



NASHOBA

REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

Nashoba Regional School District

12 Green Road, Bolton, MA 01740 PH: 978-779-2257 FAX: 978-779-2720

August 30, 2016

George H. Edwards
New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100
Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Dear Mr. Edwards:

I am writing to follow up on NEASC's request for a Special Progress Report detailing ways in which Nashoba Regional High School has addressed concerns documented in our accreditation letter from NEASC. Attached to this letter is a copy of our Special Progress Report, which has been reviewed and approved by our NEASC Follow-Up Committee.

We have made substantial progress as a school in addressing the specific concerns identified in our accreditation report, and we are a better school because of that work. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need any additional clarification or information. Thank you again for NEASC's support and feedback as we work to continually improve the quality of learning of all our students.

Sincerely,

Parry Graham, Ed.D

Cc: ✓ Brook Clenchy, Superintendent, Nashoba Regional School District
Lorraine Romasco, Chair, Nashoba Regional School Committee

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NEASC Special Progress Report

Nashoba Regional High School
September 2015/August 2016

In the accreditation letter mailed to Nashoba Regional High School on November 24, 2015 in follow-up to our visiting committee report of July 2015, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges requested that the Principal complete a Special Progress Report by September 1, 2016 providing detailed information on actions taken to address the following concerns within the Standard on School Culture and Leadership:

- Site specific examples of building-based responsibilities and decisions that rest with the building principal in order to more effectively manage the instruction, expectations, and day-to-day running of the school
- Ensure that building-based decisions follow established procedure and protocol moving through staff, building administration, and school council in order to ensure that they are being made in the best interest of the students and staff
- Site specific examples of staff being provided with meaningful roles in the school and district's decision-making processes
- Ensure that school priorities are set by the high school principal and that he is provided with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school

Substantial progress has been made in addressing each of these concerns, which are detailed individually below. There is considerable overlap across the concerns and actions, so some redundancy will be found within this Special Progress Report. Also, while the report was prepared by the Principal, it was reviewed and approved by Nashoba's NEASC Follow-Up Committee, which includes multiple teachers, a parent, and the Chair of the School Committee.

1) Site specific examples of building-based responsibilities and decisions that rest with the building principal

Classification: *Completed*

In Nashoba's Report of the Visiting Committee from the NEASC process, a number of specific examples were given illustrating a lack of building-based autonomy by the principal when making school-level decisions. Examples included central office involvement in the hiring process, decisions around professional development content, strategic initiatives introduced at the high school, and the involvement of central office personnel in the evaluations of site-based staff.

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A significant number of personnel changes have occurred in the district since the issuance of the report. The previous Superintendent left the district in December 2016; he was replaced by an Interim Superintendent (Dr. Curtis Bates) for the remainder of the school year, and by a new, full-time Superintendent starting in July 2017 (Ms. Brooke Clenchy). A number of senior personnel in the district office—the Assistant Superintendent, the Director of Human Resources, the Director of Special Education, and the Director of Facilities—also left their roles prior to July 2017.

Concurrent with changes in district personnel, there has been an increase in the principal's site-based decision-making autonomy to the point that building-based responsibilities and decisions now rest with him. Examples of this site-based decision-making can be found in the hiring process, in professional-development decision-making, in the determination of building initiatives, and in staff evaluations.

Hiring Process

As noted in the Report of the Visiting Committee, the Director of Human Resources has typically been involved in the hiring process for all instructional staff. During the 2015-16 school year, however, that was not the case. For open positions, the hiring process during the 2015-16 school year worked as follows:

- After a position was posted, an Assistant Principal and the appropriate Department Chair screened resumes to identify candidates for first-round interviews.
- The Assistant Principal and Department Chair put together an interview team, inviting multiple members of the identified department to participate, along with representative members of other appropriate departments (e.g., Special Education).
- After conducting first-round interviews, the interview team recommended a list of finalists to the Principal.
- The Principal interviewed the finalists individually, and then consulted with the Assistant Principal and Department Chair for feedback.
- Based on the interview results and feedback, the Principal recommended a candidate to the Superintendent.

During the past year there was no direct participation by members of the Human Resources Department in the hiring process (other than processing paperwork, confirming certification and CORI information, and ensuring that candidates had completed applications on file), and the Superintendent approved each of the recommendations made by the Principal.

Professional Development Decision-Making

As noted in the Report of the Visiting Committee, decisions around the content of professional development on early release days were traditionally made by a district-wide Professional Development Committee; however, there were consistent perceptions that the recommendations of this committee were not ultimately implemented, and that the content of professional development time was chosen arbitrarily by non-school-based personnel outside of a clear process.

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During the 2015-16 school year, three marked changes occurred in the way professional development decisions were made, with autonomy shifting toward the school and Principal. These changes included the addition of late-starts at the high school, the loosening of mandated PD content on early release days, and the development of a long-term high school professional development plan.

For the first time, the high school had 12 late starts during the prior year, with that time being specifically devoted to high school professional development. On late-start days, staff reported to the building at the normal time, but students reported to school two hours later, providing staff with uninterrupted time for collaboration around curricular, assessment, and instructional topics. The content of professional development during these late starts was determined by teachers and Department Chairs, with approval from the Principal; while central office personnel were invited to participate in and support work during late starts, they were not involved in determining the nature of work done during that time.

On district-wide early release days during the prior year, decisions around the structure of time shifted toward the site level. The Principal was given the autonomy to determine how best to use time on early release days, and the Principal empowered Department Chairs to develop plans for their individual departments. Information about the use of early release time was shared with personnel in the central office; however, this sharing was for coordination and support purposes.

Finally, in the Spring of 2016 the Principal began the development of a multi-year professional development plan for the high school. In developing this plan, the Principal surveyed teachers throughout the high school about professional development needs, and Department Chairs further surveyed members of their departments. The Principal then spent several afternoon sessions working with all Department Chairs to identify a vision for high school PD, along with professional development non-negotiables. Members of the district-based Department of Teaching and Learning were invited by the Principal to participate in these sessions; their participation, however, was inclusive and supportive, not directive.

As Nashoba heads into the 2016-17 school year, the Principal continues to be responsible for directing the use of late-start time; early release time has been restructured to allow for staff “choice” within site-based themes (the Principal and Department Chairs worked with the Teaching and Learning Department to identify specific themes for early release PD); and the Principal has a working draft of a multi-year, site-based professional development plan that will drive professional development content decisions at the high school.

Determination of Building Initiatives

As noted in the Report of the Visiting Committee, there was a widespread perception that initiatives at the high school were not initiated by the high school Principal or his staff, but rather by personnel in the central office. During the 2015-16 school year, however, the School Committee voiced its approval for site-based autonomy, and several district-initiated initiatives were discontinued at the high school.

In December 2015, the Principal presented to the School Committee about the November 2015 reaccreditation letter from NEASC. In that presentation, the Principal explained the concerns expressed in

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the letter around site-based autonomy, and indicated that initiatives at the high school should be initiated by the high school Principal and his staff. The School Committee publicly affirmed its support for that approach.

In addition, two initiatives that had been initiated at the district level and pushed to the high school—standards-based reporting and Positive Behavior Intervention Support—were formally discontinued by the Principal. Neither of these initiatives had been chosen based on high school feedback or identified needs.

Staff Evaluations

As noted in the Report of the Visiting Committee, evaluations for a significant number of site-based high school personnel were handled in part or in whole by central office personnel during the 2014-15 school year. The school's Instructional Support Teacher, the Media Center Coordinator, and all high school guidance counselors had their summative evaluations completed by personnel based in the central office. In addition, all high school Math, Science, and Technology teachers were formally observed by the district's STEM Coordinator, and those observations became part of those teachers' formal evaluations.

This practice changed during 2015-16. During that year, only the IST and Media Coordinator were formally evaluated by central office personnel, and those evaluations had to be formally approved by the building Principal; guidance counselors were formally evaluated in all respects by building-based administrators; and no other high school staff members had formal observations conducted by central office personnel. This same format is planned to continue for the 2016-17 school year, with the Principal formally overseeing the summative evaluations of all high school staff, and only the IST and Media Coordinator having central office personnel involved in their evaluation process.

2) Ensure that building-based decisions follow established procedure and protocol

Classification: *In Progress*

Nashoba's NEASC Report of the Visiting Committee identified several levels of concern and staff frustration with decision-making procedures. At the building level, concerns were expressed about lack of consistency and communication surrounding disciplinary situations, and a perceived top-down pressure to limit incidences of in-school or out-of-school suspensions. At the district level, concerns were expressed about limited staff and Principal involvement in decisions that directly impacted the high school—for example, decisions around professional development content or hiring decisions—and a lack of clarity around the process whereby decisions would be made (for example, a potential decision to change the honor roll determination criteria at the high school).

The Principal has taken a number of steps to address both internal decision-making processes and internal communication. The Principal has increased his work with Department Chairs as a group to enable them as

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active participants in schoolwide decision-making, to strengthen their roles as part of an established decision-making chain within departments, and to improve schoolwide communication. The Principal meets with Department Chairs (collectively known as the Leadership Council) each month and Department Chairs are actively solicited to provide agenda topics for these meetings. Several strategic decisions for the school—such as the development of an alternative education program and the development of a schoolwide professional development plan—were moved first through the Leadership Council for feedback and approval prior to expansion and implementation during the 2015-16 school year. Department Chairs are responsible for developing the budgets for their individual departments, with department-member input, and Department Chairs are responsible for determining teaching assignments within departments (and have the backing of the Principal when possible disagreements arise). The Principal also meets with the Leadership Council on an ad hoc basis to provide them with confidential information about student disciplinary circumstances and school safety situations to ensure that they are well informed as they speak with their departments.

As noted previously, multiple steps have been taken to shift decision-making from the central office level to the school level on a variety of topics, including professional development and hiring. In developing a school-based professional development plan, high school staff were surveyed about their professional development needs, and the Principal in concert with his Leadership Council used this feedback to begin the development of a long-term professional development plan. For late-start days, teachers were empowered to submit proposals directly to the Principal to determine how to make use of collaborative time. In hiring, Department Chairs and staff members have been actively involved in the hiring process, and their input has steered hiring decisions. Finally, the Principal has worked with the Leadership Council, with the local Teachers Association, with the Interim Superintendent, and with the School Committee to develop an augmented Department Chair role that will vest Department Chairs with additional institutional authority, providing them with more decision-making responsibilities around curriculum, professional development, and teacher evaluation. This augmented role is schedule to be part of contract negotiations for the 2016-17 school year.

The Principal has worked with his administrative team to develop more consistent disciplinary practices, to ensure that there is effective communication between administrators and teachers about discipline outcomes, and to ensure that students exhibiting especially problematic or dangerous behaviors receive appropriate consequences. This remains an area of focus for improvement for the 2016-17 school year.

Finally, as part of NEASC Follow-Up Committee work, the Principal collaborated with the Interim Superintendent and School Committee Chair to identify ways to clearly delineate which decisions should rest with the Principal, which should rest with the Superintendent, which should rest with the School Committee, and which should be shared areas of decision-making. This work also remains a focus for the 2016-17 school year.

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3) *Site specific examples of staff being provided with meaningful roles in the school and district's decision-making processes*

Classification: *In Progress*

Nashoba's NEASC Report of the Visiting Committee noted several concerns around lack of meaningful opportunities for staff to be involved in decision-making processes at the school and district levels. These concerns related both to lack of involvement—in other words, staff were not involved or their input was not solicited prior to decisions being made—and, when staff were involved or their input was solicited, to disparities between the input provided and the ultimate decision made.

As noted previously, staff have been provided with meaningful roles in school-level decision-making in various areas during the 2015-16 school year (e.g., hiring, professional development input, budget input), and Department Chairs have similarly been provided with a variety of meaningful roles in school-level decision-making processes (e.g., hiring, professional development plan creation, department budget development, alternative education program development). Teachers also had substantial roles in the development and implementation of a new school program, Nashoba Cup. Nashoba Cup was an inter-grade competition that identified and tracked specific positive student behaviors that exemplified the school's core values—for example, Achievement was exemplified by honor roll participation, and Engagement was exemplified by student participation in various schoolwide activities, such as dances—and then provided rewards three times a year to the winning class. Finally, staff were invited to participate in an open Faculty Forum hosted by the Principal each month, in which staff members could discuss any topics of interest with the Principal and provide him with feedback.

At the district level during the 2015-16 school year, a number of committees had substantial representation from the high school. In particular, multiple teachers were part of the newly constituted district Technology Committee, which oversaw the development of a multi-year district technology plan. In addition, the School Committee hosted an open roundtable discussion during which interested staff members were able to sit in groups with individual School Committee members and provide feedback on a wide range of topics.

While substantial progress has been made in these areas, staff participation in school- and district-level decision-making remains an area of focus.

4) *Ensure that school priorities are set by the high school principal and that he is provided with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school*

Classification: *In Progress*

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As noted previously, the Principal's decision-making authority on a wide range of topics has increased substantially. In areas such as hiring, professional development, and determining building-level initiatives, the Principal has had the authority to set priorities, and to discontinue district-sponsored initiatives that he believed were not appropriate for the high school.

In addition to previously cited examples from the 2015-16 school year, the Principal's authority to lead the school has been affirmed by the new Superintendent, Ms. Brooke Clenchy. In administrative meetings during the summer, Superintendent Clenchy clearly indicated that principals will be responsible for leading their schools, and that the role of the Nashoba central office will be to support principals and teachers in their work, not to direct it. New personnel in a variety of central office roles, including Human Resources, Facilities, and Special Education, have met with the high school Principal throughout the summer, working with him to identify ways in which they can support his priorities.

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