contributing members of society.

School and Community Narrative

Newtown is located in Connecticut approximately ten miles east of Danbury and ten miles north of Bridgeport. The major urban centers of New York, New Haven and Boston are within one to three hours away. Newtown is a suburban town with strong rural roots. The community is socio-economically diverse, with a broad range in levels of income and education. There is strong sense of partnership in the community between students, teachers, parents, and other community members who work together to provide students with a safe and challenging environment in which they can develop as productive and contributive citizens. There has been a high school serving Newtown residents since 1902. The core of the current school was built in 1970. The faculty, parents, students, administrators, board of education, and town officials developed a very comprehensive plan for the renovation, expansion, and improvement of

Newtown High School that was completed in 1997. The district consists of Newtown High School, which serves grades 9-12; a 7-8 middle school; a 5-6 intermediate school; four elementary schools; three independent schools that serve elementary and middle school students; and a small alternative high school serving approximately 15 students. Newtown High School receives the vast majority of its incoming 9th grade students from the public middle school. A small number of students are also received from St. Rose, the K-8 parochial school, and from two independent K-8 schools. There are two students enrolled from outside the district.

Newtown contains a number of light industries and technology related companies. Small businesses and retail operations are found throughout the town and a large shopping center is located along a major thoroughfare. Beyond the employment opportunities found within the town, many residents travel the nearby highway network to cities such as Danbury, Stamford, Bridgeport, and New York City. As reported in the 2000 census, the occupations of the residents of Newtown can be categorized broadly as 52.7% professional, 38.3% skilled and semi-skilled, and 9% service industries. Of those over the age of 25, 92.8% has a high school diploma and 49.8% has a bachelor's degree or higher. Again, according to the 2000 census, 2.2% of families was below the poverty level, and unemployment was at 1.6%. The median household income in Newtown was \$90,193, which was above the state average. Housing ranges from modest trailer homes, apartments, and condominiums to million dollar single residences. New development has resulted in a significant increase in the average cost of a home, from \$202,459 in 1992 to \$339,035 in 2001. By 2004 the average cost had risen to \$530,000.

The population of Newtown has risen steadily since 1980. The community and the school district have experienced especially rapid growth over the last ten years. In 1990, the total population of the town was 20,779. As of the 2000 census, the town population had increased to 25,031, a 20.5% increase in just one decade. Projections to 2007 indicate 10.55% growth resulting in a town population of 27,674. At Newtown High School, the student population has surged from a low of 926 in 1992 to the current, increasingly diverse enrollment of 1,697. The student population has increased even faster than the population of the town as a whole, 26.9% in just the last five years. The excellent reputation of the public schools is one of the factors often cited for moving to Newtown.

The K-12 student population is 4,204. The school system population reflects the racial, cultural, and ethnic composition of the town. While the overall minority population of the school district is small, it has increased over the last five years from 3.1% to 4.4%. The student population includes 1.8% Asian American, 0.8% African American, and 1.8% Hispanic American. In the district as a whole, 88.7% of students are enrolled in public schools. The composition of the high school student body reflects that of the town and district. While the minority population of the high school is small, it has increased from 2.9% in 1997-98 to 4.4% in 2002-03: Asian American 1.8%, African American 0.8%, Hispanic American 1.8%. Newtown High Schools seeks to building a community that pursues dignity and tolerance. Social Studies and World Language courses and programs such as Sociology, Multi-Cultural Perspectives, World Religions, Conversations About Race, and Cultural Immersion Days; selection of readings in English courses from diverse cultural sources; and co-curricular activities such as our Asian Students Organization, Diversity Club, and Cultural Healing Day provide students with a variety of ways to experience and appreciate diversity.

In 2002-03, the Newtown High School per pupil expenditure was \$10,187, which is slightly lower than the state average of \$10,387. Newtown is ranked 139 out of the 169 school districts in Connecticut in per pupil spending. In 1994-95, 72% of the school's funding was generated from local taxation, 25% from state sources, and less than 3% from other sources. The percentage of the local property tax allocated to schools for the past two years was 59% in 2002-03 and 58% in 2001-02. In 2002-03, there is evidence of a shift from state to local sources, with 75.9% from local revenue, 22.9% from state sources, and 1.2% from other sources. The school district has a longstanding reputation of providing an excellent education with a lean budget.

The high school population, although growing, has remained relatively stable and age-appropriate. Approximately 75.7% of the 2003 graduates entered school as freshmen four years earlier. At the district level, 93% of elementary and middle school students attended the same school the previous year. In 2002-03 the students were served by 119.2 certified staff members, including 101.3 teachers, 7.7 administrators, 2 library/media staff, 7.4 counselors, social workers, and school psychologists. According to our recent survey, 87% of our teachers has earned master's degree or above. In addition, 26% of teachers are trained as mentors, assessors, or cooperating teachers. Three of our faculty members have earned National Board Certification. Average daily attendance has been consistently high on the part of both teachers and students. On average in 2002-03, teachers were absent 5.9 days due to illness or personal time. The ratio of all certified staff to students is approximately 1:12. The ratio of teachers to students is 1:14. Teachers of academic classes have an average student load of 109. The average academic class size is 21.8: 21.2 in Algebra I, 22.3 in Biology I, 21.4 in 10th Grade English, and 22.3 in American History.

The school schedule offers students an eight period day that rotates so only six classes meet Tuesday through Friday. All eight classes meet for a conventional 43 minute period on Mondays and for an extended 53 minute period three additional days each week. It is believed that students learn best when they are provided with a challenging environment. Courses are offered at four levels, all of which prepare students for college. Flexible, student-centered scheduling results in individualized programs that meet the specific needs of each student. Students with learning disabilities are assigned to a special education faculty member under a case management system. Performance-based activities and assessments that accommodate a variety of learning styles are emphasized throughout the educational program. Students have frequent opportunities to set goals and develop a plan to complete an assigned project or solve a problem. Students are also given many opportunities to use interaction with others, experiences, and technology as sources of knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and inquiry. Eleven advanced placement courses are offered and an extensive independent study program for gifted and talented students is provided. Instrumental and choral music, art, drama, student enterprises, and senior projects provide students with opportunities to develop their gifts and talents in a wide variety of areas. It is recognized that the best work with students is the result of collaboration with colleagues. There is no school-wide common planning time; however, informal sharing of ideas goes on daily. Teachers of students at the same grade level are given time to plan together as often as possible during in-service days and department meetings. When possible, schedules of teachers working in a team are coordinated to provide for common preparation time. Curriculum development funds are set aside to pay teachers for curriculum work outside of school hours and during the summer. Teachers may take "professional days" to attend or present workshops at regional and national conventions. Some of teachers also extend their professional

responsibilities by serving on the local, state, and national boards of professional organizations and by serving as adjunct professors for local colleges and universities.

Newtown High School has been recognized by the State of Connecticut and by the National Schools of Excellence Program as a Blue Ribbon school. Students are expected to exhibit a commitment in the classroom, school, and larger community. The high student attendance rate and low drop-out rate provide evidence that students meet these expectations. On October 1, 2002, 96.2% of students was in attendance. Even though the number of students has increased dramatically, the dropout rate has fallen from 1.1% in 1996-97 to 0.8% in 2001-02. The cumulative four-year rate from the class of 2002 was 2.2%, significantly below both the ERG, at 4.3%, and the State, at 10.8%.

Recognition of student achievement in both academic and non-academic areas takes many forms. The lobby is lined with display cases that house a variety of athletic awards and art projects. The corridor leading to the Newtown High School Library Media Center houses a permanent student art collection and FBLA State awards and recognition. Photographs of cast and crew from drama productions line the corridor adjacent to the auditorium. Student designed and executed murals provide enduring witness both to the students' artistic skill and to their involvement in important issues. In collaboration with local business leaders, a student is recognized each month for achievement and contributions to the community with a dinner and newspaper article. Over the course of the year, the principal regularly uses the loudspeaker to mention outstanding performances in a variety of academic and non-academic activities and competitions. The school newspaper, *The Hawkeye*, salutes student achievement in a variety of areas. For example, a recent issue included articles with titles such as "Peer Leadership provides season of selfless service," "Coffee house showcases local talent," and "Lyddy creates fandemonium in Newtown" about a student who created a website for Newtown sports fans and designed fan t-shirts as a fundraiser for the school. Two awards assemblies are held at the end of the year, for seniors and juniors respectively, to congratulate the hundreds of students who have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement and/or sustained community service. The Newtown Scholarship Association presents approximately a dozen awards each year, and, over the last 67 years, has assisted students with grants totaling over 2.5 million dollars. Over the last three years, over \$150,000 has been granted to students in continuing aid. Individual benefactors, businesses, private groups, and fraternal organizations annually contribute significant funds for scholarships, as well as special events sponsored through the school.

Newtown High School set rigorous academic goals for its students at the same time that they integrate essential skills into all curricular areas to enable all students to experience success. As a result, Newtown High School's standardized test scores are strong compared to state averages for both the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) and for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT I). In 2002-03 student performance in all four areas of the CAPT significantly exceeded state averages. For example, 72.8% of Newtown's 10th graders met state goals in reading, compared with a state average of 47%. Similarly, in mathematics 70% of Newtown's 10th graders met state goals, compared with a state average of 45.1%. The average score of the Class of 2002 on the verbal section of the SAT was 537, compared with a state average of 502. The average score of this class on the math section was 534, compared with a state average of 503. Participation rates in both standardized tests are high, with 98.1% of students participating in the 2002-03 CAPT and 93.4% of the Class of 2002 participating in the SAT I. Beginning with the class of 2006, in order to graduate, students must either meet state

goals on all four areas of the CAPT or demonstrate that they can meet performance standards established by our faculty in four key areas: problem-solving, information literacy, written communication, and spoken communication.

Over the past decade, the faculty has taken significant steps to develop authentic, standards-based performance activities and assessments for students. These experiences include science and world language laboratory work, problem-based inquiries, portfolios, web site development, cultural immersion days, community service, senior projects, exhibitions, performances, and authentic work experiences in catering, preschool, horticulture, graphics and computer repair. Anecdotal evidence indicates that students are more engaged in learning as a result of the emphasis on authentic learning experiences and performance-based assessment. The academic and co-curricular programs are designed to meet the needs of students with varied backgrounds. In addition to a strong college preparatory academic program, there are opportunities in performing arts, applied arts and technology as well as a comprehensive athletic program. One indicator of the success of students is the participation rate in these activities; 85% of students is involved in co-curricular activities. Students are encouraged to initiate activities through a simple process that involves notifying the administration, securing an advisor, and putting club goals in writing. Recent student initiatives have created an Asian Student Association, the Improvisation Club, and a Fencing Club.

In 2002-03, 11.3% of students received services from the special education department. Approximately 1% of students was enrolled in special education courses and six students or 0.4% of students were in bilingual/ESL classes. Because of the use of collaborative teaching teams (see below) and the faculty's strong belief in inclusion, the number of students receiving additional support services in special education has been reduced from 16% ten years ago to the current percentage. Collaborative teams, including both a regular and a special education teacher, work together to teach courses that combine regular education and special education students. Collaboratives, which are offered in physical education, art, and all academic areas, make it possible for special education students to meet many, if not all, of their requirements through mainstream classes. The school is dedicated to helping students with disabilities reach their fullest potential, become responsible for their own learning, and be totally integrated into our school's programs. The school is equally concerned with meeting the needs of students who benefit from a challenge beyond that provided by the typical high school program. Approximately 50% of students is enrolled in honors or advanced placement courses. During the 2002-03, 18.9% of students was enrolled in courses for college credit. In the same year, 28.4% of seniors took advanced placement exams. Ninety-one percent (91%) of students earned scores of 3 or more, compared with the state average for the same year of 72.3% and the ERG average of 79.5%. In 2003-04, 53 students earned the designation of AP Scholar by the College Board in recognition of their exceptional achievement on the college-level advanced placement exams.

Newtown High School is at the top of its ERG in the percentage of students who attend two or four-year colleges, 88.5% in 2002, 88% in 2003. An informal survey of graduates indicate that they are well prepared for college. Students benefit from a wide range of cultural activities and events in the community. Close proximity to several private and public universities and colleges, as well as museums and theaters in nearby metropolitan areas, provides opportunities for students. Job training partnerships and work experience programs are made possible through a coalition of businesses and the high school. A career shadowing program provides students with the opportunity to spend a day on the job with a local businessperson or professional. The

school-to-career program has been identified as a model in the State of Connecticut (see appendices). The enterprise model provides students with real-world job experience serving the school and community in a variety of fields including the food service industry, childcare, computer design and repair, horticulture and floral design, and graphic arts. The enterprise advisory board is composed of student and teacher representatives and local business and community leaders. Board members discuss issues related to student enterprises.

Recent initiatives have grown out of a longstanding commitment to shared decision-making based on a shared philosophy of education. Six years ago, teachers and administrators worked together to articulate the goals for students that all teachers shared, regardless of discipline. This work resulted in a document called The Common Denominator and provided the foundation for the school's current mission statement, which was revised in 2002-03. Students are expected to create and produce significant work, to pursue learning beyond what is required, and to engage in a lifelong contribution to self and society. Work began in 2001-02 to develop graduation standards that would incorporate expectations of students and emphasize performance-based instruction and assessment. Members of the faculty worked with parents and students to develop content and performance standards for four key areas: problem-solving, information literacy, written communication, and spoken communication. Analytical rubrics were then created to measure student achievement on performance assessments related to these standards. The school is in the process of setting up a school-wide, interdisciplinary system to gather quantitative data about student achievement in each of the key areas.

In 2002-03, a K-12 committee of administrators and teachers met to establish district goals and to create action plans to meet these goals. Four goals were identified, all of which are closely aligned with our school mission and expectations.

1. Students' basic human needs are met within the learning environment.
2. Students will learn and grow based on individual strengths and needs.
3. All students will learn well through engagement in a challenging, coordinated, and consistent curriculum K-12.
4. Students will express, develop, and substantiate ideas and experiences through writing.

At the high school, work toward these goals is on-going and has already included school-wide sharing of teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse learning styles, articulating grade-specific learning objectives for each of our nine standards for reading and writing, and providing 10th grade science students with a practice CAPT exam and feedback to help them develop skills in technical writing.

Also in 2002-03 a Newtown High School Strategic Planning Committee composed of students, parents, teachers, and administrators, met to discuss a wide range of program possibilities: alternative approaches to the senior year, online courses, innovative physical education, and an academy approach to one or more subject areas. Committee members conducted considerable research in each of these areas, providing a knowledge base to help us with challenges related to rapid community, district, and school population growth.

In 2003-04, concerns over the impact of the growing student population on the positive climate of the school resulted in a Small Town Initiative involving administrators and teachers in pro-active discussion and planning. This initiative has already resulted in several steps toward maintaining and improving a positive climate, the most significant of which is the monthly advisory meeting at which information is shared with students to help them be successful in all aspects of their high school experience and at which information is gathered from students so questions and concerns can be addressed.

Newtown High School accepts teacher interns and student teachers from half a dozen universities. In addition, space is provided for evening sessions for one local university while another one sponsors evening real estate licensing courses at our school. The school also hosts an adult education program in the fall and the spring to help community members hone new skills or earn a GED. The auditorium and grounds of the high school are often used for performance events and fairs to raise funds for local organizations. Students organize outreach programs to invite the community to the school facility. For example, each year, students invite the senior citizens of Newtown to be their guests at the spring musical production and a dinner in their honor. Many senior citizens also come to the school to participate in adult education technology courses and to use the electronic labs. Members of the community make frequent use of our track for workouts. The local park and recreation department uses our playing fields for youth sports. The town library has been recently renovated and expanded to meet the needs of the growing community. The town library shares information with the school's library media center in order to provide as many educational resources for students as possible. Students serve as volunteers at the library and make regular use of its print and computer-based resources. Students participate in community theater in our town and other towns in the surrounding area and are involved in youth symphony and a regional choral group. Many students participate in summer academic enrichment programs offered by colleges and universities throughout the state and in summer clinics and travel teams in a wide variety of sports. Newtown's youth services organization provides a job bank program that is coordinated by students. Two summer programs, a music and art program for elementary students and a drama program for elementary and middle school students, employ high school students as interns.

Service learning is expected and supported but is not required. A community service organization is coordinated by parents to ensure the availability of a multitude of opportunities for students to volunteer. Students are regularly called on to assist with community events. In 2002-03, 116 students were recognized for earning 100 or more hours of community service. Seniors alone contributed over 20,000 hours of service to the community.

Newtown High School Mission and Learning Expectations

Newtown High School is committed to building a community that pursues rigorous academic goals and personal responsibility. We also encourage dignity, civility, and tolerance. At Newtown High School, students and teachers work together so that all members of the school community can reach the highest possible level of individual potential. In our partnership of students, teachers, parents, and community members, we work to promote success in a challenging environment and to cultivate competent, contributing, and productive citizens.

In pursuit of academic and personal goals, Newtown High School students are expected to create and produce significant work, pursue learning beyond what is required, and engage in a lifelong contribution to self and society.

- The student sets goals and develops a plan to complete an assigned project or solve a problem in a timely manner taking responsibility for his or her actions.
- The student accesses, organizes, analyzes, interprets, and synthesizes information to create a standards-based project.
- The student communicates to a variety of audiences effectively and appropriately through the use of written work, speech, media, and visual presentation.
- The student implements guidelines, performance standards, and established criteria.
- The student evaluates and improves his or her work through revision and reflection.
- The student uses interaction with others, experiences, research, and technology as sources of knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and inquiry.
- The student demonstrates personal integrity and respect for others through civil and tolerant actions that promote appreciation for diversity and for the dignity of all community members.
- The student develops informed opinions on a variety of issues, balancing personal freedom with public responsibility.
- The student shares responsibility with others to address and resolve issues and applies conflict resolution strategies.
- The student exhibits commitment to self and to others in the classroom, the school, the community, the nation, and the world.
- The student understands the democratic process and exercises his or her rights responsibly.
- The student actively participates in service to the school and community, recognizing the necessity for and the rewards of public service.

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR

STUDENT LEARNING

CURRICULUM

INSTRUCTION

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

I. Mission and 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 document for Newtown High School was developed using input from the school community and approved and supported by the professional staff and the school board. The mission and expectations for student learning self-study standard committee consisted only of teachers. Students, parents, and support personnel responded to a faculty-generated, written survey but were not included in standard committee meetings or discussions. As a result, there was little opportunity for ongoing dialogue between the various school community constituencies during the development of the new mission and expectations for student learning and parents and students did not have to opportunity to become more intensely involved in the school's self-assessment required in generating a mission and goals for the entire school community. According to the self-study, the faculty voted to approve the final draft in June 2002 and then revised the document in 2003. On June 10, 2003, the board of education voted unanimously to approve the current language. Despite this approval in principal, however, limitations in space, staffing, and funding undermine the school's ability to carry out the school's stated mission and expectations for student learning. (self-study, school board, standard committee)

While the Newtown High School Mission Statement is included in various documents developed by the school system and it does appear to reflect the fundamental values and beliefs about student learning held by the school community, it lacks an identity and an importance of its own. The philosophical underpinnings of the mission statement reflect what the community values. There is a strong commitment from all constituencies for the academic, social, and civic achievement of the school's students. Although students, parents, and board members were able to acknowledge the existence of a mission and expectations for student learning, they could not clearly distinguish between the district mission, performance graduation requirements (PGRs), and the school's mission. Nor could they define the academic expectations for student learning. Therefore, the school mission and expectations for student learning has no clear, single identity in the school culture and, thus is not likely to be a driving force and a guide in the decision-making processes. (school board, standard committee, student group)

In 2002, at the time the school was developing its mission and expectations it was also in the process of creating the state-mandated high school graduation standards started. While these two documents may have influenced each other during their development, they were developed separately and never brought together into one focus for the school's efforts. The work that was done to develop the graduation standards and their respective rubrics involved teachers, parents, and students and was superbly done. Those graduation standards and rubrics have been used in all areas of the curriculum to assess student achievement of those standards: information literacy, written performance; spoken communications; and problem-solving. However, the disconnection between the mission and expectations for learning and the high school graduation performance requirements means that the assessment of student learning is not explicitly connected to the Newtown High School Mission and Expectations for Student Learning. Rather, it is the graduation standards and curriculum or course expectations that are used to assess student learning. While, at the time of the visit, there was no plan to develop and use assessments and school-wide rubrics for the mission and expectations for learning, the school now has the opportunity to integrate the high school graduation standards into the school's mission and thus unify these disconnected visions and efforts. (self-study, teachers, school leaders)

Newtown High School has not yet defined the mission's academic expectations for student learning in specific measurable ways, described specific levels of performance, or identified a level of performance that is the indicator of successful accomplishment. School-wide rubrics for the academic expectations for student learning have not been developed. However, Newtown High School has done extensive work concerning state-mandated performance assessments for graduation through the development of its performance graduation standards. The faculty perceives these graduation standards and their accompanying rubrics as the school-wide rubrics and yet these expectations and rubrics were not adopted as part of the school's framework of its mission and expectations for student learning. In fact, these expectations do not apply equally to all students because students who achieve the goal standard on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) are not required to demonstrate the successful achievement of those school-developed standards. Also, there is a belief among the faculty members that the school's academic expectations listed in the mission statement are "imbedded" both literally and theoretically in the school's culture and in the graduation standards. However, they have yet to link the graduation standards directly and clearly to the mission and academic expectations for student learning developed for the accreditation process. Teachers, students, and parents cannot identify or describe specific levels of performance or the characteristics of a performance that represents an expectation's successful accomplishment. Thus, the school is unable to assess student progress in achieving its own expectations and can not improve curriculum and instruction based on those assessment results. Therefore, the mission and expectations for student learning is not a living document and the driving force for the decision-making processes of the school. (self-study, standards committee, school board, student shadow)

The mission and expectations for student learning does not guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school. Until the academic expectations are clearly identified, each with a school-wide rubric and until the curriculum is aligned with those expectations, the mission and expectations for student learning will not be the driving force of the educational program. The school does not have an internal system to identify the strength and weakness in student performance over time and thus it can not alter curriculum and adjust instruction for the purpose of consistently improving student learning. The school must depend upon external judgments that are not meaningful in strictly local, individual terms. Without an agreed upon mission and expectations for student learning, there is no school-wide focus for instruction, curriculum, and the procedures, policies, and decision-making of the school. (standard committee, teachers, central office administrators)

There is evidence that the mission and expectations for student learning has been introduced into the culture of Newtown High School. It is posted in most classrooms, in the main office, and in some common areas. Each student is introduced to the mission and expectations for student learning through the student handbook. Additionally, students hear about the mission and student learning expectations during "Mission Moments" on the daily morning announcements. Information about it has also appeared on Channel 17, the local access TV station, and in a local news article. But it is not posted on the school's web site, nor is it visible in the main lobby or figured prominently in common areas of the building. The document has also been introduced to students during advisory meetings, but, judging by comments made in interviews, there is little evidence that it has been thoroughly discussed with students or parents. As a result, it does not figure prominently as a living, public document and, therefore,

as an important part of the culture of the school. (self-study, standard committee, school tour, students, parents)

Newtown High School has indicators by which it assesses the school's progress in providing opportunities for the students to achieve school-wide civic and social expectations. While there are many opportunities and the school prides itself on the very large percentage of the students actively involved in clubs and teams, there are some limitations on the availability of some programs for ninth and tenth grade students. In addition to myriad clubs, sports, and extracurricular offerings, there are classes that create additional opportunities for social and civic skill development. Those classes that create experiences of real life enterprises offer such opportunities, but many of them have limited enrollment due to scheduling, staffing, or space constraints and are open first to juniors and seniors before others are accepted. An example of these limitations is the class that created The Greenery, a student enterprise that grows and sells plants and flowers. Another popular class, the culinary arts program; has only one teacher for both this course and the restaurant program. Because there is only one teacher and juniors and seniors have preference for enrollment, many interested students are not allowed to enroll in these classes. Eliminating students from popular elective classes because of limited facilities and staffing undermines the school's mission to enable all students to 'reach the highest possible level of individual potential'. (self-study, leadership team, teachers)

Most students at Newtown High School engage in voluntary community service. Although community service is not required for graduation, many students contribute to the community in many and varied kinds of activities, both within the school itself, as well as in the larger community of Newtown and beyond. For example, the school reports that over 28,000 total hours of community service were logged by the class of 2005. Students perceive the benefit of community service as a civic responsibility, but there is also an additional perception that the greater benefit is in the college application process. Some students even think that community service is a school requirement. Supported by access to a variety of service opportunities, many students will make a life-long commitment to community service. (self-study, panel presentation, student shadowing, student groups.)

Newtown High School does not have a plan to regularly review the mission statement and expectations for student learning. At the time of the accreditation visit, there was no plan to develop school-wide rubrics for each of the academic expectations or to review and align the school's curriculum to mission's expectations for student learning. Although the school has four performance-based graduation requirements, (PGRs), each with its well developed set of performance standards and those are used across the curriculum to assess some of the students for the purpose of graduation, there was no plan for how to align the expectations of the PGRs, the mission's expectations, and the curriculum. One coherent and agreed-upon mission and set of expectations aligned with the curriculum with each expectation including well-drafted rubrics used across the curriculum would provide an abundance of data on student performance that would lead to revised curriculum, adjusted instruction and, thus, improved student learning. (teachers, central office administrators, standard committee)

Commendations

1. The ability of faculty members, students, staff and parents to articulate similar values and beliefs about what is the mission of the school
2. The board of education's support of the mission statement
3. The extensive involvement of the students in community service
4. The clearly articulated graduation standards and rubrics

Recommendations

1. Review and revise the school's mission and expectations for student learning in a process that actively involves all constituencies of the school community and that addresses the need to have one set of school-wide academic expectations
2. Consider the adoption of the school's graduation standards as part of the school's mission and expectations
3. Develop school-wide performance standards/rubrics for each of the revised academic expectations with a clear indication of what performance level identifies the successful achievement of the given expectation
4. Clearly label the school's academic expectations and its civic and social expectations
5. Demonstrate that the revised mission and expectations for student learning is the guiding force in the school's procedures, policies, and decisions
6. Demonstrate that all students have the opportunity to participate in classes and/or activities that enable them to achieve the school's civic and social expectations

II. 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 dependant upon the commitment and involvement of the professional staff to 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, 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

Each curriculum area does not formally identify those school-wide academic expectations for which it is responsible. In some areas, however, the curriculum informally recognizes the meaning behind the school's mission, student learning expectations, and graduation performance standards. Curriculum guides are not built on a framework of the school's mission and student expectations. The school's mission and student expectations were developed after most curriculum guides were already created. Personnel reported that there was no attempt by curriculum committees to explicitly align the curriculum to school-wide expectations. Recently developed curriculum guides, such as physics, Italian, and journalism, informally recognize the meaning behind the school's mission, by including goal-setting, problem solving, communication, and reflection expectations that are identified in the school's graduation standards. However, the insertion of the Newtown High School Mission and Expectations for Student Learning and Newtown Success-Oriented School Model into curriculum guides does not embed their expectations in the curriculum. A chart was created showing which departments are responsible for which graduation standard, but there was no identification of which departments are responsible for each of the academic expectations for student learning. This leads to a lack of consistent focus on the school's mission and expectations and a diminishing of the importance of the mission as a school directing force. (curriculum guides, self-study, teachers)

The recently revised curriculum guides have been aligned with the new graduation requirements and with state and national standards. However, the curricula do not directly align with the Newtown High School's mission and expectations for student learning. Faculty members who stressed the importance of aligning curriculum to national and state standards and the new graduation standards were less clear about the importance of aligning it to student learning expectations. They stated that the academic expectations were embedded in the school's culture. Furthermore, students and parents report they are aware that the mission statement and expectations exist, but they have no direct experiences of how school activities relate to students practicing and achieving each of those expectations. As a result of this lack of alignment, students are not ensured ample opportunities to practice and achieve the expectations for student learning nor can curriculum be revised based on the assessment of student progress in achieving the school's expectations for student learning. (curriculum guides, teachers, observations)

Curriculum documents do not share a common format despite district training intended for that purpose. Some written curriculum prescribes content, includes course-specific learning goals, and suggests instructional strategies and assessment techniques that sometimes include the use of the rubrics developed for the school's graduation standards; however, the written curriculum does not explicitly integrate the relevant expectations for student learning or school-wide rubrics that would be used to measure student achievement of these expectations. For example, a 2005 Humanities Curriculum Guide suggests resources such as texts, films, art, and poetry, as well as content standards, such as "the student will be able to evaluate the multiple aspects of one's self-identity." This guide identifies course-specific learning goals and specific assessments, though not the school's graduation standards. In addition, this guide makes no explicit reference to the school's mission statement or academic expectations. The failure to integrate into the curriculum the school's academic expectations and aligned rubrics for measuring the achievement of these expectations denies students consistent opportunities to

practice and achieve the expectations for student learning. (curriculum guides, student work, teachers)

There are four academic levels: advanced placement, honors, college-prep A, and college-prep B, the latter called 'basic' until the 2005 school year. With 90% of the school's graduates continuing their education, the school does not present strong evidence that there is a real need for a fourth, basic level of course offerings. Also, with so many students going on to college after graduation and with the excellent scores achieved on the advanced placement tests, the opportunity for more college-bound students to enroll in these challenging courses should be provided rather than limited as they are by the existing pre-requisites. Across all four levels, the curriculum is not consistent in engaging students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as providing opportunities for authentic application of knowledge and skills. For example, the Humanities curriculum provides for inquiry, higher order thinking, and authentic application, such as "analyze," "synthesize," and "evaluate." In contrast, the Math Applications curriculum dictates mechanical applications, such as "use," "calculate," and "draw." The Humanities curriculum is newer than the Math Applications curriculum and is a higher level course. Despite the newer curriculum documents and intentions described in teacher reports, students at all levels are often engaged in teacher-centered learning that does not rise to the level of inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking or provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills. (classroom observations, student work, written curriculum)

The curriculum is at times appropriately integrated, emphasizing depth of understanding over breadth of coverage. The curriculum provides occasional opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. There appears to be disparity between the curriculum depth offered in written documents and implemented in practice. For example, classroom observations and student work reveal that some teachers emphasize depth of understanding in learning activities, including projects, written work, and discussions, while other teachers emphasize teacher-centered and rote activities. Consequently, many students are provided opportunities to develop and use problem-solving skills, higher order thinking or apply classroom learning to authentic, ill-defined challenges. (curriculum, observations, student work)

The school provides a wealth of opportunities for all students to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings and the school campus. These include administering career interest inventories and making available shadowing and internships opportunities. The career center also organizes an independent study program for seniors. However, participation in this excellent program is limited to honors students. Students may also earn school credit by taking courses at area colleges or enrolling on-line for college courses. Students are encouraged to participate in athletics and other student activities as well as community service. However, enrollment in the entrepreneurship programs is limited. Students are required to pay for some of these opportunities. For example, to be enrolled in an advanced placement course a student must pay the \$85 testing fee. In a society that guarantees a free public education to all, requiring a student to pay for a high level course within the educational program is inappropriate and discriminates on the basis of financial status. The concern about students' ability to pay for some of these activities was a concern among both students and parents. Offerings beyond normal courses and the school campus contribute to a well-rounded educational experience for all students. Students having to pay for curricular and co-curricular opportunities denies these opportunities on the basis of socioeconomic status if students with financial need are not identified and subsidized. (curriculum documents, students, parents)

Generally there is effective curriculum coordination and articulation between and among academic areas within the school, as well as with sending schools in the district. Several formal processes foster this coordination. K-12 curriculum committees headed by the assistant superintendent and comprised of teachers, parents, and students, meet regularly to review and revise curriculum. Department chairs meet regularly as a group and with their respective teachers for the same purpose. A partnership exists between freshman social studies and English teachers to monitor and address the progress of students as individuals and as groups. In addition to the interdisciplinary English and social studies opportunities, a new freshman math and science program was initiated this year. Informal processes also foster this coordination. Teachers note that the sharing of offices by teachers in varied departments promotes collaboration. Also, they spoke of self-initiated meetings to discuss curriculum coordination and articulation. The school's new curriculum revision process should continue to provide students with a sequence and scope of rich learning experiences, especially when the curriculum is aligned with the school's revised expectations for student learning. (self-study, teachers, students)

Instructional materials, supplies, equipment, resources of the library media center, technology, facilities, and staffing levels, while barely supporting the curriculum, also seriously limit the opportunities for all students to take advantage of the course offerings and cause unreasonably large classes. In the past five years, the student body has increased by almost 400 students, causing elevated student-teacher ratios and overcrowding. Class sizes frequently approach 30. In addition, numbers of students are denied entry into desired classes due to lack of space and lack of teachers. For example, this year, hundreds of students were denied entry into fine and practical arts classes. Despite this growth in student population, teachers report that classroom instructional materials and supplies are adequately provided. Likewise, teachers and students say that the library media center, despite its being overcrowded, does support student learning. However, students, parents, teachers, and school leaders all clearly articulated a desperate need for additional resources. One problem is the grave lack of technology. Four computer labs, computers in the library media center, and a wireless lab are intended to support curriculum implementation that is designed to prepare students to be successful in an information-based, technology-driven world. The lack of adequate technical maintenance frequently prevents consistent use of the limited technology by both faculty members and students. In addition, there is a lack of technology in classrooms, such as 'smart boards' or other interactive white boards, projectors, and networked computers and printers, as well as supporting software. There is clearly a shortage of information technology and support personnel. One notable exception to the lack of classroom technology is the school's 28-station, world language lab, that fosters student learning and facilitates the implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Consequently, although the school maximizes its limited resources, the undersized facility and low staffing levels impede the full implementation of the curriculum. (observations, teachers, school leadership team)

In general, the professional staff is actively involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on assessments of student performance in achieving course-specific learning goals and on standardized tests such as the Connecticut Academic Performance Test. However, the curriculum revision process does not include the assessment of student progress in achieving the school's expectations for student learning because the curriculum is not aligned with the school's expectations and there are no rubrics by

which to assess student progress in achieving those expectations. (self-study, school leadership team, school materials)

The Newtown School District supports a formal Curriculum Leadership Project in which 35 teachers participate. Since the 2002-2003 school year, 32 curriculum documents in eight disciplines were reviewed and revised, involving more than half of the school personnel. Guided by the assistant superintendent, the school uses a five-year curriculum review and development cycle to regularly review all areas of the curriculum. K-12 curriculum committees, headed by the assistant superintendent are comprised of teachers, parents, and students, and meet regularly to review and revise curriculum. However, the curriculum guides provided for examination reflect significantly varied designs and revision dates, some of which were older than ten years. There is sufficient compensation for curriculum work, usually based on 18 hours of work per curriculum. Furthermore, personnel from each content area participates in ongoing, year-long curriculum committees. The department chairpersons and teachers reported that recent participation in curriculum revision was increasingly limited due to the time and support they gave to the influx of new teachers. Also, the lack of experience in curriculum development by new staff members has also limited their participation in the process. The board of education readily approves curriculum, even when implementation may be hindered by budget constraints. Actively involving teachers in the ongoing formal and informal curriculum revision process enables the curriculum to meet state and national standards as well as keeping both teachers and curricula current and relevant, thus enhancing student learning. (curriculum guides, self-study, teachers)

The school's professional development activities support the development and implementation of the curriculum. The district commits significant resources to professional development in support of the written curriculum and its implementation. The district allocates more than \$36,000 in a budget line item to staff training and \$8,000 in a budget line item to memberships. The school's faculty participates on a district-wide professional development committee. The school offers a three-year plan for professional development based on feedback from teachers in the varied disciplines. The school's 2003-2004 professional development after-school workshops included: "Backward Mapping," "Strategies that Work," "Brain-based Expository Writing," "Creating Social Studies Lessons Using the Internet," and "Self-directed Learning Through Web Design." Furthermore, the school provides Connecticut Academic Performance Test and Beginning Educator Support Training workshops. Enabling teachers to seek professional improvement in such an extensive program should allow all teachers to develop and broaden their instructional strategies as well as to insure that all students are able to meet the higher challenges and expectations of the revised curriculum. (self-study materials, curriculum guides, teachers)

Commendations

1. The many "entrepreneurial" programs that engage students in self-directed learning opportunities and build successful school and community partnerships
2. Extensive involvement of the faculty in the curriculum revision process
3. The on-going K-12 curriculum review and revision process that involves teachers, parents, and students

4. The curriculum guides, generally for the upper level courses, that provide inquiry-based learning, problem-solving and higher-order thinking
5. The wide range of learning opportunities beyond the normal course offerings and school campus
6. The board of education continued support for curriculum revision
7. The new world language laboratory that provides authentic learning opportunities for students
8. The variety of opportunities for available for students, especially juniors and seniors to develop and practice the school's social and civic expectations
9. The extensive involvement of the faculty in both formal and informal curriculum review and revision
10. The implementation of the freshman math-science cross-disciplinary learning opportunity
11. The extensive informal cross-disciplinary collaboration among teachers

Recommendations

1. Align all curriculum to the academic expectations articulated in the school's revised mission and expectations for student learning
2. Identify which curriculum area or areas is responsible for each of the school's revised academic expectations to insure that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate the achievement those expectations
3. Demonstrate that the results from assessing all students' progress in achieving the schools revised academic expectations are used in evaluating and revising curriculum
4. Insure that all course syllabi identify the revised school-wide academic expectations and rubrics with which the courses are aligned
5. Demonstrate that all students, especially those in the College Prep B level courses, are actively involved in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills
6. Eliminate fees as a condition of enrolling in academic courses
7. Evaluate and revise the pre-requisites for advanced placement courses to encourage more college-bound students to enroll in them
8. Provide evidence that Newtown High School, with over 90% of its graduates continuing their education, has a valid educational need for a fourth, basic level of course offerings
9. Develop and implement a plan to enable most, if not all, seniors to participate in the senior project experience

10. Implement a standard format for all curriculum documents that clearly prescribes content, identifies the school's aligned academic expectations as well as course specific learning goal, suggested instructional strategies, and assessment techniques that include the rubrics for the school's expectations
11. Develop a policy and practice that insures that no student's full participation in curricular and co-curricular activities is restricted by financial need

III. 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 stated mission 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 purpose of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs.

Conclusions

The teachers of Newtown High School implement a variety of instructional strategies that are consistent with the school's mission statement. Fundamental elements of the mission statement reflected in instructional practices include personal and civic responsibility, individual success, continuous improvement, quality achievement, and interdependence within the learning community and school district at large. These basic principles are emphasized in many academic lessons and reinforced in co-curricular activities. The board of education and district's citizenry support community partnership that enables students to learn beyond the school walls. These experiences "cultivate competent, contributing, and productive citizens". These teaching staff members solicit support from the community members to develop opportunities for authentic learning experiences and prepare students for a "challenging environment". Science and social studies learning activities encourage students to explore and interact with the world around them and provide students with opportunities to identify and examine the natural, historical, and cultural forces that shape lives and mold their future. Students participating in these experiences develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the world in which they are living. (observation, teachers, self-study)

However, although the self-study survey results show 95% of the faculty members reporting that students in their classes are regularly given an opportunity to practice and achieve school-wide academic expectations in their classes, only two-thirds of the faculty reported that the school's mission statement influenced their repertoire of teaching methods, and only 39% of the students said that they were familiar with the school's mission statement. The school's expectations for student learning are not explicitly aligned with any courses, nor do those expectations have rubrics and, therefore, students can not be assessed on their achievement of those expectations. Many of the samples of student work provided by the school demonstrated more expectations for simple recall and use of basic skills than opportunities for students to set goals, synthesize, and communicate in a variety of presentations. Without clearly articulated and assessed expectations and without varied instructional strategies aligned with those expectations, it is unlikely that every student will practice and develop the skills and competencies needed to meet the school's academic expectations. (Endicott survey, observation, teachers, students)

With almost 90% of the graduates continuing their education, it is clear that the faculty is committed to preparing most of the students for post-secondary education. Many demanding advanced placement and honors courses are offered that provide varied and challenging learning activities and assignments. Rich and varied instructional strategies promoting student learning are used at Newtown High School; however, consistent practice of these approaches is not the norm in all curriculum areas and on all of the four course levels. Even in these higher level courses, many of the instructional techniques are teacher-centered rather than student-centered. In many of the classes observed by the visiting team, the students took notes and answered questions, the majority of which were basic recall rather than higher level analytical questions. Approximately 58% of the student body reports that teachers use a variety of methods to teach, but this percent declines as students progress through their high school careers. While the school's expectations may be 'embedded' in the upper level courses, they are less evident in the lower level courses. For the students in the newly named 'College Prep B' level of courses, varied instructional strategies that would support student achievement of high expectations appear to be even less frequent. On the other hand, many varied 'real world' learning opportunities are made available to students through a variety of 'entrepreneur' programs as well

as in both core academic and elective courses. Not having the mission as the school's driving force and not having the school's expectations explicitly aligned with courses inhibits the school's ability to insure that all students are experiencing varied instructional strategies that would be consistent with the school's mission and would better address the varied learning styles of Newtown's very large student body. (student work, self-study, survey, classroom observation)

The teachers of Newtown High School are proud of their long-standing tradition of personalized instruction, and that is reflected in the self-study survey that shows that 75% of the students feel comfortable going to their teachers for help. However, only 60% of the students reported that their teachers had time for them. Teachers personalize instruction when they conference with students individually, both in and out of the class and beyond the regular hours of the school day. Personalizing instruction is providing varied means for students to demonstrate learning, providing varied learning activities for students to set goals, develop a learning plan, assess their progress and providing individual and constructive feedback to students. The new advisory program, which now meets twice a month, can help to address the importance of personalization within such a large school. The restructuring of the two alternative learning programs and bringing them into the building does document the school's efforts to better address the educational and social needs of those students. With the rapidly growing student body and the resulting large classes of up to 30 students, there can be little question that the goal of providing a personalized learning experience for all students is in serious jeopardy (students, teachers, self-study survey, self-study)

In the self-study survey, 50% of the students reports that teachers include topics from other subject areas and 68% reports that the information they learn in one class can be used in others. Cross disciplinary learning opportunities are accomplished formally in the team-taught American studies and humanities program. This year a math-science interdisciplinary course was piloted with initial success and enthusiasm. Informally, some teachers integrate concepts and knowledge from other disciplines. For example, students in biology worked with the district's nutritionists in analyzing the chemical make-up of a particular cafeteria lunch, and their results were presented in a Health and Wellness class. Increased efforts to enable students to make connections across disciplines and to connect what they learn to the real world would deepen their understanding and enrich their appreciation of the subject matter. (teachers, self-study survey, self-study)

While 94% of the faculty asserts that their students have many opportunities to apply what they are learning to real world situations, only 40% of all the students and only 30% of the seniors agree with that observation. However, Newtown High School does have a variety of programs and partnerships in the community that provide opportunities for students to pursue learning beyond the classroom. Examples of these programs include: the Newtown Greenery, Graphics, the Back Door Cafe, computer and auto repair, an early childhood daycare experience, and culinary and catering studies. These learning activities enable students to develop and implement plans for a working business and they do have the opportunity to apply what they learn in the classroom to the real world. The social studies program has a course that requires students to fulfill a political action project, and in science courses, students study and develop plans to address real world problems. Students in English and social studies classes develop portfolios of their work and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in those two subject areas. In addition, through the senior project experience, some seniors are given the opportunity to develop a self-directed independent project, often focused on potential careers, but this "honors"

opportunity is very limited and not available to all students as it does not include students who will not be continuing their education after high school so might benefit most from such a real-world learning opportunity. Such connections to the “real world” help students realize the importance of what they are expected to learn in the classroom because it can be applied in real life. (self-study survey, classroom observations, teachers, program of studies)

As reported in the self-study, both beginning and experienced teachers receive feedback from other staff members who observe their classes. In the self-study survey, 82% of the teachers reported the feedback from supervisors as an important factor in improving instructions. Teachers are formally observed by department heads and administrators at least twice a year. The follow-up conference includes constructive feedback focused on improving student learning. Beginning teachers are also observed by their BEST mentors and content coaches and there is a five-day orientation program for new teachers that helps to prepare them for instruction and gives them some knowledge of the school and the curriculum. New teachers spend a minimum of 40 hours with their content coach so they can gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum, expectations for student learning, and effective lesson planning. Department chairs are valued as leaders in content areas and instruction. There is a very strong collegiality among staff members in specific content areas. Peer observation and informal collaboration are encouraged. The new core department offices are located next to each other to facilitate professional collaboration both within and across these departments. There is strong mutual respect among departments. An extensive professional development program offers six days for teachers to broaden their instructional strategies and deepen their knowledge of content. As part of the supervision program, teachers are offered ways to pursue professional improvement goals and document their achievement of those goals. Many of these options include professional collaboration. Teachers work toward improving their expertise, knowledge, and instruction through reflection and other formal and informal means. Teachers subscribe to educational and content publications and take professional days to stay current in their content areas and instructional strategies. Teachers share their workshop experiences informally and often choose to try new approaches. Eighty percent of teachers report they participate in professional development in instructional strategies based on identified instructional needs. However, in the self-study, only 39% of the students and 26% of the parents reported the opportunity to provide feedback to improve instruction. The strong cultural emphasis on improvement of instruction is well invested and enables teachers to be knowledgeable in both their content and in best instructional practices. However, there is also a need to increase the variety of instructional strategies across all course levels to insure that the academic needs of individual students can be better met. With more varied instructional strategies, more students would be better able to achieve the school’s high expectations. (self-study, Endicott survey, teachers, department chairs, school materials]

All teachers in core departments share office space in several large, adjoining rooms with easy access from room to room. This arrangement fosters communication among teachers within and among departments. There is much less interaction between teachers in the core disciplines and teachers in other departments. A strong program to support beginning teachers begins in a five-day summer workshop and continues through a mentor program differentiated to meet the needs of teachers new to Newtown High School. Some professional development is focused on protocols for analyzing student work called ‘Critical Friends’ and teachers are encouraged to apply and extend their knowledge of these strategies through study groups, department discussions, and individual work. However, there is no systematic process of engaging all

teachers in ongoing studies of student work, so these strategies are used inconsistently. There is a strong collegiality among staff members and a pervasive openness to help and share. While instructional strategies to help students meet the graduation performance requirements are shared by teachers within and among departments, because the school's mission and expectations are not aligned with the curriculum, they are not the major focus of teaching and learning. The lack of a formal collaboration process to assess student work and to share instructional strategies within and across departments, limits teachers ability to improve instruction so all students can achieve the school's expectations for learning. (teachers, self-study materials, central office administrators)

All faculty and staff members have been adequately trained in the use and application of technology in their particular field. In the self-study survey, 76% of the teachers reported that they frequently integrate technology into their instructional practices. Mathematics teachers utilize computer animation and graphing calculators to introduce and demonstrate skills. Computer simulations in science classes also serve as an instructional practice. The language laboratory is used extensively by the world language department, allowing students to practice and apply their oral proficiency. Internet research is widely used in all courses. Courses such as Journalism, Yearbook, and JAVA utilize the computer labs daily. Such consistent demand for student use of technology is seriously inhibited because of an inadequate number of computers available throughout the building, however labs are frequently closed because of a lack of adult supervision or because a course is scheduled into that room. Class sizes often exceed the number of workspaces in the computer labs. Not all classrooms have stationary computers for instructional use, and teachers must share the two computer carts even though not all of the computers on the carts are operational. Teachers also cite an inconsistency in Internet service availability as well as a lack of technical support desperately needed to keep the system up and running. For a school of almost 1,700 students, of whom 90% continue their education in order to work and live in a technologically-driven, information-based world, Newtown High School woefully lacks adequate technology resources. In the self-study survey, only 53% of parents states that their children have access to technology in the classroom, and only 55% of the students reports that teachers use technology in their classes. The lack of adequate technology and support directly impacts student access to one of the most vital resources needed for the 21st century. These limitations in technology significantly compromise the extent to which technology is integrated in instructional practice and, therefore, limits student learning. (survey, teachers, student shadowing)

The school's professional development program provides thoughtful and well designed opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies. Seventy-one percent of teachers surveyed agreed that professional development in the area of instructional strategies is based on identified instructional needs. Feedback from a variety of sources, including teacher self-assessment and supervision reports, is used by the school and the system to identify instructional improvement needs. To design professional development programs to address those needs, teachers assess their level of proficiency with reference to a Professional Development Standards matrix. They assess themselves in four areas: planning, instruction, assessment, and professional responsibility/growth. All teachers are engaged in professional development with an emphasis placed on in-school collaboration efforts. Six required professional development days are planned within the school year with the majority being scheduled during the early months of the year. Some faculty members stated that spreading these

days throughout the year would offer more time for reflection and sequencing the delivery of the programs. In addition to these six days, after-school workshops are offered. The topics for these workshops are derived from different sources such as committee requests, focus groups, and district goal requirements. The district supports teacher-directed curriculum design and improvement by providing remuneration to staff members who develop workshops or create ‘teacher initiated plans’ (TIPS). Analysis of the impact of professional development programs is now beginning. The district’s Professional Development Committee currently is researching how to measure student improvement as a result of professional development activities. However, professional development can not use results from assessing student progress in achieving the school’s academic expectations for student learning because the curriculum is not aligned those expectations and the students are not assessed on their achievement of those expectations. With clear learning expectations and aligned rubrics for each expectation, assessing student progress in achieving the school’s expectations would result in data that would be well used to identify both curricular and professional development needs. When student assessment results are used to adjust curriculum and instruction, student learning improves. (self-study survey, teachers, department members) Teacher supervision and evaluation processes are used to improve instruction for the purpose of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs. The teacher supervisory and evaluative processes improve instruction, enhancing student learning within each department. All non-tenure teachers meet with an evaluative-paired team of an administrator and chairperson; they also work closely with content mentors. This peer collaboration team has been trained in scripting and conferencing techniques. Tenure teachers have a variety of choices for evaluation ranging from collaborative action research, portfolio development, peer collaboration, or traditional observations. The supervision/evaluation process is thoughtfully designed and plays an integral role in instructional improvement. It is based upon research into effective approaches for improving teacher practice. Overall, the evaluative process promotes introspection and reflection. Because the school’s mission and expectations for student performance are not part of the process of supervising and evaluating teachers, the potential to improve student learning is not fully realized. (teachers, department members, self-study)

Commendations

1. The depth of content knowledge and awareness of best practices that is prevalent in all departments
2. The relocation of core department offices that foster professional collaboration
3. The training of teachers in the critical friends’ protocols that foster collaboration and the assessment of student work for the improvement of instruction, curriculum, and learning
4. The excellent orientation program and support provided to teachers new to the Newtown Public Schools
5. The district’s support of BEST mentors and content coaches as a key element in orienting new teachers to the school and district
6. The professional dedication of the faculty manifest in its consistent efforts to improve student learning despite increasing class sizes and the lack of adequate technology

7. The extensive professional development program that enables all teachers to continue to broaden their instructional strategies and/or deepen their knowledge of their subject
8. The high academic expectations held for students in the advanced placement, honors and college prep A courses
9. Bringing the alternative learning programs into the building so the students sense that they are a part of the larger school community

Recommendations

1. Insure that the school's revised academic expectations for student learning apply to all students as well as assessing all students' achievement in their junior and senior years
2. Demonstrate that the results from assessing all students' progress in achieving the schools revised academic expectations are used in designing the professional development for improving instruction
3. Maintain reasonable class sizes so teachers truly have the opportunity to personalize instruction and address the varied academic needs and learning styles of their students
4. Implement and fund a staffing plan that permits adequate sections of both core academic and elective courses to be offered to meet student requests
5. Create an ongoing procedure that enables groups of teachers to collaborate student work, cross-disciplinary learning, assessment techniques, and planning learning activities during the school day on a regular basis
6. Expand the use of the 'critical friends' protocol throughout the faculty
7. Demonstrate that all students, especially those in the College Prep B level courses, are actively involved the learning process, making connections across the curriculum, have significant opportunities for self-directed learning, higher order thinking, applying knowledge and skills to 'real world' issues, and are self-assessing and being reflective about their learning

IV. 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 their instruction to better respond to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates the growth and competence of students to parents, school officials, and the public. The results of student learning must be continually discussed and used to develop short-term and long-term strategies for improving 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 purpose 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

The Newtown High School Mission and Expectations for Student Learning document is a relatively new part of the school culture based upon a long tradition of strategic planning to improve leadership, teaching, and learning. Documents, including the district's mission statement, the Common Denominator, and the high school graduation standards demonstrate the evolution of the school's mission and expectations for student learning. However, at the time of the visit, the students' achievements of the academic expectations were not being assessed. Therefore, it is impossible to determine student progress over time in achieving those expectations. (self-study, teachers, observation)

By not coordinating the school's efforts on writing and implementing its performances based-graduation requirements with developing the school's mission and expectations, no performance standards or rubrics were developed for the school's academic expectations identified in its mission statement. Therefore, the mission and expectations for learning do not directly drive the development of assessment activities or strategies. There is no means to assess student progress in achieving those academic expectations and no way to use those assessment results to adjust curriculum and instruction. With no assessment data the teachers are inhibited in their efforts to improve curriculum, instruction, and student learning based on assessing student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations as listed in its mission statement. (self-study. Teachers, school leaders)

However, the high school graduation standards do define four areas of performance: information literacy, written performance, spoken communication, and problem-solving. There is a school-wide analytic rubric for each of these standards that is used by the teachers in performance tasks embedded in their curricula. While much work has been done to create and use a variety of performance tasks across the grade levels and disciplines to assess student performance in one or more of these graduation standards, the school has not yet completed a clear articulation of where in the curriculum each of these graduation standards apply and are assessed. However, what the school is doing for its graduation standards is exactly what is needed to be done for their academic expectations. Joining the graduation standards to the school's mission would be a viable solution to this situation. (teachers, student work, self-study)

Teachers assess student performance with the rubrics for the required graduation standards and transmit that information to the students and to the high school administration. The high school administration then updates a list of students in need of reaching the goal on one or more of these four areas and transmits that information back to the entire staff. The high school administration communicates by letter with parents regarding their student's progress in meeting the graduation requirements. Therefore, the students and their parents are aware of the student's performance and their achievement of these standards. Where students may be deficient, they can focus their attention on completing the particular graduation standard(s). However, this can not be done for the school's identified academic expectations. (teachers, assessment committee, school and district administrators)

The four graduation standards do not apply to all students. If a student achieves the goal standard on the reading and the writing components of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, they are excused from achieving the successful level of performance for the oral and written communications standards even though oral communication is not assessed by the

Connecticut Academic Performance Test. If a student achieves the goal standard on the math and science components of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, then they are excused from demonstrating the successful level of performance on the problem-solving graduation standard. This means that only those students who do not meet the goal standard on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test are held accountable to meet all four of the graduation standards. For those students who achieve the goal standard in grade 10, this also means that the graduation standards are not assessing their improvement in those identified areas over the last two years of high school learning. (program of studies, self-study, teachers, school leaders)

The administration and faculty collect some data to determine the school's success in meeting the stated social and civic expectations. Data from discipline records, attendance records, graduation and drop-out rates, and student participation in athletics and co-curricular activities and clubs is collected it was not clear that this information is consistently made public. There is some evidence that the school uses that data to plan or modify activities to improve student performance. Co-curricular activities are created, updated, or discontinued as needed. The "Student Community Initiative" was recently begun to promote student leadership and to help maintain the sense of community in a large and very rapidly growing school population. The alternative learning programs were recently brought into the school building to provide opportunities for at-risk students to improve their academic and social performance. Students are encouraged to become involved in community service; so much so, that some students perceive that expectation as a graduation requirement. A school-wide advisory program intended to foster a sense of personalization, improved communication, and increased sense of social responsibility was begun in 2004-05 and expanded in 2005-06 to meet twice a month for approximately 20 minutes. These projects are focusing more attention on helping students' increase their social responsibility in the school and the community. (teachers, assessment committee, school and district administrators, self-study materials)

The school mission and expectations for learning are posted in many rooms, and there is some evidence that teachers make explicit reference to the expectations for learning with their students. All teachers do communicate the specific goals of their own course to the students through such things as course syllabi. A few teachers make explicit connections between the mission and expectations for learning and the goals for their courses. Many teachers use a wide variety of rubrics and assessment lists. Some of these assessment tools are explicitly derived from the rubrics used for the performance tasks required for graduation. Some departments and/or teachers modify these rubrics for specific performance tasks in their courses. Some teachers use models or benchmarks of various types to help students understand the level of performance required in the course. Thus, in a wide variety of ways, most teachers do make clear their expectations for student learning and provide clear performance standards so the students know what is expected of them. Doing the same for the mission and expectations for student learning in planning learning and assessment of student performance regarding these expectations would improve student achievement of those expectations. (teachers, students, self-study)

Teachers at Newtown High School use a wide variety of assessment materials and strategies but most of these assessment materials are not explicitly related to the school mission and expectations for learning. Many teachers do use performance tasks required for graduation. All freshmen and sophomores create writing portfolios. Portfolios are used in other courses, as are many types of projects and performance tasks. A few seniors do independent projects, an

opportunity severely limited to a small portion of the class. Some common assessments are required in some departments. Although many teachers do informally discuss classroom-related student performance, data and information on student achievement from these varied assessments is not systematically collected and analyzed to evaluate student performance over time. A systematic approach to using data should enhance the decision-making process to adjusting curriculum and instructions and, thus, improve student performance. (teachers, students, school leaders, self-study)

The use of technology as a tool to collect and analyze the data about student performance is limited and should be increased. An improved capacity to gather and organize data about individual and groups of students would enable the school to use this data to drive decisions about curriculum and instruction and to improve student performance. (teachers, assessment committee, school and district administrators)

Although there is time through four full and two half in-service days, as well as through department meetings and encouragement to create in-service courses, there is little systematic work to collaborate on analyzing data and information from student performance. While the 'Critical Friends' protocols have been introduced and some teachers do use them, their use in assessing student work and learning activities tends to be informal and infrequent. Using such protocols by all teachers within and across departments would provide a rich source of information by which to make decisions to improve curriculum, teaching, and learning. While teachers state that the mission and expectations are a reflection of what they do and are embedded in the school's educational program, there is little or no collaboration on assessing student achievement of the school's academic expectations for learning although projects to revise or create curricula do begin with an assessment of student performance as communicated by standardized tests and teacher observations. However, there is no coherent process linking the mission and expectations for student learning, the use of school-wide rubrics, and the resulting data on student performance to assessing curriculum and instructional activities. Thus, there is no opportunity to revise curriculum and adjust instruction specifically to contribute to improving student performance regarding these expectations. (teachers, assessment committee, school and district administrators)

Most of the professional development opportunities on the development and use of performance assessments and the use of the data to analyze student performance have been informal. Some teachers have attended conferences and workshops to learn these skills. The 'critical friends' protocol for analyzing student work has been presented to new teachers during the pre-school week of professional development. Many teachers have worked independently to learn to create and use a variety of assessments. The focus of this new work is the high school graduation performance requirements, however, and work on assessment has not focused on the school mission and expectations for learning. Systemic professional development focused on learning how to develop varying, effective performance assessments and how to use the resulting data to improve teaching and learning would contribute to improved teaching and learning. (teachers, assessment committee, school and district administration)

Much information about student performance regarding grades, high school graduation performance requirements, state and national tests, and behavior is communicated to students and their parents through such strategies as report cards, progress reports, scheduled parent conferences, school events, phone calls, emails, and letters. However, as little or none of this

communication is related to the school's mission and expectations for learning, the students' and parents' attention is not focused on the school's mission and expectations for student learning. (teachers, assessment committee, school and district administrators)

Commendations

1. The use of a wide variety of performance standards and varied assessment strategies within and across disciplines
2. The development and use of performance tasks and rubrics to support the graduation performance requirements
3. The involvement of teachers, parents and students in the development of the school's graduation standards
4. The wide-spread use of the graduation standards and rubrics in assessing student performance
5. Providing graduation standards assessment results to the faculty and parents

Recommendations

1. Develop a system of rubrics for each of the school's academic expectations that includes an identified targeted level of successful achievement
2. Insure that the performance standards/rubrics developed for each of the revised academic expectations are used throughout the aligned curricular areas so that all students understand what is required of them and how to achieve it
3. Establish an assessment process that insures that all students will be assessed on their progress in achieving the school's newly adopted expectations
4. Develop and implement a technology plan that improves the school's capacity to collect, assess, and report on student performance data
5. Communicate regularly progress regarding performance on the school's academic, social, and civic expectations to staff, students, parents, and the community.
6. Provide ongoing professional development to teachers on how to develop, use and analyze varied assessment activities and common assessments for grade level and multi-sectioned courses and how to use collected data to adjust and improve curriculum and instruction
7. Provide ongoing professional development for teachers in the use of school-wide rubrics within the classroom and for specific student assignments

SUPPORT STANDARDS

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

V. 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 principal has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning.
2. The principal 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 principal 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 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

Newtown High School has a new principal who has succeeded an interim principal and a principal who was in the school for thirty plus years. The assumption is that the new principal of Newtown High School will be granted the same authority and responsibility to implement the school's educational program and to pursue the school's mission and expectations for student learning. In the past, the administrative team used a tiered structure promoting leadership autonomy at the department level. The principal received input from support staff and students and acted as a liaison between the superintendent and the faculty. Over the past few years, however, the change of administrative staff, including both the principal and assistant principals, has diminished the continuity of vision necessary to effectively lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning. The new administrative team expresses a strong desire to work with the school's dedicated teachers to fulfill the vision identified in the school's mission and expectations for student learning. (self-study, school leadership team, department chairs)

The new principal describes the Newtown High School culture as possessing a student-centered focus with strong collegiality and intense intellectualism. Her vision is evolving to reflect the needs of the students, the staff, and the community and will be shared through faculty and department meetings, student advisory, student meetings, and daily announcements. She is codifying the procedures for the school, one example being the development of a parent handbook. The new principal's challenge will be to establish and communicate a clear vision on how the Newtown High School community will fulfill its mission and expectations for student learning while accommodating the burgeoning student population in an undersized and inadequate facility. With such a clear vision and the active involvement of all the constituencies of the school community, Newtown High School will continue to make progress in improving learning for all students. (school board members, school leadership team, teachers)

Teachers as well as assistant principals, the dean of students, the director of guidance, department heads, and the athletic director provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school. The administrative team includes the principal, the two assistant principals, a dean of students, a director of guidance, and the department heads. The administrative team meets weekly to collaborate on initiatives and refine action plans for school policies and practices. Individually, each of these team members has extensive responsibility and authority in all levels of managing the school's student body and staff members. Some of the responsibilities of the assistant principals include the supervision of alternative programs, 504 coordination, administering the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, scheduling, and programs such as the 'small town meetings'. The dean of students oversees individualized plans for students, fosters student-teacher relations, and participates in advisory planning. Department heads lead their departments in supporting best teaching practices and curriculum revision in addition to evaluating department members and organizing mentorships for new teachers to Newtown High School. The new teacher initiation program supports and guides new staff members by providing a week-long orientation program prior to the opening of school as well as providing for each new teacher both a trained teacher as mentor and another experienced teacher as 'content coach'. In addition to these roles, teachers also play leadership roles by serving on committees such as building level and K-12 curriculum reviews, addressing various building issues, and the BEST program. Teachers work closely with department chairs in assessing, revising, and implementing

curriculum revision. However, due to the growing size of the school, the large number of new teachers who have experienced teacher support, and recent changes in administration, teachers also report that they feel disconnected from the decision-making process. As a result, there has arisen some confusion about the roles of the various policy making/advisory bodies. On the whole, however, the faculty is dedicated to being actively involved in the efforts to improve the school and student learning. Such a professional commitment is an excellent resource for a school community dedicated to excellence. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team)

The educational program is designed to promote the school's mission and expectations for student learning and especially to prepare the vast majority of its students to continue their education after high school. In keeping with Newtown High School's mission of academic rigor, students are offered opportunities to enroll in courses that challenge and enrich their abilities and align with their interests. Core academic courses are organized into four levels: advanced placement, honors, college prep A, and college prep B, the last level formerly labeled 'basic'. In most cases, students may select to take a course from one of the three levels offered. For example, in the first year science program, there are Basic Earth Science, Earth Science, and Honors Earth Science. Thus, a student may be enrolled in courses on different levels during the school year. (program of studies, self-study, teachers, students)

To enroll in an honors course, a student must have a teacher recommendation and department approval. However, there is a parental override practice that does permit students to enroll in a higher level course than the one for which s/he was recommended. At the advanced placement level, the prerequisites for admission are extremely demanding and, as a result, appear to limit opportunities for students to select these challenging courses. There are several social studies and science courses that group all three course levels within the course sections, an effective means to encourage heterogeneity while providing the appropriate challenge and support for all students to succeed. Collaborative courses pairing a special educator and regular educator are available only in the college prep B level courses. Interdisciplinary programs including American Studies; 9th grade Math/Science and English/social studies programs, the honors senior projects, and community service offer students cross-discipline connections and authentic learning opportunities. Thus, some of the school's practices encourage heterogeneity and cross-disciplinary learning and encourage students to meet a higher challenge; other practices segregate students based on their academic performance and limit challenging learning opportunities. (students, self-study, special services, program of studies, department chairs)

Aside from heterogeneously organized elective classes and the several science and social studies courses, Newtown High School groups students in core classes in levels based on past student achievement. These grouping patterns reflect the beliefs of the faculty and community that such achievement grouping patterns meet the individual educational needs of the students. Teachers say that grouping by past achievement levels was the best avenue to differentiate instruction, promote student achievement, and maintain the same learning objectives for all students. In fact, the pedagogical term 'differentiated instruction' is designed to apply to meeting the varied learning styles and needs of students within a given course section, not through different levels of the same course. While this grouping practice certainly provides appropriate challenging opportunities for high achieving students, in practice and as shown much research on this subject, it does not provide equal opportunities for all students to meet high expectations nor does it engage the interest and effort of all students. It was clear in the samples of student work and in classroom observations that there were significant and alarming differences in the

expectations for student performance in the four course levels. In the recently renamed ‘college prep B’ courses, formally known as “basic”, the expectations for student learning appear to be limited to simple recall and worksheets. The fact that the collaborative teaching opportunity for students with special needs is available only on the college prep B level limits the opportunities for those students to participate in the far more enriched curriculum and instruction offered at the other levels that should be accessible to them with the help of proper resources such as special needs aides who are provided to give them more equal opportunity to succeed. Also, in a school where faculty members are trained in instructional processes that involve problem-solving and investigative methods of learning that are much more inclined to engage student interest and effort, class expectations for simple recall and use of worksheets appears to lack respect for the student and to belie the school’s mission. There is also a gender disparity in the B courses as enrollment in those courses is predominately male. For a school that sends approximately 90% of its graduates on to two and four year colleges, the practice of having three and four levels of the same course may not be justifiable in terms of space, personnel, or scheduling, nor is reducing learning opportunities a valid means to address individual student needs in a school equipped to offer so much to all its students. Research demonstrates that such leveling severely limits student preparation to meet the life’s challenges and does not inspire them to have higher expectations, to be prepared to continue their education after high school, or to participate in learning activities with open, inquiring minds and faith in their ability to solve their problems or participate in civic responsibilities. It is possible that professional development on actual ‘differentiated instruction’ would help address the challenges of increasing heterogeneity. (teachers, student work, observation, school leadership, program of studies)

The eight-period rotating schedule, greatly influenced by the demands of the lunch scheduling, supports the school’s mission and expectations in part by providing opportunities for students to take a variety of elective courses, and it accommodates the rigorous curriculum demands of many of the students. In addition, the extended weekly class period accommodates varied teaching strategies. This schedule, however, provides inadequate time during lunch for efficient food services for all students, socialization, and constructive use of free time. On Mondays, students eat during their study hall period, resulting in breakfast for some and no lunch for others. The remainder of the week limits lunch to twenty-two minutes with extensive crowding in all shifts. This schedule has been changed four times over recent years in an attempt to deal with the undersized cafeteria. These scheduling fluctuations are a direct result of increased student population, inadequate facilities, and inadequate staffing. It is apparent that the lunch schedule drives the total school schedule and, in combination with the limited number and types of classrooms and understaffing, limits the course offerings resulting in multiple study halls for many students. Hundreds of student requests for enrollment in the fine and practical arts areas have been denied. The scheduling fluctuations, the significantly increased student populations, the inadequate size of the cafeteria, and lack of classrooms makes it almost impossible to develop a daily schedule that truly facilitates the offering and effective delivery of the educational program. Thus, the students can not take full advantage of the course offerings, and all experience severely limited opportunities to improve learning. (observation, department chairs, teachers, students, school leadership team)

The atmosphere at Newtown High School is positive and collegial. Students, parents, and members of the school staff have meaningful roles in the decision-making process in order to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership. Some students report that

they have a strong voice in the decision-making policies at Newtown High School through the newly-formed advisory program, guidance counselors, the administration team, the student government, student clubs, and participation on various school committees such as the graduation standards committee and the newly formed leadership group called the student community Initiative (SCI). However, in the self-study survey, 51% of students say they felt that they do not have a strong voice in decision-making. Parents report having a strong voice at the district level as well as at the high school in such areas curriculum, space needs, policies, and hiring new candidates. Parents serve as leaders of booster clubs and the parent teacher student association (PTSA) which gives them a direct opportunity to voice their issues and concerns. They also have a direct role in course selection for their children through the override process. Teachers are also given the opportunity to become involved in the decision-making process via departments, building level and district committees, a technology committee, and a planning committee for the advisory committee. They are also directly involved in the on-going process of curriculum revision and in supporting new teachers as either mentors or content coaches. However, in spite of the many opportunities for teachers to become involved in the decision-making process, some teachers expressed the belief that they have less input now as a result of the growing size of the Newtown High School population. Such a perception can lessen the positive atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership that has been a traditional characteristic of this school community. (self-study, parents, teachers)

The student load at Newtown High School challenges the teaching staff to provide attention to individual students. With the increased enrollment over the past five years, numerous class sections in all departments have in excess of 25 students enrolled. Some of the classes with enrollments that are too large to insure that all students' needs are being addressed include: American Literature, composition courses, most of the social studies courses, Integrated Math 1 and 2, statistics, Pre-calculus, Calculus, Earth Science, Chemistry, and about one-half of the world language courses. These over-enrollments in the core academic areas inhibit the teachers' ability to provide constructive feedback on student work as well as the quality and quantity of assignments that require higher order thinking. In the elective areas, hundreds of students were not permitted to enroll in courses because of the lack of teachers and inadequate facilities. Courses such as science and English that require technology support enroll more students than can be accommodated by computer stations. Despite these challenges, the Newtown faculty members continue to be committed to doing their best to personalize the learning experiences and to meet the learning needs for each student. Several teachers in the elective programs and in world languages are teaching an additional class preparation in order to open more opportunities for students. To effectively deliver the school's educational program and to insure that all students have the opportunity to meet high expectations, class sizes must be returned to a reasonable size, additional classroom space needs to be provided, and additional teachers need to be hired to reduce class size and to offer courses that are justified by student enrollment numbers. This school does not have enough classrooms and teachers to accommodate the educational program and needs of the students. (self-study, observation, teachers)

There is a new program, Advisory, that attempts to insure that each student has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor assigned to personalize each student's educational experience. There are many formal and informal programs within the school community in which students are supported by adults who know them well and assist them in achieving the school-wide expectations for learning. In its second

year, the Advisory program that meets twice a month, matches groups of students with faculty members in smaller group settings that facilitate discussions on important issues. The school culture at Newtown High School fosters a personalized relationship between students and staff. Teachers and counselors make themselves available to students before, during, and after school. Additional opportunities for personalization exist in the Newtown High School Career Center, the guidance department, and the reading-math center. In addition, coaches work informally as mentors to the many student athletes at Newtown High School. It is clear that most students feel connected to the school community. (self-study, parents, students)

There are occasional limited opportunities for formal professional collaboration within and across departments in support of student learning. Monthly, departments meet to discuss teaching and learning issues, as well as to conduct department business. The department chairs meet twice monthly with the principal to discuss school policy issues and the development of leadership for improving student learning. Scheduled professional development sessions provide some opportunities for teachers to collaborate. However, the lack of common planning time inhibits teachers from collaborating on common expectations and assessments across sections of courses and the development of cross-disciplinary learning activities. Staff members express the need for more time to be made available for collaboration, both within and between departments. The absence of more formal and readily available opportunities for collaboration among the highly skilled and creative staff members limits the development of learning opportunities that would better meet the educational needs of students. (self-study, teachers, administrators)

Despite the lack of an adequate number of clerical staff members to meet the multitude of needs resulting from the rapidly increasing student body, all staff members are involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students. Despite the overwhelming demands of their jobs, the secretaries create a warm, supportive climate and assist students by facilitating access to administrative or counseling services. Secretaries enjoy their work and convey that enthusiasm to students. The security staff contributes to a safe and secure learning environment. The custodial staff and the cafeteria workers are courteous and friendly to students. A positive school climate exists at Newtown High School for staff, teachers, and students. (self-study, student and teacher survey, observation)

The success of Newtown High School students is regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed. Recognition of student achievement and success is evident throughout the building. Samples of student work are exhibited in display cases in the main lobby. In addition, the athletics program acknowledges the athletes at the close of each sports season, at pep rallies, and at seasonal awards nights. Celebrations include annual academic and community service and sports awards ceremonies. The music department presents awards to graduating seniors and photographs of drama presentations are posted on the school's website and on the walls along the arts hallway. The Future Business Leaders of America organization showcases its awards in a display case outside the main office. Student murals decorate the hallways; exemplars of student work are displayed in the school lobby and in many classrooms. Accomplishments from academic and extracurricular events are publicized in the local media. Recognition of these accomplishments clearly instills a sense of pride in students. (self-study, parents, observation)

The climate of Newtown High School is safe, positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership exhibited by faculty, staff, and students. The school community takes pride in the school's recognition by the United States Department of Education

as a Blue Ribbon School. Students report feeling comfortable, safe, and proud of their school. This sense of pride is demonstrated, also, by the faculty and staff. Students and teachers are actively involved in the extracurricular and sports programs with 85% of the student body involved in athletics and activities. Most teams are coached by and clubs are advised by faculty members. In the last five years, the student enrollment has increased by almost 400 students to the present enrollment of approximately 1,700 in 2005. Such a rapid growth in a school that was already considered large, makes it far more difficult for students to feel that they are known and valued in the school community. The Newtown High School faculty is challenged to sustain that positive and productive environment for such a rapidly expanding student population. (panel presentation, self-study, students)

The Newtown Board of Education attempts to support the school, administration, and teachers as they address the educational and personal needs of the students. The board has approved the implementation of school initiatives such as the Success-Oriented School Model, K-12 reading and writing standards, and the newly adopted graduation standards for the class of 2006. The board has also put into place ‘no tolerance’ policies for bullying and for hazing. It approves the adoption of curriculum even when its members realize that they may not be able to convince the town’s decision-makers to provide all the resources needed to implement that curriculum. The members of the board have given significant efforts to educate and convince the town of the serious needs of Newtown High School. However, because of the decisions of the town government, the Newtown High School budget has not kept pace with the sharply increasing needs resulting from the rapid increases in student enrollment. The need for an expanded building that address problems in the cafeteria, the library, the gymnasium, technology, and inadequate number of classrooms as well as the desperate need for increasing the number of both professional and clerical personnel must become a priority for the entire Newtown community. The existing facility and level of staffing is already having a significant negative impact on student learning which will only get worse each year that these unwarranted conditions are allowed to continue and will threaten the continuation of the excellence the town expects from its school and its young people. (panel presentation, self-study, teachers)

Commendations

1. The strong sense of pride demonstrated by students and staff of Newtown High School
2. The dedication and commitment of administration, faculty, and support staff to student’s well-being
3. The active involvement of parents, students, and teachers in the decision-making processes throughout the school program
4. The active involvement of parents in booster groups that provide so much support for student participation in athletics and activities
5. The dedication of the faculty to school improvement through their involvement on building level and district committees
6. The continued dedication of the teacher to personalize instruction and to meet the educational needs of their students despite the large class sizes

7. The hard work of the clerical, custodial, and security staff in promoting the well-being of the student body
8. The faculty member's professionalism as demonstrated in their roles as mentors and content coaches for new teachers and coaches and advisors for sports teams and student activities
9. The new teacher orientation program that introduces new teachers to the school and its culture as well as supporting them throughout their first years in Newtown High School
10. The initiation of 'small town committee' to develop student leaders and the introduction and expansion of the advisory program to insure every student in that large school has at least one adult who takes a personal interest in their educational progress
11. The professional development program that offers time and support for teacher participation in-service programs and conferences
12. The on-going acknowledgement of student success and achievement throughout the school
13. The existence of a safe and supportive learning environment in a school of almost 1,700 students
14. The attempt to offer heterogeneous learning opportunities in some social studies and science classes

Recommendations

1. Provide more "collaborative teaching" opportunities at the college prep A level courses
2. Implement ways to increase student access to more challenging learning opportunities and courses
3. Implement ways to reduce the opportunity for low achieving students to enroll in less challenging courses
4. Increase opportunities for all students to take advantage of heterogeneous and cross-disciplinary learning opportunities
5. Continue to expand the advisory program to better meet the significant need for all students to have an adult taking personal interest in their progress in school as well as to increase student opportunities to achieve the school's social and civic expectations
6. Develop a calendar for in-service time that addresses the changing needs of teachers during the school year
7. Clarify and communicate opportunities for teachers, staff, students, and parents to be involved in the school's decision-making process

8. Develop and publicize evidence to demonstrate the significant need for increased clerical staff
9. Identify the technology needed to facilitate the administration and management of the school as well as the collection and assessment of student performance data and develop a plan for implementation and maintenance of that needed technology
10. Include input from department chairpersons, teachers, parents, students, and maintenance staff members in evaluating the effectiveness of the current schedule in delivering the school's educational program

VI. School Resources for Learning

Student learning and well-being are dependant 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 laws.

Conclusions

Student support services at Newtown High School are consistent with the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning. In addition, the school has established numerous programs which are intended to enable all students to achieve the academic, civic, and social expectations delineated with the mission statement. Examples of this include the math/reading center where students can come to receive extra help with assignments and projects at any time during the school day. There is an active special education department that, in addition to identifying, monitoring, and referring students in accordance with local, state, and national laws, has demonstrated a commitment to collaborative teaching that helps to staff and administer the school's two alternative programs, The Afternoon Program (TAP) and the Flex program, and that has provided opportunities for students to participate in the school's entrepreneurial programs through the Back Door Café. Other school-run entrepreneurial programs that offer real world experiences to participants include culinary arts, printing, and dry cleaning and programs run through the career center such as the senior project, in which seniors are paired with a member of the community to explore an interest, and also the voluntary community service initiative that is a source of pride to many students. (self-study, teachers, students, school materials)

Although the aim of these programs is to provide varied learning opportunities in a comprehensive high school students may be limited from gaining full access to these programs for a number of reasons. These limitations may include: limiting enrollment to just juniors and seniors; lack of sufficient personnel or adequate facilities to enroll the number of students who register for the programs; or charging a fee for admissions that inhibits some students from equal access to these opportunities. The impact of these limitations is that some students are being denied an opportunity to participate in what might be for them an important influence on a career choice or life path. (self-study, teachers, support staff)

Newtown High School's support services actively collaborate with the professional teaching staff, utilize community resources to enhance learning opportunities for students, and provide resources that enhance student learning. The support services include: the enterprise programs that are either partnered with local businesses or operate as businesses themselves; the school's substance abuse counselor and social worker who are associated with Danbury Hospital; and the school's library/media center that works cooperatively with the Cyrenius Booth Community Library. Perhaps the outstanding example of this is the career center's community service initiative and the senior project, which, although voluntary and thus not used by all students, incorporate many varied community sources in support of student learning. (support staff, self-study, teachers, students)

Student support services are assessed for effectiveness in a variety of ways and are revised to support improved student learning. For each program run by the guidance department, parents and students are asked to complete feedback forms that are used to make revisions for the following year. The guidance director compiles data on post secondary plans for the graduating class and has begun to develop a data base which reflects college admissions decisions and admissions criteria relating to Newtown High School students. The guidance staff also meets weekly to review and revise programs and methods of addressing student needs. A developmental guidance curriculum is being planned for next year. The health services department maintains a record of student visits and prepares an annual report for the medical

advisor and superintendent. This report includes, among other things, statistics regarding immunizations and examinations. Every five years a full compliance review is completed to evaluate special education needs and services. The director of pupil personnel collects data annually from the psychologists, social worker, and substance abuse counselor regarding direct service hours, meetings and crisis intervention activities. The library media staff prepares an annual report that addresses the program and specific goals of the library/media center. The level of satisfaction with student support services is very high, and the clerical support staff in each of these areas deserves much of the credit for the success and effectiveness of the daily delivery of programs and services. (self-study, student, teachers, school support staff, and parents)

A system is in place for effective and ongoing communication with students, parent/guardians, and school personnel. It is designed to keep all school constituencies informed about the types of available student support services and identified student needs. Communication from school resource personnel is comprehensive, varied, and targeted to the appropriate audiences. Communication includes, but is not limited to, memos, newsletters, phone calls, letters, planning guides, conferences, pamphlets, e-mails, class presentations, and small group seminars. Quarterly newsletters are sent out to parents, students, and teachers from guidance, health services, and the library media center. In addition, quarterly progress reports and report cards are sent home. However, because of the lack of adequate technology, processing these quarterly academic reports is extremely cumbersome. Teachers routinely share home phone numbers and e-mail addresses with students and parents. An open house is held each fall and parent teacher conferences are scheduled each semester. The guidance department hosts many informal parent coffee gatherings for transitional periods in students' lives such as the college application processes for seniors and high school orientations for the transition to grade nine. Formal programs include financial aid night, grade eight parent night to outline the high school program of studies, post secondary planning for juniors and parents, and "alumni day" where graduates return to Newtown High School to address college bound seniors. (parents, student, school support staff, self-study, school materials)

The guidance department prepares a post secondary planning guide, and a myriad of helpful handouts and guides on topics related to high school and post secondary planning for parents and students. The library media center provides information about its services through its website and newsletter. Student support personnel use faculty and department meetings to disseminate information regarding various programs and services available to students. The nurse regularly communicates with the staff on specific individual health issues that will impact student achievement and has available in the health office brochures on a wide range of health topics relating to adolescents. (parents, student, school support staff, self-study, school materials)

Student records, including health and immunization records, are maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law. All student records from the guidance department, health services, the library media center, and special education are kept secure and confidential. (school support staff, self-study, school materials)

The guidance department maintains the academic records and transcripts for students in Grades 9-12, graduates of Newtown High School, and any students who have withdrawn from high school. The files are kept in permanently locked, fire-proof cabinets and are not accessible to teachers unless they sign in to see the records. Parents and/or students have access to the files

only when a counselor is present. The office area is locked at the end of the school day. (self-study, tour of the facility, school personnel, self-study)

At Newtown High School, the health records of all students are kept both electronically and manually; that is, as hard copy folders in a locked, fire-proof file cabinet. The school's computer network database systems provide health records to the necessary personnel. The students' immunization records are kept for fifty years while the hard copy is kept on file for seven years after graduation. (self-study, school personnel, tour of the facility)

The library media center stores all student database information in a locked server room. The information is deleted when the student graduates and/or when the student moves out of the district. Students who use the center are assured that their identity as well as the material that is checked out is kept confidential. Teachers and/or other employees of the school do not have access to this information. The information on students for outstanding books, however, is given to the secretarial staff for purposes of collection. The parents have the right to review any information only if the student is under age. (self-study, tour of facility, school personnel)

In the special education area, copies of the student files are kept in a secure area in unlocked, fire-proof file cabinet. The room is locked each day as well as the outer office area. The special education chairperson and the security person are the only employees who have access to the keys to the area where copies of the student files are kept. The original student files are securely kept at the central district office. Only the school psychologist, the social workers, and the special education teachers may sign out the student files at the high school. These files cannot leave the building. Teachers need to contact the students' case managers for any student information. Parents have the authority to inspect and review reports unless the district has been advised that the parent does not have the authority under applicable state law governing such matters as guardianship, separation, and divorce. The district keeps records until the minimum retention period as recommended by the state of Connecticut is achieved. The school personnel feel confident that the students' records are kept confidential as well as secure within the school environment. (self-study, tour of facility, interviews, school personnel)

The existing support service staff is insufficient to provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library media services. The dedicated, clerical staff in each of these areas is overwhelmed and routinely takes work home. In the past five years, the student body has increased by almost 400 students, the faculty has been increased by 18 teachers, the professional support staff added a school psychologist and a guidance counselor, and the administrative team has a new dean of students. Despite these significant increases in personnel and the resulting demand for services, the only increase in clerical support in the entire school was to increase the hours of a part time clerk by ten hours. Trying to fulfill the demand of the significantly larger school community without increasing the clerical staff is not only burdensome on those in clerical positions, but it significantly hampers the efficiency and effectiveness of the professional staff as well.

In addition, the professional support staff takes pride in the full range of programs and services that enables over 90% of the school's graduates to continue their education beyond high school. With a counselor/student ratio rapidly approaching 300 to 1, full implementation of guidance programs and services is compromised and communication with teachers, parents, and

students suffers. To meet the significantly increased parental and student expectations additional support is needed. (self-study, teacher, support staff)

The guidance department, along with the school psychologists, social worker, and career resource personnel provide a comprehensive range of programs and services that address the career, academic, and social/emotional needs of students at Newtown High School. This is accomplished in a variety of ways including: classroom instruction, small group lessons, group counseling, instruction in use of guidance software, day and evening programs for parents and students, community outreach, college representative visits, staff memos, and individual parent and student conferences. Counselors provide input in the development of individual education plans, coordinate and implement 504 plans, assist students in the course selection process, and make referrals to community mental health agencies and social service providers. For students new to the district, the guidance staff provides an ice cream social before school begins and conducts a small group transition meeting once school starts. The staff of the college and career center provides a wide range of services to students and graduates including career and personality inventories, electronic college searches, job shadowing and internships, as well as part time employment. (student, facility tour, teacher, school support staff, self-study.)

The health services include a variety of offerings for students and teachers. Preventive health and emergency services are available in the nurse's office throughout the school day. Various health issues are assessed and treated while promoting health and wellness. Mandated screening for vision and scoliosis are performed during the school year with appropriate referrals being sent to the parents as needed. During the school year, three health-related newsletters are prepared by the nurse's office for dissemination to the faculty as well as to the staff in other schools within the district. In addition, services on health issues, such as drugs, alcohol, smoking, good nutrition, and academic/personal problems are provided to students. Health professionals from the community provide information to students for the annual health day. A collaborative process exists where school personnel, nurses, families, physicians, and community resources work together to make appropriate plans and referrals for students in need. An emergency plan with specific instructions relating to various scenarios is given to all staff members. First-aid treatment along with health counseling is provided on a one-to-one basis. The student assistance team (SAT) is now coordinated by the Dean of Students and accepts referrals from teachers, guidance department, special education staff, and specialized staff including a psychologist, social worker, nurse, administrators, and the student assistance counselor to identify and address the various needs of individual students. Specific monitoring and support plans are developed by the SAT so that students facing barriers to learning may be helped according to their needs: academic, social and emotional, health and education choices, and responsibilities. The school personnel feel confident about the health services that are offered to students and staff members. (school personnel, self-study, tour of facility, teachers)

Library/media information is fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program. The library media specialists work closely with the teachers and meet bi-monthly with department chairs to discuss curriculum needs. These meetings keep the librarians current with department needs. Teachers and administrators are also involved in the selection of materials. The library/media center's newsletter "FYI from the LMC", requests suggestions for materials to purchase and informs the school population of new acquisitions. The library staff responds to the feedback from their newsletter. According to the self-study survey, 72.4% of teachers use the media center services in the delivery of their curriculum. The media center keeps

lessons created by the media specialist collaborating with the classroom teacher to support the curriculum. In order to meet the needs of the students, the media specialist stays aware of materials and databases that would support the curriculum. (self-study, visit to media center, teachers, media personnel)

As a result of extensive use of the media center by students, it is sometimes filled and thus, access to library/information services, facilities, and programs is limited for other students, staff, and support staff. As much as the library staff members try to accommodate the school community, they are frequently overbooked and overcrowded. Students indicate they frequently cannot get on a computer when needed. If the computers are reserved for classes, students and staff members may not use them during that class period. Two major causes of overcrowding are the fact the existing library facility is not big enough to accommodate the increased size of the student population and the library, as it should be, is open to students who do not have a class during a particular period. However, fewer students would go to the library to socialize if the school provided an attractive alternative space where students could socialize as well as do homework and study. When the media center is filled, the media specialists spend most of their time and effort monitoring student behavior rather than using their expertise to improve student learning. (students, teachers, support staff, observations)

The library/information services foster independent inquiry by enabling the students to use various school and community information resources and technologies. The library/media center fosters independent inquiry by teaching students and staff members about the card catalog, how to use the seven databases provided online including Newspaper Source, Galenet Databases, and the Connecticut Digital Library. As part of the instruction in using the library catalog, students create a bibliography of books either to read or use for research. When classes come in to do research, the media specialists spend time with the class, pointing out the best approach to their task and giving them the choice of many resources, including print and media. (teachers, support staff, self-study)

The library/media center at Newtown High School has policies in place to ensure the selection and removal of resources and use of the Internet. The primary selection of resources is performed by the library media specialists, who are always open to suggestions and seek input from the staff and students. They have a policy in place for weeding in order to keep the collection current and attractive. An Internet permission form is included in the parent handbook. Parents must return the form signed to the school. “Bess” an Internet filter also hampers students from accessing inappropriate websites. (teachers, support staff, interviews)

Commendations:

1. The frequency, quality, and variety of communication to students, parents, and staff members, from all student support service areas
2. The media specialists attending bi-monthly department head meetings to plan and stay abreast of curriculum needs
3. The cooperation among counselors, school psychologists, social worker, and career education personnel in delivery of student support services

4. The variety of opportunities provided students by the special education department for full school involvement
5. The exceptional level of caring demonstrated by support service personnel
6. The college and career center providing significant links to the community and fostering post-secondary planning for students
7. The library/media center for remaining open before and after school hours
8. The full-time school nurse for serving the needs of the district as well as the high school
9. The excellent support of student learning provided by the math/reading center
10. The on-going self-assessment of and revision to all of the school's support services

Recommendations

1. Demonstrate the need and develop and implement a plan that provides for additional professional and clerical resources in the guidance and special education programs
2. Provide adequate maintenance and technical support to maximize the use of available technology
3. Develop and implement a plan to enlarge the library media center and expand its services so that it can better meet the educational needs of the large and rapidly growing student population
4. Provide additional computer stations in the library so that all students have equal access to technology
5. Expand the school health service's professional personnel so they better meets the needs of the expanding school population
6. Investigate and implement a technology-based process to facilitate the writing and sending of progress reports

VII. 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 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

Newtown High School actively and consistently engages parents and families as partners in each student's education and encourages their participation and support in various school programs and support groups. Parents remain informed on academic, athletic, and other school events via regular school newsletters in addition to several mailings on specific programs. According to the self-study survey, 90% of parents surveyed believe that they have adequate opportunity to meet with teachers to discuss student progress. The school and faculty members frequently communicate via telephone, e-mail and other forms of written communication to inform parents of student progress and achievement. Mailings sent from the career center solicit parent input and participation in the school's job shadowing and internship programs. Parents are frequently seen in the guidance office reviewing college materials or meeting with counselors, and programs such as the junior and senior parent nights help to engage parents in the education of their children. Newtown High School remains highly receptive to parent involvement in all facets of the school, fostering a positive and consistent partnership and connection with parents that benefits student learning. (parents, teachers, self-study survey)

The school fosters many productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning. Newtown High School solicits local businesses to participate in the job shadowing and internship programs and for career mentoring experiences through the senior project program. These contributions play a significant role in the planning and implementing of Newtown's school to career programs. Additional programs such as career speakers' day and world language day elevate the level of collaboration between the school and community. The art department also utilizes various community sites to display student art exhibits. (students, teachers, self-study)

The culinary classes serve luncheons to the faculty and staff, and students in computer science classes repair computers sent in by community members. The Newtown Greenery, run by students, grows and sells floral gift baskets, plants, and other items. The Back Door Café, a program for students with special needs, prepares and sells food to the school and local communities. A required social studies course gets students involved in the community's issues. Additionally, students have the opportunity to enroll in advanced classes at the University of Connecticut cooperation program. The Tech Prep program allows students the opportunity to earn college credit through Naugatuck Valley Community College. These initiatives allow students to demonstrate their commitment to the community as well as heighten their awareness of community resources. Newtown High School and its students significantly benefit from such varied and consistent partnerships with the community. (student, parents, community members)

The school site and plant inhibit the school's efforts to fulfill its mission as well as severely limiting the delivery and enhancement of all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning. The addition of 88,000 square feet as part of a renovation project completed in 1997 no longer supports the educational needs of the school's rapidly growing population. Some hallways and stairwells are overcrowded during passing times. Programs, such as the fine and practical arts, are unable to satisfy all the students interested in enrolling in courses because of the lack of rooms as well as a lack of adequate staffing. In an attempt to address and accommodate the lack of adequate classroom space due to increased enrollment, seven areas in the basement of the school were converted into classrooms in the summer of 2005. These additional rooms have also been used to house the two alternative

programs that were finally brought back into the building so those students could have a better sense of being a part of the Newtown High School community. (self-study, teachers, school leaders, students)

While these additional teaching stations provided minor help, it has caused a significant loss of the storage areas that these classrooms now occupy. As a result, some frequently used supplies were moved off-site, make access to and use of those resources very inefficient. Necessary instructional and custodial supplies sometimes take up to three days to arrive after a request is made. There is only one courier contracted to make deliveries for the entire district. Teachers who need paper must place their orders well ahead of time to insure a timely delivery. The inability to guarantee the availability of supplies for immediate use inhibits the teaching and learning process. (self-study, teachers, school leaders, students)

Inadequate storage remains a significant concern throughout the building, particularly in the areas of music and the nurse's office. The area used by the school store was reduced to one-half its size to accommodate the attendance office. The cafeteria is totally inadequate to handling the needs of almost 1,700 students. Thus, the limitations of the existing facility are having a significant and negative impact on the school's ability to deliver its educational program and fulfill its mission. (self-study, teachers, school leaders, students)

During each of the lunch shifts, the cafeteria service areas are very crowded. To help alleviate this problem the cafeteria staff moved one serving station outside of the main area, but it had only a minor impact on the overcrowding. As a result of an increased enrollment, the four cashiers struggle to process the increased number of students purchasing food. Because the custodial staff is understaffed, trash and litter remain in the cafeteria throughout the time lunches are served. The more aesthetically pleasing round tables in the cafeteria have been replaced with long benched tables to accommodate more students at one time. Those tables tend to create an image of what one might see in a prison rather than providing students with an enjoyable place to eat. The need to accommodate all students in the cafeteria for lunch continues to impact the education program despite modifications to the schedule that have already been attempted. (observation, self-study, students, teachers, school leaders)

The lack of available classrooms, teachers and thus, additional courses for this student population causes students to have more free time during the school day. This has created safety concerns because insufficient staff is available to insure proper supervision. During non-lunch times, students who do not have a class must either go to the unappealing cafeteria or the library. Access to the computer labs is extremely limited because they are usually reserved for classes. To provide another option, some of the round tables taken from the cafeteria have been placed in the entry lobby. While the current facility limits their efforts, the faculty continues to offer every educational opportunity for their students. (observation, self-study, students, teachers, school leaders)

Due to the school's limited size, the inadequacy of the cafeteria to serve the increasing student population, the school has experimented with four schedule formats in the past five years. In an effort to reduce the overflow of students eating lunch, this plan requires that on Mondays, students eat during their free period, resulting in some students eating lunch at 7:30 in the morning while others do not eat at all because they do not have free time in their schedule. During the rest of the school week, lunch occurs in four separate shifts of 21 minutes. To

accommodate the four lunch shifts, classes during that time have 75 minutes of instruction compared to sections of the same course that meet at different blocks of the day for 50 minutes. This difference in instruction time seriously impacts daily planning for teachers with multiple sections of the same course. Faculty and staff members voice serious concern about the long-term impact this disparity of time will have on student achievement at Newtown High School. (students, facility tour, teachers, school leaders, self-study, school materials)

Despite the school's increasing population and building limitations, the overall facility remains clean. The custodial staff, widely respected by the high school community for their dedication and work ethic, has a rotating schedule in order to accommodate all the various activities that occur both during the school day and at night. The director of building and grounds for the Newtown Public School and the head custodian at the high school agree that the thirteen custodians struggle daily with the maintenance of a building that continues to grow in terms of student population. Such an increase in student population without an increase in custodial services reduces the ability of the existing staff to accomplish the necessary work and repairs. The custodians' report that they work several hours beyond contracted times in an attempt to complete jobs, attend to the needs of the facility, and to maintain the school's neat and functional appearance. (self-study, support staff, school leaders, teachers)

As the site of many school and community events, the auditorium is in need of serious repair. Many of the seats are in disrepair and are sometimes removed but not replaced, decreasing the capacity of the auditorium. At any one time, only two of the four grades can be seated in the auditorium for assemblies or informational meetings. The stage floor and curtains are also in need of repair. The custodial staff struggles to maintain the cleanliness of the area. There have been several plans proposed to renovate the auditorium scheduled, then postponed for yet another year because of other facility priorities. (self-study, school tour, school leaders, teachers)

The main gym is too small to accommodate all students. Thus, there is no area in which the entire school community can be brought together for any reason. For example, pep rallies for fall and spring sports are held outside, but the winter sports are not recognized with pep rallies because of space constraints. The school cannot come together as an entire school community so the sense of belonging to a large community or celebrating each others' successes is not fulfilled. (self-study, school tour, students, school leaders, teachers)

There are not enough computer labs to accommodate the needs of this large, college-bound student body. The computer labs that do exist do not contain enough computers for an entire class. Thus, when classes do get to use the labs, not every student can get the same benefits because they can not be actively involved in the learning process. They can only observe what is going on. With such a significant limitation, it is not surprising to find that many teachers avoid integrating the use of technology into their courses, thus depriving students of a needed opportunity to be technologically adept in order to be successful in post-secondary education. Some of the computer labs remain locked at certain times of the day due to the lack of available adult supervision; therefore students are denied access to the technology when they have the time and need to use it. Additionally, many faculty members do not have immediate access to a computer. As a result, they are not able to comply with administrative requests to regularly check their e-mail messages. This adversely impacts necessary and required communication as well as impeding the learning process. Current and available technology does not provide all students

and teachers with the opportunity to use technology in the teaching and learning process, thus limiting the students' ability to be fully prepared for college or careers. (facility tour, teachers, board of education, students, school leaders, self-study)

The physical plant and facilities are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations. Current reports that indicate complete compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations are housed in a central location in an organized fashion. Newtown High School remains diligent in complying with local fire, health, and safety regulations. There is no one identified to be in charge of a safety plan for the storage, distribution, and disposal of science and other chemicals thus compromising the safety of students and teachers. The heating ventilation and air conditioning system receives yearly maintenance and cleaning, and the air filters are replaced at least once a year. However, there is continual concern over the inconsistent and uncomfortable temperatures in the facility. The disparities in temperature evidenced by some areas being so cold that jackets are worn and other areas so warm that occupants are noticeably uncomfortable, compromise the educational process as well as the maintenance of equipment such as computers that require a regular temperature in order to operate properly. (self-study, observations, facility tour, teachers, building administrators)

Most instructional equipment is adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate. In the self-study survey, 62.6% of the teachers reported that they were satisfied with the availability of educational equipment despite the observation that televisions, VCRs, and DVD players are not evident in all classrooms. However, this was not the case with technology. There are not enough computers and computer labs to accommodate the need by the rapidly increasing student body. The computer labs do not have enough computers to accommodate full classes even when all the computers are working. There is not adequate maintenance to insure that the equipment will work when needed, and repairs to computers often are not made in a timely fashion. Often times the on-line service fails. The special education department has not received any new technology. "Smart Boards" for mathematics instruction were allocated in last year's budget but removed due to financial constraints. Such unreliability and lack of availability of modern technology not only interferes with communications and the teaching-learning process but also discourages teachers from developing lessons that are dependent on the use of technology. Student learning is impacted, and their use of technology to gather, organize, assess and communicate information is undermined, making them less able to compete when they continue their education after high school. (self-study, teacher, students, facility tour, observations)

The school has a planned program of building and site management to ensure the appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school plant, but it is not adequately funded. Members of the custodial staff hold various licenses and certifications that enhance their ability to maintain the building in a functional manner. The district maintenance supervisor and his staff keep a well-maintained and clean school environment, but some of the maintenance and repair projects, such as those needed in the auditorium, have been delayed because of lack of funding. Also, repeated requests for additional custodial staff made by the district maintenance supervisor have been denied. In the past, two capital improvement plans have included requests to make improvements to the auditorium including the replacement of lights, seats and carpeting, and repainting. Each time, these requests have been displaced in favor of addressing other budget priorities. Currently, there is a plan to address the auditorium renovations in the next building renovation. While the need for a building addition and renovation is apparent, no plan

has been drawn, no commitment has been made by the town to undertake such a project and thus, the date of a renovation is not known. The consistent lack of attention to these maintenance needs in an area that is widely used by the school and local community reflects poorly on the school at large. In addition, without immediate and consistent attention to these issues, facility deterioration will continue. (parents, facility tour, central office administrators, school leaders, board of education)

A space needs committee was established a year and one-half ago in response to the rapid enrollment increases. This committee, comprised of building administrators, parents, department chairpersons, and central office administrators, first hired an architect to explore the possibility of creating a new high school facility. A subsequent committee, not including department chairpersons, shifted the focus to assessing the ability to build an addition to the existing facility. It was concluded that such an addition would result in the loss of playing fields and/or parking lots. While the space needs committee continues to meet, the specific needs of the building that will address the limitations of the existing building in delivering the school's educational program and fulfilling the school's mission as well as the willingness of the larger Newtown community to support the addition and renovation has not been confirmed. (teachers, administrators, parents, board of education)

The Newtown community does not 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. Despite the financial resources of the community and its citizens that places Newtown in the top ranks of the communities in Connecticut that are able to provide revenue, Newtown High School is ranked 139 out of the 169 school districts in Connecticut in per pupil expenditure. Students enrolled in advanced placement courses are required to complete the exam and pay the \$85 exam fee. Additionally, students involved in other programs such as sports and marching band also must pay for their participation. The fee for student parking is one of the highest in the state. The school has no set process to identify and support those students who may be unable to pay these fees. As a result, some students do not participate because of financial limitations of which the school is unaware. The school does not take a concerted initiative to ensure that every student is aware of these opportunities and that no student is deprived of these opportunities because they are unwilling to admit that they can not afford them. (teachers, self-study, parents, students)

The school and district have a systematic process that involves the faculty and administrators in the budget preparation. Teachers identify instructional needs to enhance student learning for the upcoming school year, submitting and reviewing those requests with the department chairperson. These requests are then submitted to the building principal, who, after any necessary reductions, submits a finalized version to the central office. The superintendent, using the proposed budgets from the various parts of the school system, reviews the requests and submits his proposal to for the board of education's review. This process allows all involved parties to have input in what is necessary to improve student learning. While the board of education generally supports the budget requests from the superintendent, the town's legislative council and board of finance have significantly cut those funding requests. As a result the staff needed to deliver the school's educational program is not in place to meet the needs of the increasing number of students. Despite the agreed-upon inadequacy of the existing building, town officials have yet to agree on the funding needed to address those significant facility issues.

The result is that the quality of the educational program is being seriously undermined as the student population increases. (teachers, central office, self-study, school leaders, board of education)

Commendations

1. The frequency, variety, and quality of communication with parents
2. The significant and positive parental involvement throughout the school program
3. The variety and quality of business/community/higher education partnerships
4. The maintenance of the building that provides a clean and safe environment
6. The diligent and consistent work ethic of the custodial staff
7. The inclusion of all necessary partners in the budget process

Recommendations

1. Identify and publicize the negative impact on the school's ability to fulfill its mission and to meet the educational needs of its growing student population of each of the following:
 - a. an inadequate number of classrooms
 - b. an inadequate library-media center
 - c. an inadequately sized cafeteria
 - d. inadequate technology resources for student and teacher use
 - e. inadequate office/conference space and
 - f. a run down auditorium
2. Identify and publicize the number of additional teachers needed to reduce the size of core academic classes that exceed 23 students
3. Identify and publicize the number of class sections of courses that were not taught and the number of students thus deprived of those learning opportunities due to the lack of needed teachers
4. Develop and implement a school wide technology plan that provides the necessary resources, access, and support to ensure that all students have easy and continuous access so they can develop the needed competencies to succeed in an information-based, technologically-driven society

5. Expand and improve the cafeteria facilities so that it no longer interferes with the delivery of the educational program and provides an inviting place for students to eat, socialize, and do homework
6. Add additional classrooms so that the educational program can be delivered to meet the needs and interests of the students
7. Develop and implement a staffing plan that adds enough teachers to restore reasonable class sizes in the core academics and to teach course offerings that meet the educational needs and interests of the students
8. Investigate and develop options for on-site storage of instructional and maintenance supplies
9. Increase available space in the guidance and special education areas
10. Establish an emergency response team to develop and implement procedures that will increase students safety and accountability for fire drills, lockdowns and other unforeseen emergencies
11. Implement a formal plan to identify and assist students who are unable or unwilling to admit that they can not afford to participate in school programs
12. Put in place a chemical safety coordinator

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 other officials to use to improve the quality of programs and services for the students the in Newtown High School. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should 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 that occur at that school throughout the decennial cycle. To monitor the school's progress in the Follow-Up Program, the Commission requires that the principal of Newtown 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 Progress 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 manor 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 principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty days (60) of occurrence any substantive change, which negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditations. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact that the change has had on the school's ability to meet CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix. 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 visiting committee 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.

Newtown High School
NEASC Visiting Team
September 18 – 21, 2005

BAKER, JERI	Waterford High School	Waterford	CT	06385
BENEDICT, JAN	Westhill High School	Stamford	CT	06902
BORCK, JENNIFER	Ct. State Dept of Ed	Hartford	CT	06145
DALLAI, RUSSELL	North Haven High School	North Haven	CT	06473
DELLACAMERA, JOHN	West Haven High School	West Haven	CT	06516
DEVLIN, WILLIAM	Darien High School	Darien	CT	06820
DOYLE, THERESA	Torrington High School	Torrington	CT	06790
DUNN, SCOTT	Simsbury High School	Simsbury	CT	06070
GOMES, ELIZABETH A.	Portsmouth High School	Portsmouth	RI	02871
HIBBARD, K.MICHAEL	Ridgefield Public Schools	Ridgefield	CT	06877
HIGGINS, EDMUND	Branford High School	Branford	CT	06405
KANEKO, AURORA	Guilford High School	Guilford	CT	06437
MAZZONNA, SUSAN	South Windsor High School	South Windsor	CT	06074
NOONAN, MARILEE	East Haven High School	East Haven	CT	06513
O'ROURKE, GAIL	Woonsocket Senior High S	Woonsocket	RI	02895
REMY, RONALD	Bassick High School	Bridgeport	CT	06605
WASLEY, TONI	Hale-Ray HS	Moodus	CT	06469
WOODMAN, CHRISTINE	Montville High School	Montville	CT	06

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & 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 on the school's ability to meet the Standards. The following are potential areas where there might be negative substantive changes which must be reported:

- elimination of fine arts, practical arts and student activities
- diminished upkeep and maintenance of facilities
- significantly decreased funding
- cuts in the level of administrative and supervisory staffing
- cuts in the number of teachers and/or guidance counselors
- cuts in the number of support staff
- decreases in student services
- cuts in the educational media staffing
- increases in student enrollment that cannot be accommodated
- changes in the student population that warrant program or staffing modification(s) that cannot be accommodated ,e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency
- identification by the state as an underperforming school
- takeover by the state
- inordinate user fees