

**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

**COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

***REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE***

**Nashoba Regional High School**

**Bolton, MA**

March 8 - March 11, 2015

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# STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS

## THE DISTRIBUTION, USE, AND SCOPE OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Committee on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this visiting committee report of Nashoba Regional High School to be a privileged document submitted by the Committee 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 days (60) 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 Nashoba Regional High School in terms of the Committee'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 committee.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Statement On Limitations</b>	3
Introduction .....	5
School and Community Summary .....	7
School’s Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations.....	10
Teaching and Learning Standards .....	11
Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations .....	12
Curriculum.....	16
Instruction.....	21
Assessment of and for Student Learning .....	28
Support of Teaching and Learning Standards .....	35
School Culture and Leadership .....	36
School Resources for Learning.....	44
Community Resources for Learning .....	50
Follow-Up Responsibilities.....	56

## APPENDICES

- A. Roster of Visiting Committee Members
- B. Committee Policy on Substantive Change
- C. List of Commendations and Recommendations

## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

- Teaching and Learning Standards
  - Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations
  - Curriculum
  - Instruction
  - Assessment of and for Student Learning
- Support of Teaching and Learning Standards
  - School Culture and Leadership
  - 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 Committee'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 Committee in the Follow-Up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school be reevaluated at least once every ten years and that it shows continued progress addressing identified needs.

### **Preparation for the Accreditation 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 Nashoba Regional High School, a committee of 14 members, including the principal, 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. The self-study of Nashoba Regional High School extended over a period of thirty school months from September 2011 to December 2014. The visiting committee was pleased to note that students, parents, school board members, and citizens joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations.

Public schools evaluated by the Committee 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 Committee, Nashoba Regional High School also used questionnaires developed by The Research Center 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 sixteen evaluators was assigned by the Committee on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Nashoba Regional High School. The Committee members spent four days in Bolton, 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 Committee's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented public school educators as well as building and central office administrators, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Nashoba Regional High School.

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

- review of the school's self-study materials
- 40 hours shadowing 16 students for a half day
- a total of 45 hours of classroom observation (in addition to time shadowing students)
- numerous informal observations in and around the school
- tours of the facility
- individual meetings with 32 teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning
- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers
- the examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

Each conclusion in the report was agreed to by visiting committee 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 visiting committee's judgment will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and to better meet Committee Standards.

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

## School and Community Profile

Nashoba Regional High School is a four-year comprehensive high school located in Bolton, Massachusetts. This northern Central Massachusetts high school (9-12), serves 1,037 students from the towns of Bolton, Lancaster, and Stow through the cooperative regional agreement established in 1951 and amended in 1995 to include grades K-12. The total population of the communities in 2013 was 19,542. In the district, there are 1,735 male students and 1,699 female students, with a total student population of 3,434. Of the 1,037 students at the high school, 94 are school choice students from surrounding towns. In addition to the high school, the school district has two public elementary schools, Center School in Stow and Mary Rowlandson Elementary School in Lancaster, one public PK-8 school, Florence Sawyer School in Bolton, and two public middle schools, Hale Middle School in Stow and Luther Burbank Middle School in Lancaster. In addition, there are a number of private, independent schools in the district: South Lancaster Academy, Trivium School, Robert Fitzgerald Kennedy Children's Action Corps, and the Doctor Franklin Perkins School. Minuteman Regional High School, located in Lexington, MA, is the district's vocational school.

The rural community of Stow, located 25 miles west of Boston and 28 miles east of Worcester in Middlesex County, is known for its many apple orchards, working farms, and golf courses. According to the 2010 census, the town's population is 6,590, a growth of 11.66% over the previous decade. The town boasts a private airport as well as Lake Boon, an increasingly popular residential area. The many fine old homes in Stow reflect its rich history; the town was formerly known as Pompositticut Plantation. Stow has numerous points of interest, most notably its four golf courses and popular apple orchards. In 2011, the average annual household income was \$121,869 and the median age was 43.5. 72% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher. The population of Stow is 94.7% white, 2% Asian, 1.4% Hispanic and 1.85% other.

The rural community of Bolton, located in Worcester County, is also known for agriculture, apple orchards, and golf courses. Bolton today is an exurb of Greater Boston and Worcester, located 25 miles from Boston and 19.7 miles from Worcester. Bolton proudly protects over 2,000 acres of conservation land in more than 15 conservation areas. The population, according to the 2010 census, is 4,897, a growth of 18% over the previous decade. Median age of Bolton residents is 42.8, and 67% of Bolton residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. In 2011, Bolton had an average annual income of \$129,894. Bolton residents are 97.1% white, 1.3% Asian, and 1.6% other.

The rural community of Lancaster, located in northern Worcester County, was founded in 1653 and is the oldest community in Worcester County. Lancaster is 48 miles from Boston and 15.5 miles from Worcester. According to the 2010 census, the population is 8,055, a growth of 9.15% over the previous decade. Lancaster is home to many historic buildings, apple orchards, farms, ponds, and more than 1,000 acres of conservation land. Lancaster is located between Route 2, Interstate 190, and Interstate 495. In 2011, Lancaster had an average annual household income of \$76,765, and a median age of 38.9. 31% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher. The population of Lancaster is 80.5% white, 9.5% black, 7.4% Hispanic, 1.2% Asian, and 1.4% other.

The district budget for FY2015 is \$46,759,455, and \$37,480,583 of that comes from funds provided by the communities. Stow's assessment will be \$15 million, an increase of \$843,538 over last year. The town of Bolton is being assessed \$12.5 million, while Lancaster's assessment is \$10.7 million. The remainder of the budget will be funded with Chapter 70 money from the state.

Nashoba Regional High School has a graduation rate of 94.7% and a two-year average dropout rate of .8%. 81.3% of students attend four-year colleges, 11.6% attend two-year schools, and 2.6% enlist in the military or take a "gap year." The attendance rate for students is 95.51%, and the attendance rate for teachers is 95.5%. According to the 2012-2013 Massachusetts School and District Profile, Nashoba had an average attrition rate for all students of 4.53%: 4.86% for females, 4.1% for males, 5.96% for high needs students, and 10.3% for low-income students. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education profile, 7.2% of the district's student population is low income, compared to a state average of 38.3%. Approximately 5.9% of students qualify for free lunch, compared to a state average of 33.6%. Also, 12.4% of the student population is disabled, compared to 17% across the state. Finally, .6% of students are English language learners, compared to a state average of 7.9%. Per pupil expenditure in 2012 was \$12,686, compared to a state average of \$13,636. While per pupil expenditure is less than the state average, the school district's budget is approximately 32% higher than the state minimum required net school spending rate.

NRHS has a strong Advanced Placement program and its students do well on MCAS. All AP students take the exams in their subjects. In May 2013, 264 students took 452 exams, and 91.3% scored a 3 or higher. Fifty-three percent of the class of 2013 took at least one AP class and earned at least a 3 on an exam. The 2013 MCAS results were as follows: 95% proficient or higher for English language arts, 92% proficient or higher for mathematics, and 87% proficient or higher for science and technology.

Students at Nashoba Regional High School are recognized in a variety of ways. There is an undergraduate awards ceremony every year and a senior awards ceremony before graduation. Academic

achievement is recognized through the publication of the honor roll, and for graduation, an honor cord is given to one student from each department to recognize academic success. In addition, the Nashoba Regional Scholarship Foundation awards many student scholarships based on academic and personal achievements.

Nashoba offers a number of unique opportunities for students. Nashoba is one of two high schools offering a state-certified EMT program. In addition, the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, MA, offers a summer internship to one Nashoba junior every year. NRHS students participate in dual enrollment programs through several local colleges, including Quinsigamond Community College, Middlesex Community College, Mt. Wachusett Community College, Fitchburg State University, and Worcester State University.

Extracurricular activities are very important to the Nashoba Regional High School community. Students participate in athletics, performing arts (band, chorus, and drama), and student groups including a nationally recognized Best Buddies program, a FIRST Robotics program that achieved national recognition, and a highly competitive DECA program. Students write for the Chieftain Press and a school literary magazine, and produce video announcements; others are socially and politically active in organizations like the Political Awareness Club and the Gay-Straight Alliance. Twenty-seven different sports are available to Nashoba students, including unified street hockey and unified track. More than 30 clubs and student organizations were active at Nashoba in the 2013-2014 school year.

**I-CARE @ NASHOBA**  
**Mission and Core Values:**

We at Nashoba believe **INTEGRITY** is our foundation. We strive to make it a visible part of everything we do when we:

**COMMUNICATE:** with honesty and respect, clarity and effective purpose, guided by acceptance and open-mindedness

**ACHIEVE:** through consistent hard work and motivation, striving to realize high standards, to persevere over adversity by fostering the ability to innovate and adapt to change

**RELATE:** as a local and global citizen, practicing empathy and compassion, growing as an individual by finding common ground and appreciating differences

**ENGAGE:** by taking initiative, participating with passion and enthusiasm, collaborating to create something bigger than each of us

We expect our students to aspire to these values.

We expect our staff to live these values.

We expect our larger community to support these values.

We ask all to CARE, make the most of our time at Nashoba, and OWN IT!

**21st Century Learning Expectations:**

(INTEGRITY) The student will apply personal responsibility and demonstrate character in the learning process.

(COMMUNICATE) The student will communicate information and ideas clearly and effectively in varied contexts for a variety of purposes.

(ACHIEVE) The student uses higher order thinking skills to problem solve.

(RELATE) The student values and demonstrates appreciation for lifelong learning, cultural understanding, and character through empathy, compassion, and collaboration.

(ENGAGE) The student will exhibit evidence of creativity, independent thinking, initiative, and enthusiasm.

*OWN IT!*

# **COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS**

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**CORE VALUES, BELIEFS, AND LEARNING  
EXPECTATIONS**

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**CURRICULUM**

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**INSTRUCTION**

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**ASSESSMENT OF AND FOR STUDENT  
LEARNING**

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## Teaching and Learning Standard



### Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations

*Effective schools identify core values and beliefs about learning that function as explicit foundational commitments to students and the community. Decision-making remains focused on and aligned with these critical commitments. Core values and beliefs manifest themselves in research-based, school-wide 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Every component of the school is driven by the core values and beliefs and supports all students' achievement of the school's learning expectations.*

1. The school community engages in a dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process informed by current research-based best practices to identify and commit to its core values and beliefs about learning.
2. The school has challenging and measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for all students which address academic, social, and civic competencies, and are defined by school-wide analytic rubrics that identify targeted high levels of achievement.
3. The school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are actively reflected in the culture of the school, drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment in every classroom, and guide the school's policies, procedures, decisions, and resource allocations.
4. The school regularly reviews and revises its core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, as well as district and school community priorities.

## Conclusions

The Nashoba Regional High School (NRHS) community consciously and deliberately engages in a dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process informed by current research-based best practices to identify and commit to its core values and beliefs about learning. In September 2011, the school staff began the formal process of creating core values, beliefs, and expectations. Staff consulted Grant Wiggins' *Schooling by Design*; the NEASC *Guidebook to Developing Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations*, 2009 edition, with particular focus on the exercise from *School Improvement in Maryland Schools* (k12.org); and Bernie Trilling's and Charles Fadel's *21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times*. The staff conducted multiple meetings on the core concepts before bringing the concepts before students, parents, the school committee, and the wider community. In August 2012, 200 community members responded to the survey ranking the values and expectations presented by the staff. In October 2012, 300 students responded to a survey that further narrowed the focus of the core values and beliefs. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012, during a community forum, more than 40 stakeholders, including parents, community members, several students, and several teachers and administrators reviewed feedback from staff and students, as well as findings from the research literature. In March 2013, the school established a clear set of core values and beliefs about learning. The acronym I-CARE is an easier method for students to remember the core values and beliefs and helps to internalize them. Posters of the I-CARE core values and beliefs are posted in every classroom, all community centers of the building, on the school's website, on teachers' Google websites, in video announcements, in the school newspaper, and on teachers' syllabi. They have been incorporated into the school's disciplinary referral form, and are referenced in the principal's weekly email/phone call to the community. As a result of the dynamic and collaborative effort on the part of the stakeholders, the majority of students and teachers at NRHS have identified and internalized the core values and beliefs as presented in the I-CARE statement. (self-study, community members, teachers, students, classroom observations, school committee meeting minutes, core values and expectations timeline, facility tour)

The school has developed challenging and measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for all students which address academic, social, and civic competencies, and are defined by school-wide analytic rubrics that identify targeted high levels of achievement. The I-CARE set of core values, beliefs, and expectations establishes a clear list of academic, civic, and social competencies. While somewhat less than two-thirds of students and staff agree that the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are challenging, parents report that the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations as presented in I-CARE are indeed challenging. According to parents and students, the I-CARE learning expectations prepare students for success beyond high school. In August 2013, the school implemented school-wide analytic rubrics for each learning expectation. The staff used the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation system as a model when developing the levels of achievement for the analytic rubrics. Students can achieve "No Effort," "Beginning," "Developing," "Proficient," and "Exemplary" on five separate school-wide rubrics. The terms used within the rubric are rooted in the I-CARE statement. While the school administration has required all teachers to use the school-wide rubric on at least one assessment per quarter per class, this is practiced inconsistently throughout the school. Teachers report finding the rubric too restricting and some have even altered the rubric to fit their classroom content and assessments. Many teachers report that the language within each rubric is awkward, restrictive, and not student-friendly. The regular use of school-wide rubrics that are rooted in the school's challenging and measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations provides students with a clear picture of what is expected for their success and is instrumental in helping them meet or exceed expectations. (self-study, Endicott survey, students, teachers, administrators, student work, parents, core values and expectations timeline)

The school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are actively reflected in the culture of the school, frequently drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment in most classrooms, but are inconsistently used to guide the school's policies, procedures, decisions, and resource allocation. The school's Nashoba Cup proposal, "Spread the Word to End the Word Movement" and various other initiatives are driven by the foundation of the school's core value: integrity. The school's Best Buddies Program, GSA group, Amnesty International, Debate Team, Community Service Club, German Exchange, National Honors Society, NRHS Model UN Club, and extensive sports programs are co-curricular activities within the school community that are dedicated to actively teaching students the values of honesty, respect, empathy, and compassion. Over the past two years teachers have made a conscious effort to focus on the idea of student engagement within their classrooms by utilizing technology, interdisciplinary instruction, and authentic assessments to engage their students in the learning process. All teachers have made changes to their course syllabi, incorporating the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations into the course objectives. Teachers have also incorporated the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and school-wide rubrics on some of their assessments. Many teachers utilize a version of one of the school-wide rubrics on one assessment a quarter; however, many express difficulty measuring students' achievement of such core values as integrity, honesty, and respect. Teachers and students have also expressed that the terminology within the rubrics is cumbersome, restrictive, and not student-friendly which make it hard to incorporate all aspects of the rubric into course-specific assessments. The school administration has incorporated the I-CARE values and beliefs into the school's office referral form, on which teachers and students must explain how the school values and beliefs were violated. With the exception of this change in policy, there has been no other policy or procedural changes driven by the school's core values and beliefs. Individual departments allocate funding to incorporate professional development for technology, interdisciplinary lessons, data review, development of new curriculum, and alignment of assessments, but this is not done on a consistent basis throughout the school. The school-wide access to resources for professional development to enhance 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations is limited and sporadic. The school is truly a community of learners which is evident through the challenging and meaningful core values, beliefs, and learning expectations of the school. The school's I-CARE statement creates a culture of inclusiveness demonstrated by teachers, students, and administrators. The increase of cross-disciplinary course offerings, authentic assessments and explicit connections to real-world situations are signs that the students in the school community strive to meet the high standards set forth in the I-CARE statement. When there is school-wide ownership and consistent use of the 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations and their corresponding rubrics, these practices will drive curriculum decisions and assessments and students and parents will be informed as to student progress in meeting the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, students, teachers, parents, school committee meeting minutes, student work, classroom observations, department leaders, school leadership)

The school has not yet reviewed or revised its core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, and district and school community priorities. The school has no formal process in place to review and/or revise the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The school administration and leadership council have engaged in limited conversations about the creation of a review process for the core values and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, but no formal process has yet to be developed. The school staff admits that no formal process for review and revisions is in place. Learning expectation rubrics are not consistently implemented school-wide, and there is no formal process in collecting data which demonstrates students' achievement of the learning expectations. Therefore, there is no data to analyze in order to inform curriculum, instruction, and assessment. When a formal review process is created and when the school engages in a regular review and revision of its core values and beliefs based on appropriate

assessment data, teachers will gain clarity and acceptance of the learning expectations as they apply to instruction and assessment and then students will more effectively demonstrate and understand the real world applications of the I-CARE set of core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, teacher interviews, teachers)

**Commendations:**

1. The dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process used to develop the I-CARE set of core values, beliefs, and expectations
2. The I-CARE set of core values and beliefs which allows students to identify and internalize the values, to take ownership of their school culture and community, and to practice and achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
3. The development of challenging and measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations which flow directly from the school's core values and beliefs
4. The 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations analytical rubrics which are deeply rooted in the I-CARE statement
5. The school culture that embodies the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
6. The increased focus on student engagement, technology, and interdisciplinary courses
7. The incorporation of the I-CARE core values and beliefs on the school-wide discipline referral form

**Recommendations:**

1. Resolve the restricting and confusing nature of the analytic rubrics
2. Implement the school-wide analytic rubrics consistently to measure student progress on the achievement of the school's learning expectations
3. Provide funding for professional development dedicated to collecting and analyzing the data regarding core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
4. Develop and implement a formal review of the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
5. Ensure that the established core values, beliefs, and learning expectations inform all aspects of the school's policies, procedures, decisions, and allocation of resources

# 2

## Curriculum

*The written and taught curriculum is designed to result in all students achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations for student learning. The written curriculum is the framework within which a school aligns and personalizes the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The curriculum includes a purposefully designed set of course offerings, co-curricular programs, and other learning opportunities. The curriculum reflects the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. The curriculum is collaboratively developed, implemented, reviewed, and revised based on analysis of student performance and current research.*

1. The curriculum is purposefully designed to ensure that all students practice and achieve each of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
2. The curriculum is written in a common format that includes:
  - units of study with essential questions, concepts, content, and skills
  - the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
  - instructional strategies
  - assessment practices that include the use of school-wide analytic and course-specific rubrics.
3. The curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through:
  - inquiry and problem-solving
  - higher order thinking
  - cross-disciplinary learning
  - authentic learning opportunities both in and out of school
  - informed and ethical use of technology.
4. There is clear alignment between the written and taught curriculum.
5. Effective curricular coordination and vertical articulation exist between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district.
6. Staffing levels, instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and the resources of the library/media center are sufficient to fully implement the curriculum, including the co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities.
7. The district provides the school's professional staff with sufficient personnel, time, and financial resources for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum using assessment results and current research.

## Conclusions

Although staff has invested time and effort to expand awareness of the five core values, the Nashoba Regional High School (NRHS) curriculum does not yet fully incorporate the school's stated 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Teachers have developed challenging, engaging, technologically savvy and creative course content, especially in electives and in several new interdisciplinary courses, but often this content is not explicitly tied to the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. While course expectations are expected to reflect the school's expectations, teachers were given little time to focus on integrating them into the curriculum. Core learning expectations in such content areas as mathematics, English and social studies are woven into the district's evolving digital curriculum-mapping program, but not all departments have fully updated their curriculum. Furthermore, resources and time for integrating the resources was not uniformly allotted and, as result, the use of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations in the classroom is, as one teacher said, "patchy." Responsibility for specific core values and expectations has not been assigned to individual departments. Finally, the school community has identified a "critical need" for innovative curriculum options for students who are not academic achievers. When teachers purposefully design curriculum to incorporate the school's core values, they expand the opportunities for each student to practice and achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (students, self-study, panel presentation, student work, teachers, department leaders)

The Nashoba curriculum guides are not fully written in a common format and do not uniformly include units of study with essential questions, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Departments are at various stages of curricular completion due, in part, to lack of professional time for curriculum work and to few opportunities for collaboration in the master schedule. The school has a hard copy/paper curriculum in binders that was introduced in 2007 in accordance with some principles of *Understanding by Design*. This hardcopy curriculum lacks 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and has little direction for instructional strategies or common assessments. Most of the curriculum units on Atlas Rubicon lack instructional strategies, essential questions, or concepts, content and skills. When curriculum is written in a common format, with clear essential questions, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and connections to the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, then students are provided with transparent, consistent, and engaging learning opportunities across all disciplines. (curriculum documents, self-study, teacher interviews, student work, Endicott survey, curriculum guides, students)

The curriculum does emphasize depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem solving, higher order thinking, authentic learning opportunities in the school, and informed and ethical use of technology; however, there is a need for additional opportunities in cross-disciplinary learning and the authentic application of knowledge. School-wide learning expectation rubrics require that teachers incorporate all of these skills throughout the curriculum. Current curriculum amongst the various disciplines, both online in Atlas Rubicon form and in physical binder form, include essential questions, enduring understandings, essential skills and content standards to varying degrees. However, very few tie these criteria to specific course schedules, syllabi, or lesson plans. Despite this fact, the Endicott survey indicates that 80 percent of students feel that the curriculum challenges them in critical thinking and problem solving, and 85 percent of faculty feels that the curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding. Problem solving is evident in the math and science courses offered at NRHS, and in such courses as Integrated Computer Technology and Introduction to Guitar. Additionally, students develop higher-order thinking skills in many class settings. For example, in a U.S. History class, students compare historical events and their impact on the modern world. In an English class, students investigate and create digital biographies and analyses of poets and their poetry. Additionally, there are

opportunities in and out of school for authentic learning. Programs such as the Bolton Ambulance Service's EMT training course, the Clinton Savings Bank in-school banking program, the DECA club, and the art-based mural club are indicative of these learning opportunities. However, less than 50 percent of students feel they are provided with authentic opportunities to apply knowledge and skills outside of the classroom. While the school has added some interdisciplinary electives, there are very few multi-disciplinary courses offered at NRHS. Only 30 percent of staff feels that the curriculum emphasizes cross-disciplinary learning. Most students, parents, and teachers report that they have knowledge of the ethical use of technology. When curriculum emphasizes higher-order thinking, problem solving, inquiry, cross-disciplinary learning, authentic learning opportunities, and the informed and ethical use of technology, students will be better able to achieve the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (curriculum guides, Endicott survey, teacher interviews, parents, students)

There is not a clear alignment between written and taught curriculum. Evaluation of written curriculum course guides found that very few contain or are aligned with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Key features such as enduring understandings and essential questions associated with each particular unit are missing from the current written curriculum. However, the use of Atlas Rubicon should serve to address this need, once digitized curriculum guides are established and implemented within each discipline. Although this program fosters the *Understanding by Design* system and allows a convenient venue for collaboration, teachers will still require formal time and training. Samples of student work did not clearly show that the taught curriculum coincides with the written curriculum. Existing written curriculum guides contain minimal lesson planning that reflects unit sequencing. A refined alignment between written and taught curriculum will ensure that all teachers regularly deliver a consistent curriculum based on the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, teachers, department leaders, students, school leadership)

The school does not fully have curricular coordination or vertical articulation between and among academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district. The school and district have an inconsistent structure. Recently a STEM coordinator has been added to district personnel and a newly formed district committee focuses on vertical alignment of the math and science curriculum. Math, world languages, and wellness have stronger lines of communication than technology, engineering, and social studies. Teachers report that the social studies coordinator is also the finance director and a middle school principal. While there is a curriculum coordinator for STEM subjects, English and language arts have an instructional coach. As a result, no clear lines of communication or responsibility are in place for curriculum. At the school level, department heads lack the time to develop curriculum, and their role in identifying staff needs to guide professional development is unclear. Departments meet once a month, but they generally address other issues like state-mandated District Determined Measures rather than curriculum. The school leadership also meets once a week, and tackles a host of building-related issues. On the district level, the middle school curriculum is clear and aligned and students come to the high school with similar knowledge and skills. A well-coordinated and vertically aligned curriculum within all departments at NRHS will ensure that students receive consistent instruction that emphasizes depth of understanding and higher order thinking skills. (self-study, students, teacher interviews, central office administrators, Endicott survey, school leadership)

Sufficient technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and library/media resources are available to implement the curriculum, co-curricular activities and other learning opportunities; however, the effectiveness of these resources is limited due to insufficient staffing, teaching space, materials, and technology access. The Endicott survey indicates that 38 percent of the staff believes that the school has sufficient staff to implement the curriculum. From a space perspective, staff must share classrooms,

which often requires teachers to conduct classes in up to five different classrooms per day. Due to the high teacher mobility and the rotating schedule, students often have a very difficult time following-up with teachers to receive extra help or to ask questions during and after school, since they do not know where the teachers are located throughout the course of the day. In some cases, textbooks are outdated and many are in poor physical condition, which requires teachers to supplement their courses with handouts and other materials. Students are also encouraged to use e-books where possible, but connectivity issues in the school often make accessing these books difficult. The school has a well-qualified and supportive staff, yet there are not enough teachers to teach the variety of classes needed. Sixteen Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered, which limits the availability of faculty to teach other classes and has in some cases resulted in an increase in class sizes. Additionally, issues with the facility impact effective implementation of the curriculum. Art classes lack sinks. Science labs are outdated and there are not enough of them to sustain the six credit option, which includes augmented lab requirements; in some cases, lab restrictions force students into opting for reduced credit opportunities. The graphics computer lab is relatively new and serves an excellent purpose in enhancing students' graphics design opportunities and class interaction. However, overall there are not enough computer labs in the school to support student needs. The co-curricular program is highly subscribed with many students involved in one or more activities, and co-curricular programs appear to enjoy the support necessary to be successful and meet student needs; however, only 30 percent of the staff believes that co-curricular programs are sufficient. Many students report the need to fundraise to purchase equipment for after school activities. When staffing, materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and media center resources are sufficient, students will be more effectively supported as they strive to achieve the school's stated learning expectations. (classroom observations, teacher interviews, Endicott survey, self-study)

The district does not provide the school's professional staff with sufficient time and financial resources for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum using assessment results and current research. There is a clear desire among staff for more professional development opportunities to work on curriculum. Common planning time is not built into the master schedule. Teachers have the opportunity to serve on the district's professional development committee, but do not necessarily feel like their priorities are considered or their voices are heard. Teachers meet informally and at lunch times to work on curriculum. Individual departments have budgets for professional development, but funds are not always easy to access. There is a lack of continuity and follow through with professional development days provided by the district. Currently, the school's curriculum is still under construction, but there is no evidence that teachers had the time or resources to examine current research on best practices or to work together to design quality units that incorporate the school's core values and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The curriculum is viewed as a document to "get done" rather than as a dynamic reflection of teacher and community beliefs. Despite gaps in the written curriculum, there is a vibrant and creative curriculum that exists off the books. Students, teachers, and administrators all claim that teachers work together on courses. There is a continuity of instruction, common expectations and values, and collaborative planning. When sufficient time and resources are provided for collaboration on curriculum, teachers can create more authentic learning opportunities and will therefore be able to demonstrate a depth of understanding and application of knowledge that will assist students in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (classroom observations, student shadowing, panel presentation, self-study, central office administrators, school leadership)

### **Commendations:**

1. The creation of innovative and challenging course content that relates to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations

2. The teachers' commitment to continuous professional improvement
3. The informal collaboration by teachers to improve teaching and learning
4. The enhanced graphics computer lab which fosters real-world 21<sup>st</sup> century learning
5. The high level of student participation in co-curricular programs
6. The creativity of teachers in working around the space, materials, and technology challenges the facility creates
7. The use of Atlas Rubicon to develop and provide access to curriculum and to help ensure the thorough inclusion of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
8. The development of interdisciplinary classes to promote student achievement of core learning expectations
9. The varied opportunities for students to experience authentic learning both within the school and in the community

**Recommendations:**

1. Provide appropriate, teacher-driven professional development opportunities which will enhance curriculum development and revision to improve student learning
2. Increase space within the facility to support student learning and reduce teacher inconvenience
3. Update science laboratories to meet curricular needs
4. Ensure adequate staff to meet student curricular needs
5. Provide reliable support for the integration of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology in all classrooms
6. Ensure curriculum coordination and articulation within NRHS and with its sending schools
7. Complete the development of curriculum guides and ensure that assessments, essential questions, and instructional strategies are included for all units
8. Provide time for teachers to collaborate regarding best practices and pacing as defined in curriculum guides, specifically those teaching the same course
9. Develop a process to review taught curriculum to ensure alignment with written curriculum
10. Continue to increase offerings in cross-disciplinary learning
11. Link essential questions, enduring understandings, essential skills and content standards to specific course schedules, syllabi and lesson plans
12. Embed the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations into the written and digital curriculum
13. Identify which departments are responsible for specific learning expectations and ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century skills across varying subject areas

**3****Instruction**

*The quality of instruction is the single most important factor in students' achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Instruction is responsive to student needs, deliberate in its design and delivery, and grounded in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. Instruction is supported by research in best practices. Teachers are reflective and collaborative about their instructional strategies and collaborative with their colleagues to improve student learning.*

1. Teachers' instructional practices are continuously examined to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
2. Teachers' instructional practices support the achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations by:
  - personalizing instruction
  - engaging students in cross-disciplinary learning
  - engaging students as active and self-directed learners
  - emphasizing inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking
  - applying knowledge and skills to authentic tasks
  - engaging students in self-assessment and reflection
  - integrating technology.
3. Teachers adjust their instructional practices to meet the needs of each student by:
  - using formative assessment, especially during instructional time
  - strategically differentiating
  - purposefully organizing group learning activities
  - providing additional support and alternative strategies within the regular classroom.
4. Teachers, individually and collaboratively, improve their instructional practices by:
  - using student achievement data from a variety of formative and summative assessments
  - examining student work
  - using feedback from a variety of sources, including students, other teachers, supervisors, and parents
  - examining current research
  - engaging in professional discourse focused on instructional practice.
5. Teachers, as adult learners and reflective practitioners, maintain expertise in their content area and in content-specific instructional practices.

## Conclusions

Teachers' instructional practices are continuously examined for improvement at Nashoba Regional High School (NRHS); however, there is a lack of consistency with regard to the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Nashoba's core values and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations (I-CARE) are on display throughout the school. Although teachers report students embody the core values in myriad ways, articulation about how to assess achievement of the core values is inconsistent. The school's home page displays both the core values and learning expectations, and rubrics exist for each of the expectations. The rubrics are aligned with the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, but teachers do not consistently report ownership for using the school-wide rubrics. The level for achievement of these expectations is not reported. Individuals identified as members of the Department of Teaching and Learning report collaborating with teachers to help them reflect on and improve their instruction and department heads liaison between teachers and central office staff, but teachers question the impact they have on district-wide decisions. Teachers report feeling limited support reflecting on their educational processes through the evaluation system. In an internally generated survey, staff members were evenly divided when asked if the leadership team and staff engage in professional discourse. According to Endicott results, 57 percent of staff disagrees or is undecided as to whether the school's professional development program enables teachers to acquire and use skills to improve instruction and assessment. Many faculty members take advantage of department and district monies to participate in professional development opportunities of their own choosing, but not all staff members feel they have viable options available to them. While some teachers participate in initiatives and individual activities that provide opportunities for them to examine their own teaching practices, no formal process (apart from the formal teacher evaluations) exists by which teachers' instructional practices are continuously examined to ensure that they are consistent with the school's core values, beliefs and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. When a process of continuous examination of instructional practices and their connection to the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations is in place, students will be ensured of having every opportunity to consistently progress toward meeting the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, teachers, students, parents, Endicott survey, central office personnel)

Teachers experiment with varied instructional practices in support of the achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Nashoba teachers personalize instruction, engage students in cross-disciplinary learning, and are progressing toward engaging students as active and self-directed learners. Teachers frequently emphasize inquiry, problem solving, and higher order thinking, and are moving toward helping students apply knowledge and skills to authentic tasks. The results of the Endicott survey indicate a large disparity between staff members', students' and parents' perceptions of personalizing instruction. There appears to be confusion over the meaning of personalized instruction, but interviews with students, parents, and teachers and evidence provided by staff indicate personalization exists. Teachers differentiate, as appropriate, for the needs of their students. Teachers provide students with options for acquiring and communicating knowledge by providing choices such as one-on-one conferencing, receiving and providing feedback on long-range assignments, and participating in formative assessments that gauge their understanding. While all teachers implement varied instructional methods, it is evident that teachers across content areas and levels do not make use of all methods available. There are four levels of classes at Nashoba (CP, accelerated, honors and AP) and students and teachers acknowledge that students' motivation varies. World language teachers are investigating heterogeneous grouping at the CP and accelerated levels to provide greater opportunities to inspire students to learn from one another and to accept greater academic challenges and responsibilities.

There are many examples of students engaging in cross-disciplinary learning at NRHS. Students participate in classes taught by teachers from multiple disciplines, such as a science and English course

called Maritime Studies and Literature and Molecular Gastronomy, a course co-taught by teachers of science and foods. In their English classes, students explicate both text and visual art. They also read literature on war history and battles. Nashoba's emphasis of cross-disciplinary learning encourages students to recognize the interrelation and value of all content areas across the curriculum and increases student engagement.

Students are engaged as active and self-directed learners at NRHS. Students report that their principal has been supportive of students meeting course requirements in myriad ways and teachers encourage students to challenge themselves to achieve. Student work samples indicate that cooperative group work is occurring across disciplines; for example, in a music class, students worked together to compose a duet. Students have many choices between clubs and co-curricular activities. They also report they commonly seek out teachers they have previously had to collaborate in their self-directed work. Inquiry, problem solving and higher order thinking skills were observed in accelerated, honors and Advanced Placement level courses. Students in CP level courses were observed engaging in multi-sensory activities related to organization and comprehension. In some CP level courses, higher order thinking was observed; however, these observations were not consistent across all courses.

Students at NRHS continuously and consistently apply their knowledge and skills to authentic tasks. A working bank exists in the high school, where students learn and practice real-world financial skills. Best Buddies food and gym classes exist in which students with disabilities and their peers work together to meet learning objectives. A formal EMT training program leads to students being certified and the Bolton Ambulance Program engages students to respond to real-time emergencies in surrounding towns and within the school.

Students report multiple opportunities to engage in self-assessment and reflection. They are able to access their grades at any time through the PowerSchool program and, dependent on the teacher, students may grade their own work immediately or wait two or three days, or in some cases, up to two to three weeks, to receive their graded work. This was validated in interviews with parents and students. Students who are referred for behavioral infractions are asked to reflect on their behavior and on how it violated the school's core values and beliefs. The Endicott survey data indicate that approximately 58 percent of students are in agreement that they have the opportunity to assess their work. Opportunities routinely provided to students include the use of rubrics and opportunities to correct test errors.

The fact that 74 percent of students surveyed indicate that they incorporate technology in their work is consistent with the staff's integration of Google Drive; the bring-your-own device initiative; the integration of Chromebooks in classroom activities; scientific technology such as Pasco probes to measure heart rate, ventilation, EKG, muscle movement, etc., and the widespread use of many and varied websites. Technology is used in classrooms when it is available and functional. Because there are consistent and widespread opportunities for NRHS students to apply inquiry, problem solving and higher order thinking skills, to experience cross-disciplinary and authentic learning opportunities, and to demonstrate the informed and ethical use of technology, students are able to demonstrate a depth of understanding and application of knowledge that will assist them in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, teachers, students, parents, Endicott survey, central office personnel)

Teachers adjust their instructional practices to meet the needs of each student by using formative assessments (especially during instructional time), strategically differentiating, and by purposely organizing group learning activities; additionally, efforts are underway to further address providing additional support and alternative strategies within the regular classroom. At NRHS, teachers are

responsive to many students' varied learning styles. Teachers use group activities and varied instructional strategies in their courses. According to the Endicott survey, more than 85 percent of parents indicate that teachers engage their children as active learners and provide additional support when needed. Teachers employ many different strategies to respond to students; varied learning styles, including adjusting pacing and instructional practices based on feedback from assessments, chunking long-term projects into smaller, more achievable parts, assigning creative projects and connecting art or music to subject-area content. Time is spent in computer labs for activities such as writing, investigating problems and/or historical questions, building computer programs, and designing movies and podcasts. Parents, teachers, and administrators cite the number of aging computers and insufficient bandwidth as limiting factors to accessing available technologies. When teachers use formative assessment in their classrooms to inform and adjust their instruction, especially during class time, they provide clarification and reinforce concepts to students with emerging understandings, and as a result, student engagement and achievement are maximized, and students are better able to meet or exceed stated learning expectations.

Strategic differentiation is evident in courses such as German, in which many levels (German 3, German 4 and AP German) are taught in the same classroom at the same time; instruction is carefully planned so that all students are continuously exposed to new content over the course of the two years they may be in the class. Teachers use strategically differentiated instruction to offer new ways of looking at ideas, problems, or concepts and provide students with a greater opportunity for in-depth understanding. Some teachers purposefully organize group-learning activities for students in order to support 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. In a CP Chemistry course, students worked in small groups to solve problems related to the mole concept. Groups succeeded at the task to varying degrees, but students practiced communication skills as they worked together. Working in smaller collaborative groups allowed students to be active and engaged learners, drawing from each other's strengths. While it appears clear that NRHS meets the needs of high achieving students, there is a concern among some members of the school community that this effort needs to be more widespread and much more needs to be done to address the needs of alternative or at-risk students, which is a growing sector of the school population. While there are individual examples of staff instruction that model best practices around hands-on, project-based, personalized, and differentiated learning in alternative environments, there is no formal, systemic process for discussing and developing common language and practices around alternative education at NRHS. Teachers and parents recognize the need for additional professional development and programming to address the needs of the alternative and at-risk populations at Nashoba, and teachers express a desire to learn more from one another, recognizing the talents and instructional skills of their colleagues. When instructional practices are consistently adjusted in a variety of ways to better meet the diverse needs of all students, they are more likely to be successful in meeting the school's stated learning expectations.

One aspect that keeps teachers from adjusting their instructional practices to meet the needs of students is the limited availability of classrooms within the school. Students, teachers, and parents report concerns about how limited classroom availability during certain times of the day affects instruction. Teachers frequently travel between multiple classrooms throughout the day, carting classroom materials between classrooms during passing time and then taking important minutes to set up in the room where they will be teaching. One biology class meets in the art room and non-science classes also use science classrooms. Due to daily repurposing of different classrooms, teachers are limited in time and space to prepare and set up lab materials that may be necessary for one course, but inconveniently placed for another. The limits placed on teachers' abilities to conduct labs affect both the quality and the quantity of lab courses that are offered. When all teachers have the space to consistently use a broad range of

instructional strategies, student engagement will increase, and students' ability to achieve the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations will be enhanced. (self-study, Endicott survey, classroom observations, student work, panel presentation, student shadowing, teacher interviews, students, teachers, parents)

Teachers, individually, and in some instances, collaboratively, improve their instructional practices by utilizing student achievement data from a variety of formative and summative assessments, examining student work using feedback from a variety of sources, and engaging in professional discourse focused on instructional practice. According to the Endicott survey, 69 percent of teachers say that they examine a wide range of student work, common course assignments, and common grade-level assignments to make informed, data-based decisions. Seventy-three percent of staff members report that they examine standardized student assessments such as MCAS, Advanced Placement, and SAT results, as well as common mid-year and final exams to understand student achievement. Teachers use a variety of formative and summative assessments within their classrooms to improve their instructional practices. For example, during student presentations about thesis-based visual products her students created, one English teacher tailored questions specifically to the projects themselves, prompting each student to reflect on the process that led to his or her finished product. Assessment feedback and data from other sources such as competitions (computer programming, math team, robotics, DECA), exchanges with other professionals, conferences, AP Institutes, and the College Board website also help inform instructional practice. Some teachers have taken advantage of tools such as Mastery Manager to adjust their instructional practices and to monitor student achievement. While teachers examine student work individually and sometimes as a department, there is little opportunity to collaborate with other teachers in the review of student work. Teachers report they would welcome this opportunity, if time were made available.

Members of the Department of Teaching and Learning are available to teachers to provide feedback and analyze student data, and department heads work collaboratively (as time permits) with these individuals in math, science and English. Teachers report concerns, however, about having the time to communicate with and learn from these individuals. Although members of the Department of Teaching and Learning embraced Atlas Rubicon as a means of increasing district-wide communication about curriculum alignment and instructional practices, some teachers viewed the sudden launching of this program in late August 2014 as an poorly timed inconvenience. Teachers and school administrators report that more comprehensive communication between district administrators and faculty might have alleviated frustration and increased teacher buy-in. Teachers anticipate that state-mandated District Determined Measures will provide more opportunities for school-wide assessment of data toward modifying instruction, but this is still a work in progress. With the exception of communication between parents and special educators, little evidence was provided about how teachers use feedback from parents to improve instructional practices. Parents corroborated this in parent interviews. Some teachers stated that they survey students for feedback about instructional practices, but no evidence indicates this is a school-wide practice. When teachers have formal, systemic opportunities to examine their own practices and to collaborate with colleagues in order to improve their instructional practices, students will be ensured of receiving consistently high quality instruction to assist them in achieving the school's learning expectations.

Some teachers use research as a basis for improved instructional practice and have shared their findings with colleagues. Numerous teachers report ways they have taken advantage of professional development opportunities on their own. These opportunities include attending conferences and completing graduate coursework. These opportunities may or may not have involved examining current research and/or engaging in professional discourse focused on instructional practice; teacher-initiated instead of district-

provided opportunities are what faculty members feel are most relevant. Although a few groups of teachers voluntarily participate in professional learning communities, and teachers have been surveyed and provided input about the efficacy of discourse during a faculty meeting discussion on instructional practices (fall 2014), teachers have struggled to consistently utilize a common language regarding curriculum and instruction like *Understanding By Design (UBD)*, and indicate that further professional development around *UBD* may be helpful. With focused, collaborative planning time and formal professional development, teachers at NRHS will further refine their instructional skills and expectations and develop instructional practices to improve student achievement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, parents, students, teachers, Endicott survey)

Many teachers, as adult learners and reflective practitioners, maintain expertise in their content area and in content-specific instructional practices. Teachers maintain expertise in their content area according to surveyed students, staff, and parents, who agree with the sentiment at rates of 81, 89, and 83 percent respectively, on the Endicott survey. How teachers accomplish this is revealed in a series of teacher responses to the TELL survey. Only 16 percent of teachers see district-offered professional development sessions as a means to deepen content knowledge, while 50 percent feels they need such professional development to teach more effectively. Regarding such professional development, only six percent of surveyed teachers view teachers as playing a role in determining content of in-service professional development, 32 percent believe the professional development is data driven, only 12 percent consider professional development to be differentiated to meet the needs of different teachers, and only 27 percent see the school leadership making a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about professional development.

The needs of teachers to deepen content knowledge and the absence of professional development that meets this need have led many teachers to maintain content-area expertise individually. Teachers take traditional and online courses, read academic journals, attend conferences, and join professional organizations as ways of connecting to ongoing content-area support. Teachers also want to be given greater opportunities to engage in the planning of in-service professional development and to be provided with more district-level support to engage in outside professional development activities. Teachers recognize that there is much internal expertise, and they would like to learn from their colleagues. When teachers maintain their content expertise and content-specific instructional practices, and are supported by meaningful professional development, students are ensured of receiving up-to-date methods of instruction. (self-study, teachers, Endicott survey, TELL Mass survey)

### **Commendations:**

1. The dedication of teachers to the practice of teaching and their investment in the success and well-being of all students
2. The collegiality among all staff to support teaching and learning
3. The positive and constructive relationships between faculty and individual students
4. The engagement of students as active learners
5. The many opportunities for all students to apply knowledge and skills to authentic tasks
6. The willingness to provide additional support to students whenever needed
7. The varied instructional practices that support the achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
8. The use of formative assessment during instructional time
9. The authentic learning opportunities provided for students
10. The integration of technology into daily lessons and activities

**Recommendations:**

1. Provide opportunities for teacher input into district-wide decisions about instructional practices and professional development planning
2. Provide teachers more formal, systemic opportunities to examine their own practices and to collaborate with colleagues in order to improve their instructional practices
3. Develop more opportunities for CP level students to engage in higher order thinking skills and to take greater responsibility for their learning
4. Provide professional development and programming to address the needs of the alternative, at-risk, and low motivation student populations at NRHS
5. Provide professional development for all instructional staff to ensure an in-depth understanding of strategic differentiation
6. Provide more common planning time and meaningful, content-specific professional development to ensure that all teachers meet the needs of all students in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and core values
7. Provide additional training and support in the implementation of Atlas Rubicon and *Understanding by Design*
8. Improve communication between teachers and district/building administration about decision-making processes for professional development

### Standard



## Assessment of and for Student Learning

*Assessment informs students and stakeholders of progress and growth toward meeting the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Assessment results are shared and discussed on a regular basis to improve student learning. Assessment results inform teachers about student achievement in order to adjust curriculum and instruction.*

1. The professional staff continuously employs a formal process, based on school-wide rubrics, to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
2. The school's professional staff communicates:
  - individual student progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to students and their families
  - the school's progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to the school community.
3. Professional staff collects, disaggregates, and analyzes data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement.
4. Prior to each unit of study, teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed.
5. Prior to summative assessments, teachers provide students with the corresponding rubrics.
6. In each unit of study, teachers employ a range of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessments.
7. Teachers collaborate regularly in formal ways on the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments.
8. Teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to ensure students revise and improve their work.
9. Teachers regularly use formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning.
10. Teachers and administrators, individually and collaboratively, examine a range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practice, including all of the following:
  - student work
  - common course and common grade-level assessments
  - individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
  - standardized assessments
  - data from sending schools, receiving schools, and post-secondary institutions
  - survey data from current students and alumni.
11. Grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning.

## Conclusions

At Nashoba Regional High School (NRHS) the professional staff does not yet continuously employ a formal process, based on school-wide rubrics, to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. School-wide rubrics, which reflect the school's core values, were developed in 2012, and the faculty was expected to implement one school-wide rubric per quarter, however there is no formal review process to ensure that this is done consistently. Many teachers are only implementing pieces of the rubric or modifying the rubrics to suit a specific need. Teachers report that they find the rubrics cumbersome and not student friendly. Teachers also report that they feel overwhelmed by the rubric and feel pressured to use all elements of the rubric. When a school fully implements a formal, ongoing process through which teachers use the school-wide analytic rubrics to assess student progress, students will be provided with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the school's stated 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (teachers, teacher interviews, Endicott survey, self-study, student shadowing, student work, parents, school leadership)

The school's professional staff does not communicate individual student and whole-school progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to the school community. There is no concerted effort to measure progress in meeting 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Teachers use portions of the analytic school-wide rubric for summative assessments and report results on the PowerSchool grade portal and also reach out to select parents through e-mail, open house, and parent conferences. Although there is no formal report, 53 percent of parents agree that they receive information explaining their students' progress on the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning standards. Some parents report that they receive regular e-mail updates from some of their children's teachers. The school does not have identified benchmark dates or times when it shares whole-school achievement of each of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Since no reports are generated measuring progress on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, the professional staff cannot provide students and parents with suggestions as to how to better meet or exceed the standards. The school has no data available to modify the curriculum to insure that students are meeting 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations. When schools formally communicate individual student and school progress in achieving its learning expectations, students and parents are better able to monitor their progress in meeting the school's expectations for learning. (self-study, Endicott survey, school committee, teachers, parents)

There is evidence that staff collects, disaggregates, and analyzes data to identify and responds to inequities in student achievement. Eighty-eight percent of teachers report that they collect and analyze data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement, while only 46 percent of teachers report analyzing classroom work, and 35 percent report analyzing departmental midterms/finals. Fifty-eight percent of teachers report that they meet within departments or in professional learning teams to review student achievement data to tackle inequities in performance. Teachers employ formative assessment practices such as the use of whiteboards, "do now" activities, frequent quizzes, and line-up activities. Even though no formal time is set aside to review student work, teachers collaborate informally with their colleagues before and after school, during lunch, or via e-mail or Google Drive. Some staff members who teach the same course informally discuss student results on local and common assessments and make suggestions to each other about exploring different strategies. There are also discussions about trying to address achievement gaps with at-risk students. Students report that some of their teachers utilize Mastery Manager software to grade and provide analysis of assessments. When teachers collect and analyze data and use that data to improve curriculum and instruction, they are in a better position to insure that all students are meeting 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (classroom observations, student shadowing, student work, teacher, self-study, Endicott survey)

Prior to each unit of study, some of Nashoba's teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed. Eighty-eight percent of teachers report that they communicate their expectations and syllabus by handouts, verbally, and on their Google site, and 93 percent agree that their course expectations document and syllabus include 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Even though school-wide rubrics are not fully utilized, teachers have modified the school-wide rubrics so that they are clear and concise and adequately measure certain 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations in their content area. Some teachers have provided students with unit objectives specifying what they should know and be able to understand. Classrooms have the I-CARE learning expectations and mission statement posted and students are able to communicate the I-CARE 21<sup>st</sup> learning expectations. In discussions with teachers, they have identified common planning time as an issue in collaborating on assessment design and the use of the rubrics to assess measuring 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. When teachers routinely communicate 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, students see how assignments link to the expectations and their performance informs them of their progress in meeting the standards. (student work, teacher interviews, teachers, students, self-study, Endicott survey)

Prior to summative assessments, the majority of Nashoba's teachers provide students with the corresponding rubrics. Out of the 821 students surveyed at NRHS, 71 percent say that teachers provide them with rubrics to assess their work, while 77 percent say that they understand the rubrics provided to them. As only 48 percent of staff cites using the school-wide rubrics, the evidence suggests a wider use of individually developed, course-specific rubrics across staff. In an internally generated survey, 79 percent of staff responded that they do use rubrics frequently. Some teachers post their rubrics on their Google sites and provide paper copies for students who do not have Internet access. When teachers provide individual or school-wide rubrics prior to giving summative assessments, students are aware of expectations and are better able to successfully demonstrate proficiency. (student shadowing, student work, self-study, Endicott survey, parents, teacher interviews, teachers)

In each unit of study, teachers often employ a range of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessments. Nashoba's internally generated staff survey, which collected data from 78 teachers, suggests that 97 percent of responding teachers use a variety of strategies to assess the abilities and knowledge retention of their students. Results from the Endicott survey reveal that 91 percent of the staff agrees that teachers at Nashoba employ a range of assessment strategies, including a variety of formative and summative assessments in each unit of study. However, during the school's "mock NEASC visit" in spring 2014, during which 50 classrooms were visited over the course of two days, formative assessments were observed in only 50 percent of classes. Many teachers utilize such formative assessments as "problems of the day" or "do now" exercises at the beginning of class, or "tickets to leave" at the end of class periods. Teachers also check for understanding as students work through exercises, utilizing whiteboards, thumbs-up/thumbs-down activities, and written quizzes. Some teachers also employ pretests at the beginning of a unit. Students are also formatively assessed on a daily basis through observations of their performance in group and independent work. Although some teachers provide exemplars for assignments and projects, this was not observed across the board. Summative assessments include tests, projects, papers, presentations, and portfolios. Classroom visits and discussions with teachers and students supported the wide and varied use of summative assessments. Additionally, 77 percent of students who responded to the Endicott survey perceive that teachers use a variety of methods to assess their learning, and 66 percent believe that their teachers offer suggestions to help improve their work. As a result of teachers employing a range of assessment strategies, including

formative and summative assessments, students are provided multiple opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the school's learning expectations. (self-study, Endicott survey, teachers, students)

Some Nashoba teachers meet formally to discuss and improve both formative and summative assessment strategies. Due to the inflexibility of the master schedule and a shortage classroom space, the opportunity to provide teachers with common planning time is limited. A recent initiative to form voluntary professional learning teams (PLTs) to enable teachers to regularly meet and collaborate has not been very successful due to the limitations imposed by the schedule. According to the Endicott survey, 49 percent of responding teachers believe they meet formally to discuss the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments. Fifty-five percent of the staff reports that they collaborate in informal ways with colleagues at least once a week, and only 12 percent claim to analyze formative and summative assessments, including common assessments. Also, only 17 percent of teachers claim to revise formative and summative assessments, including common assessments, with colleagues at least once a week. A limited number of staff members participate in voluntary professional learning teams and these are only possible if teachers share the same duty or free periods. When teachers have opportunities to collaborate with one another, they will be able to create, analyze, and revise summative assessments to address achievement gaps and improve student achievement. (self-study, teachers, teacher interviews, school committee, Endicott survey, TELL Mass survey)

Many teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to ensure that students revise and improve their work. According to the Endicott survey, 61 percent of students and 70 percent of parents believe Nashoba's teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to students. Furthermore, 62 percent of students agree that their teachers respond to their work in a timely manner and 66 percent of students agree they are given suggestions to improve their work. In addition, two thirds of the student body believes that teachers are fair and consistent in their grading processes. Teachers report that 87 percent of them return formative assessments to students within a week, 66 percent hand back summative assessments within a week, and an additional 19 percent hand their summative assessments back within two weeks. In an effort to get assessment results out to parents and students, 88 percent of teachers report that they updated PowerSchool with assessment data at least once a week or more. Students interviewed agreed that most receive their tests or labs back within two to three days and they sometimes self-grade quizzes/tests and thus have instant feedback on their performance. A few students indicated that it takes weeks to get tests back and that by that time the feedback is no longer valuable. Administrators and guidance staff report that teachers have two weeks to grade significant assignments (tests) and to put them in PowerSchool and four days to put in less significant assignments. Students identified the English and history department teachers as providing valuable feedback on draft essays for colleges and for other classes. Students also report that teachers are available for extra help and provide opportunities to make test corrections to rectify misconceptions. When students are provided with specific, timely, and corrective feedback on their assessments, they are able to take the necessary steps to improve their performance and are more likely to meet or exceed the school's learning expectations. (self-study, Endicott survey, students, teachers, school leadership)

The majority of Nashoba's teachers routinely employ formative assessments to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning. Ninety-one percent of staff indicates that they utilize a wide range of assessments, including formative and summative assessments. In an internally generated staff survey, with more specific questions, results indicate that 43 percent of staff uses formative assessment on a weekly basis, and 38 percent uses them on a daily basis. Only three percent

indicates that they never use formative assessments in class. Students and teachers report that numerous quizzes are given leading up to a test so that students have a baseline in knowing where they stand before taking a heavily weighted summative assessment. Teachers report using white boards, “do now” activities, exit tickets, and line-up activities to get daily feedback. Teachers report that these activities help inform them how the students are progressing and are therefore able to adapt their instruction accordingly. Students report that they find it helpful to develop review games, such as Jeopardy before taking a summative assessment. A world languages classroom was using padlet.com to conjugate verbs in present and past tense. A sizable majority of teachers indicate that they review these assessments with students and utilize them to modify or improve their instruction. Teachers who regularly make use of formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction ensure that students are, in fact, learning and that they are able to meet stated learning expectations. (self-study, Endicott survey, classroom observations, teachers)

Although many teachers individually examine a range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practices, there is little evidence that teachers and administrators are involved in a formal process to collaboratively examine evidence to improve teaching and learning. Administrators, department chairs, and individual departments share standardized assessment scores. Administrators are also able to get MCAS assessment data for incoming ninth graders and utilize it for course placement. Some teachers are working with a colleague who is teaching the same course to align curriculum or to develop common assessments such as midterm exams and final exams. According to the Endicott survey, 77 percent of the students, 69 percent of the staff, and 81 percent of the parents believe that Nashoba’s teachers use a variety of methods to assess learning. An internally generated survey found that 92 percent of teachers agree that they examine a wide range of student work, 80 percent examine a wide range of common course assignments, and 76 percent examine a range of common grade-level assignments. Seventy-three percent of staff examines standardized student assessments to chart student achievement. Seventy-six percent the staff tracks individual student progress in achieving the school’s 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, however, only 48 percent agree that they investigate school-wide progress in achieving those goals. Additionally, anecdotal evidence obtained through teacher interviews conducted by the school suggests the vast majority of the work done looking at assessment evidence is done individually and informally, with little formal structure or time built into the master schedule and annual calendar to carry out such activities. Although the vast majority of teachers are using evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practices, this is limited to a departmental/course level and is not widely implemented at the school-wide level. Teachers perceive a lack of time to collaborate on a school-wide basis must be addressed in order to meet this goal. Multiple conversations with teachers during individual teacher interviews, teacher meetings, and the school leadership meeting echoed the need for time to be built into the schedule and calendar to allow for teachers to collaborate within their departments and across departments regarding student work, assessments, curriculum and instructional practices. Teachers are provided with data from standardized test scores. Guidance takes all of the sending school information and puts it into students’ cumulative folders; health-related information is relayed to the nurse. Teachers can review sending school data, but the information remains in the guidance office. When teachers and administrators, individually and collaboratively, examine a range of evidence of student learning, the curriculum can be revised and instructional practices can be improved to better meet the needs of the learning community. (Endicott survey, Assessment committee survey, self-study, teacher interviews, teachers, school leadership)

Grading and reporting practices are reviewed and revised by some of the professional staff to ensure alignment with the school’s core values and beliefs about learning. Data from the Endicott survey

suggested that less than half of the staff feels that grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning. Thirty-seven percent of staff agrees that school-wide grading and reported practices are regularly reviewed and revised, while roughly another third are undecided. There is some evidence that there may have been some confusion as to whether the survey question referred to individual or school-wide practice. There was little confusion among parents since 82 percent state that they believe that grading and reporting practices are aligned with the school's core values and beliefs about learning. Eighty-six percent of staff states that they regularly plan, review, and revise assessments, and 83 percent of staff reviews and revises grading and reporting practices in response to the needs of student accommodation plans, IEPs, and 504s. There is evidence that teachers have modified their rubrics to include the I-CARE 21<sup>st</sup> century learning standards, which were implemented in 2012. Teachers do have impromptu opportunities to revise common course and common grade-level assessments (midterms and finals) during district professional development times, but the opportunities are not regularly scheduled. Sixty-five percent of students believe their teachers' grading practices are fair and consistent. Additionally, parents and students report that course expectations and grading practices are inconsistent across a few courses depending on the teacher. When grading practices and reporting are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning, students and parents will be assured that all students are being appropriately and fairly assessed in their effort to achieve the stated learning expectations. (Endicott survey, self-study, student work, teachers, parents, students)

### **Commendations:**

1. The modification of assessment and grading practices to meet the needs of all students
2. The informal collaboration among colleagues to examine student work, revise curriculum, and improve instructional practices despite time and space limitations
3. The wide use of varied formative and summative assessments to determine student performance and to inform instruction
4. The effort on the part of many teachers to provide students with specific, timely, and corrective feedback on assessments
5. The frequent use of teacher-generated, course-specific rubrics to inform students of assessment expectations
6. The collection, disaggregation, and analysis of data by individual departments to improve teaching and learning
7. The use of the Mastery Manager program by a few teachers to provide a detailed analysis of formative assessments

### **Recommendations:**

1. Ensure that the school-wide rubrics are used across the curriculum to assess individual and whole-school progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
2. Develop and implement a formal process to communicate individual student and whole-school progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
3. Establish a system through which individual academic departments take ownership for the assessment of specific 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
4. Provide professional development regarding 21<sup>st</sup> century skills instruction and the implementation of school-wide rubrics
5. Communicate relevant 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectation to all students prior to each unit of study
6. Provide time and appropriate professional development to enable teachers to more effectively analyze student data to inform curriculum and instruction

7. Provide teachers with common planning time so that all teachers can collaborate on the development of formative and summative assessments
8. Ensure teacher access to and the appropriate use of shared data from sending schools and other relevant sources
9. Ensure formal opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively within and between departments to review assessment data, revise curriculum, and improve instructional practices

# **SUPPORT STANDARDS**

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**SCHOOL CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP**

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**SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

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**COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

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**5**

## School Culture and Leadership

*The school culture is equitable and inclusive, and it embodies the school's foundational core values and beliefs about student learning. It is characterized by reflective, collaborative, and constructive dialogue about research-based practices that support high expectations for the learning of all students. The leadership of the school fosters a safe, positive culture by promoting learning, cultivating shared leadership, and engaging all members of the school community in efforts to improve teaching and learning.*

1. The school community consciously and continuously builds a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture that fosters student responsibility for learning and results in shared ownership, pride, and high expectations for all.
2. The school is equitable, inclusive, and fosters heterogeneity where every student over the course of the high school experience is enrolled in a minimum of one heterogeneously grouped core course (English/language arts, social studies, math, science, or world languages).
3. There is a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult in the school, in addition to the school counselor, who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
4. In order to improve student learning through professional development, the principal and professional staff:
  - engage in professional discourse for reflection, inquiry, and analysis of teaching and learning
  - use resources outside of the school to maintain currency with best practices
  - dedicate formal time to implement professional development
  - apply the skills, practices, and ideas gained in order to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
5. School leaders regularly use research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improved student learning.
6. The organization of time supports research-based instruction, professional collaboration among teachers, and the learning needs of all students.
7. Student load and class size enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students.
8. The principal, working with other building leaders, provides instructional leadership that is rooted in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations.
9. Teachers, students, and parents are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership.
10. Teachers exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning.
11. The school board, superintendent, and principal are collaborative, reflective, and constructive in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
12. The school board and superintendent provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school.

## Conclusions

The Nashoba Regional High School community has worked to build a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture that fosters student responsibility for learning and results in shared ownership, pride and high expectations for all. The Endicott survey shows that 84 percent of students and 97 percent of staff feels that Nashoba Regional High School's "school culture is safe, positive, and supportive." The majority of students surveyed do not believe bullying is an issue at Nashoba, and 75 percent of students are proud of their school. Student and faculty handbooks set high expectations for both students and staff and reflect a culture of shared ownership and responsibility. The majority of students feel that teachers are concerned about their learning. Similarly, the results of the Endicott survey reveal that teachers (71.7 percent) and parents (94 percent) agree that the school encourages students to take responsibility for their learning. Meetings with teachers, parents, and students revealed pride in the school community, and overwhelmingly they all describe Nashoba as a positive place to teach and learn. Students, teachers and administrators participate in a variety of community building activities, groups and clubs such as pep rally, community service club, Best Buddies, and Gay/Straight Alliance. Because the Nashoba community has worked to build a safe, positive, and respectful environment, the majority of students feel safe, respected and their academic needs are supported both in and outside of the classroom. (Endicott survey, self-study, student handbook, faculty handbook, students, teachers)

The Nashoba Regional High School staff and students have worked to develop an inclusive community for returning and new students entering the school, and have developed heterogeneous classes that are offered in different content areas. Multi-level courses are offered in full-year courses and half-year electives in the business, English, world languages, computer science, fine/performing arts, social studies, and science departments. In the world languages course of study, heterogeneous classes are offered at different levels (I, II, III, IV). The self-study reports that each grade attends guidance seminars addressing different topics. Student survey results show that 71 percent believes that they have access and opportunities to enroll in courses with different levels. Staff survey results echo that heterogeneous classes are required and that the school offers equal access to these multi-level classes. During interviews, staff, students, and parents stated that programs have been developed to provide new students (freshmen and transfer) an effective orientation program that assists them entering the school community. As a result of this, Nashoba Regional High School has an inclusive, supportive environment that allows students to explore different content areas and to work effectively with other students. (Endicott survey, program of studies, teacher interviews, students, self-study)

Nashoba Regional High School does not have a formal, ongoing program or process through which each student has an adult in the school (other than his/her school counselor) who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. However, Nashoba does provide many opportunities for students to interact with adults in a variety of capacities including a large number of co-curricular groups and clubs, (i.e., DECA, robotics), athletics teams and a school-wide activity period. Students identified the school-wide activity period as a "waste of time" for many students who are not involved in clubs that meet during that time and identified that the number of students and "rowdiness" in activity classrooms is a hindrance to using the time for academic work. In addition, activity period is not held on a regular, consistent basis and students were not able to explain or identify how frequently activity period took place or how it was determined. While some students identify members of the staff that serve as informal mentors, most students were not able to identify any adult (other than their guidance counselor) in the school as a "go to person." When the school provides a formal, ongoing program or process for every student to connect with an adult in the school, students will have a greater sense of belonging and access to additional supports to help them achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (master schedule, self-study, students, teachers)

In order to improve student learning through professional development, the principal and professional staff engage in professional discourse for reflection, inquiry, and analysis of teaching and learning, and use resources outside of the school to maintain currency with best practices. However, there is limited dedication of formal time to implement professional development, and to apply and reflect upon the skills, practices, and ideas gained in order to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Staff reports that they seek out professional development opportunities outside of school to engage in professional discourse for reflection, inquiry, and analysis, but that opportunities to do so are often limited. Common planning time is not built into the master schedule for teachers and staff, so any opportunities to take advantage of such time are informal and voluntary. According to the 2014 TELL Mass survey, teachers do not believe that sufficient time or resources are provided for professional development. Teachers do not favorably view professional development that is offered; TELL Mass data shows that teachers believe the professional development is not data driven, aligned with the school's improvement plan, differentiated to meet the needs of teachers nor does it deepen teachers content knowledge. Teachers participate in graduate courses and seek out appropriate professional development opportunities off campus, which are generally supported financially by the district. The school calendar provides some formal professional development time (three full days and six early release days), however, much of that allotted time is used inconsistently for a variety of initiatives (school, district and state driven) that limits time for interactions with colleagues. When teachers are given the time and resources to engage in meaningful professional development and discourse for reflection, inquiry, and analysis of teaching and learning, and to maintain current with best practices, students will have increased access to challenging curriculum, effective instruction and varied assessment. (self-study, TELL Mass survey, teacher interviews, department leaders, district calendar)

School leaders regularly use the district's new evaluation tool; however, the impact of this tool on improving student learning is unclear. The self-study noted that the roll out of the evaluation tool is still ongoing and they are, "building the plane as they fly it." The role of department heads in evaluating staff at the high school is still undetermined. It is also noted in the self-study that staff has concerns regarding the consistency in the interpretation of the rating scales, and the possibility of incomplete evaluations as high school staff is evaluated by staff who are not involved in the day-to-day operations of the school. In teacher interviews, the sentiment was echoed from the self-study that due to the volume of teacher evaluations assigned to each administrator there is not sufficient time to use this evaluation tool in a meaningful way to improve instruction. The concern was also repeated that staff members feel that this overwhelming workload and use of outside evaluators will weaken the autonomy of the principal as an educational leader. As a result of the issues with the ongoing roll-out and current iteration of the evaluation system, it is unclear whether this evaluation system is effectively focused on improving teacher practices which will impact student learning. (self-study, teacher interviews, district administrators)

The organization of time provides limited support for research-based instruction, professional collaboration among teachers, and the learning needs of all students. The current schedule (seven periods in an eight-day rotation) provides equal instructional time for all students. The majority of faculty feels there is sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students, however special education staff indicates that the current school schedule negatively impacts their ability to adapt course schedules to meet the needs of students who require alternative scheduling. As part of the district academic calendar, staff participates in professional development on early release days once a month and an additional three full days throughout the year. This limited professional development time is used for district and school-based initiatives and does not provide a formal opportunity for professional collaboration among staff. Although some staff have informal arrangements for professional collaboration with colleagues and

dedicate personal time to engage in these activities, the results of the TELL Mass survey indicate a large portion (44 percent) of teachers at Nashoba devote no time weekly to collaborative planning, and an additional 33 percent devotes less than or equal to one hour a week on such activities. School leadership and staff both identify the lack of time as an obstacle for expanding professional collaboration at Nashoba. The principal and a committee to review alternative scheduling options are hopeful that a new schedule will be in place next year. Organizing time to support research-based instruction, professional collaboration and addressing the learning needs of all students will further enhance the academic rigor and success of all Nashoba students. (master schedule, teachers, administrators, department leaders, TELL Mass survey)

Student load and class size at Nashoba enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students. Results of the 2014 TELL Mass survey suggest that 50 percent of teachers agree that class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time to meet the needs of all students. Student interviews and the results of the Endicott survey indicate a large majority of students believe their class sizes are reasonable and feel that the teachers are able to address their learning needs in their courses. Sixty-four percent of parents also agree that the number of students in their son/daughters classes allows the teachers to meet his/her individual learning needs. Students and staff are aware of a class cap of 25 students and that the cap is abided by throughout the school with a few exceptions. Average class size across all subjects remain below the 25 student cap, with department average class sizes ranging from 15.6 students in art to 22.83 in social studies, and with individual class enrollments ranging from fewer than five students to a maximum of 30 students. A review of teacher course loads reveals that the majority of teachers have student caseloads of fewer than 100 students per semester. Reasonable average class sizes provides teachers with the ability to meet the needs of all learners, to personalize instruction, and to help all students achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (Endicott survey, TELL Mass survey, master schedule teacher interviews, students, classroom observations)

The principal, working with other building leaders, is capable of providing instructional leadership that is rooted in the school's core values, beliefs and learning expectations; however, this leadership is compromised by a lack of sufficient decision-making authority to do his job. There is an apparent disconnection between the perception of who is responsible for and who is actually leading curricular and instructional programs and changes at Nashoba Regional High School. The Endicott survey states that 78 percent of students believe that the principal is clear about what he wants to accomplish in regards to instructing all students, however, only 68 percent of the staff agrees that the principal and school-based administrators provide the instructional leadership that relates to the school's core values. The self-study noted that the current building-based administration is prevented from providing this leadership because of the time spent on handling various building-based management issues. Administrators are no longer participating in school-level meetings and activities as they did before because of the amount of time spent on building-based issues. The report states that department heads have attempted to fill this void through their monthly meetings and by providing leadership in their respective areas. In addition, decisions that should be made by the principal are made instead by central office personnel further reinforcing the feeling of the staff that the principal is unable to be an effective leader because he is not given the autonomy to do his job well. One recent example includes the proposal by central office personnel to adopt a weighted grading system to determine the honor roll at the high school. This suggested policy change was made without the benefit of student or staff input and while it was discussed by the school council which unanimously opposed it, the proposed change is still being considered for implementation. These types of decisions reinforce the concern about decision-making without any regard for the school's stated core values and beliefs and undermine the autonomy and authority of the principal. In the TELL Mass survey, 68 percent of staff does not agree that there is a shared vision, and 66 percent disagrees that school leadership supports the teachers. As noted during

various teacher interviews and committee meetings, the level of leadership is inconsistent among departments in terms of professional development and support. There are also perceived differences in how different responsibilities are viewed by staff and administrators. Specifically, the perception exists that both administrators and teachers have chosen to selectively enforce different aspects of student behavioral expectations, as well as expectations for professional conduct for staff. This has created the perception among other staff members that these infractions are not being enforced, and with the lack of accountability “a myriad of small faculty responsibilities are allowed to slide.” This is further enforced by the TELL Mass survey which shows while 54 percent of the staff strongly agrees/agrees that school administrators support teachers’ effort to maintain discipline in the classroom; only 47 percent of staff members believe that there is consistent enforcement of the rules of student conduct and only 25 percent of staff feels that school administrators consistently enforce the student conduct code. Some staff members appear unsure of the working relationship among the building administrators, and while the specific responsibilities of each building administrator are clearly delineated in several school documents, it is unclear if staff is aware of these specific responsibilities. As a result, there is a perception among staff that there is a lack of clarity regarding the administrators’ leadership responsibilities which impacts the development of a shared vision with staff. It is clear that the principal has the capacity and capability to lead the school but he lacks the authority and autonomy to create a shared vision and make decisions that are aligned with the schools core values and beliefs. When the principal has the authority and autonomy to create and execute a shared vision among members of the school’s professional staff, there will be more confidence in the principal’s leadership which is rooted in the core values and beliefs of the school community. (Endicott survey, TELL Mass survey, self-study, Standard subcommittee members, teacher interviews)

While parents have a meaningful and defined role in decision-making, staff and students do not have the same meaningful role in decision-making to promote responsibility and ownership. During parent interviews, they stated that there is a clear method for them to approach building administration with different concerns and questions. Whether they are members of the school council or not, parents stated they have the ability to attend council meetings to share their concerns. There were numerous statements regarding how approachable the administration is during the school day and beyond as they are highly visible at various events. It was also noted that parents feel that the administrators listen to all input before making a decision. In staff and student interviews, however, there were numerous statements made regarding their perceptions that they are not being listened to when they have been asked for their input or have served on various committees. Both groups stated that while they have been asked for their input or opinion regarding various issues, their perception is not considered as decisions reflect a polar opposite of what they express. Both groups feel that when they serve on committees or are asked for input, “a decision has already been made.” Staff noted that this has mostly occurred while serving on district-level committees, hiring committees for new staff, and when they have been surveyed by administration. Staff responses to the TELL Mass survey show that 79 percent of the staff feels they do not have an appropriate influence on decision-making, and 67 percent has no input in planning school improvement. While the Endicott survey states that 68 percent of teachers state that they have meaningful input in decision-making, a follow-up survey focusing specifically on the input that teachers actually have, finds that 75 percent of the staff feels their input is “non-existent or minimal.” Staff also noted that there is a feeling that the high school is being treated differently and becoming ideologically alienated from the rest of the district. Students stated that they had no part in the development of the core values and I-Care statement since it went through school council, of which some were not aware and others viewed the students who did participate as only those students “who got good grades” or “were on student council.” Students also stated that their impression is that when asked for suggestions or whenever they are surveyed, none of their suggestions are addressed. This belief is further shown in the

student survey in which 59 percent of the students feel they have no input or are unsure of their level of input in school decision-making. As of result of this, both students and staff feel that while they are asked for the input, their suggestions, proposals, and work in various settings is merely for appearance and does not impact various decisions. As a result, staff and students are reluctant to participate on committees or provide their input which has created a sense among high school staff that they are becoming more isolated from the other district schools. When teachers, students and parents feel they have meaningful and defined roles in decision-making, they will have increased responsibility and ownership of those decisions which helps ensure that their needs are being met. (Endicott survey, self-study, TELL Mass survey, teacher interviews, parents, students)

Teachers exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning. Teachers serve as advisors and coaches to the varied co-curricular groups, clubs and athletic teams at Nashoba. Each subject area has a teacher who serves as a department head and who works with other teachers within their areas to develop departmental budgets, makes curriculum decisions and revisions and ensures classroom and supply needs are met. While teachers readily volunteer to serve on a variety of committees within the school, including but not limited to leadership teams, candidate screening and interview committees, and a committee to review the school bell schedule, they are not as eager to volunteer for similar positions at the district level. Regarding instruction, according to the TELL Mass survey, 71 percent of teachers feel that they are recognized as educational experts, 74 percent feels trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction, and 76 percent feels encouraged to participate in school leadership roles. Through leadership roles within the building, teachers become active participants in improving the school and sustaining an environment conducive to teaching and learning. (TELL Mass survey, self-study, teachers, department leaders)

It is unclear whether there is a collaborative, reflective, and constructive process among the school board, superintendent, and principal in achieving the Nashoba Regional High School's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The school committee believes that when they have directly worked with the principal it has been a constructive, collaborative process. They did note the process of vetting proposals and changes through various subcommittees, but also that many of the items brought to them have already been reviewed and processed by the principal and superintendent/central administration. Principals attend every other school committee meeting to provide updates on school events and on progress toward goals, and to address any specific concerns. There are regularly scheduled monthly meetings with district and building-based administrators throughout the year to discuss relevant issues. The superintendent also individually meets every other week with principals to review progress toward goals and to provide support and guidance for building-level issues. The Endicott survey reflects that 54 percent of the staff does not see these three groups working together in a collaborative, constructive manner. Staff indicate that the appearance of "top-down" directives and programs that originate from central office have created a lack of ownership of these programmatic changes in the school. This lack of ownership has translated to changes that are not truly collaborative, do not necessarily align with the school's core values and beliefs, and have contributed to a sense that there is a lack of clear instructional leadership. The current principal believes that there is a constructive relationship among these groups; however, many staff members and parents do not share this perception. When central administration, building administration, and school board meaningfully collaborate and reflect on the school's core values and learning expectations, the resulting programs and decisions are focused on the best interests of students and staff. (Endicott survey, self-study, teachers, support staff, parents)

The school board and superintendent do not provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school. There is a significant discrepancy in the perception as to whether the school committee and central administration provide the principal with sufficient authority to make decisions

within the high school. Through interviews and provided narratives, the school committee and superintendent believe that they provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority. There is a clearly delineated job description which outlines the principal's various responsibilities, and the provided narratives detail their perception of how the principal is provided with this autonomy. However, numerous parents and staff members provided examples of how the principal's authority has been compromised. Parents stated that their input and suggestions, specifically in the hiring process, were not listened to or incorporated in the final decisions and that those decisions were not made by the principal, but by central office personnel. Nearly 72 percent of the staff is unsure or disagrees that the principal has been provided with sufficient authority by the school committee and superintendent. In teacher interviews, the self-study, and various committee meetings, staff provided examples of how they perceive the principal has not been given the authority to effectively manage the school. Staff, again, mentioned their reluctance to serve on district-wide committees as they feel that their input is not being honestly listened to, and while their input is sought, it is done only to project the image of inclusion and collaboration. Another frequently mentioned concern centered on the hiring process. Repeatedly staff mentioned that the finalists that have emerged from their screening and interview process have not been chosen by central office administration despite having relevant experience, subject matter knowledge, and having met committee/district established job descriptions or qualifiers. Currently, the director of human resources participates in all building-based candidate screening and interview committees and this participation reflects the staff perception that most hiring decisions are made by other central office administrators not necessarily the superintendent. Another frequently repeated issue from staff focused on "top down" directives that have impacted culture and climate in the building. One significant issue centered on the handling of student discipline. Numerous staff members mentioned that there has been an obvious push to reduce the number of the in-school and out-of-school suspension in part due to legislative changes, but also in what they see as being a decision based on the school's and district's image in School Safety Discipline Reports to the state. Staff feels there is a concerted effort to not suspend students "if at all possible" despite incidents or violations that would normally warrant a suspension to minimize disruptive behavior or maintain student safety. It apparent that the students are aware that there are lapses in discipline enforcement and this has led to a belief among some students that they are not going to receive consequences for violating published behavioral expectations. Another concern focused on the significant discussion at the superintendent and school committee level to use weighted GPA to invite students to apply for National Honor Society and for honor roll consideration. Staff noted that this change would effectively eliminate students enrolled in college prep classes from being able to participate or attain these levels of academic distinction. These changes, both proposed and enacted, came from the central office administration and were not discussed within the building or with the school council and clearly created inequity and exclusion, which goes against the school's core values. As a result, it is clear that the building principal is not given sufficient authority to make decisions and govern his building. This has created a perception among staff and parents that there is a void in leadership at the high school. In turn, staff feels that they are responsible for maintaining instructional leadership, do not feel supported by administration in regards to discipline, and most provide their own time for professional development and collaboration. When the superintendent, central office, and school board provide the principal with an appropriate and necessary level of autonomy, the school will be able to better support staff in making decisions based on actual needs rooted in the I-CARE philosophy. (Endicott survey, self-study, Standard subcommittee members, teachers)

### **Commendations:**

1. The creation of a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive school community
2. The development of a strong sense of community and family that is working to becoming more inclusive of new students and those with diverse needs

3. The variety of courses that are accessible to all students based on academic ability and interest
4. The commitment of the staff to voluntarily seek out opportunities for professional collaboration and discourse
5. The willingness of staff to independently seek and arrange professional collaboration
6. The reasonable class size and teacher course loads which enable teachers to personalize instruction and to meet the needs of all learners
7. The approachability of building administrators and their willingness to listen to parents' concerns before making a decision
8. The collaborative spirit of teachers as leaders within the building

### **Recommendations:**

1. Provide formal meeting time for faculty members to collaborate with each other within and across departments to focus on the learning needs of all students
2. Explore other schedule models that would support greater professional collaboration and support the learning needs of all students
3. Develop and implement a formal, ongoing program or process through which each student has an adult in the school (other than his/her guidance counselor) who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century goals
4. Develop and implement a professional development plan to support 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning
5. Clarify the roles of all administrators involved in teacher supervision ensuring that building-based administrators are charged with the primary role of teacher evaluations
6. Provide all evaluators with annual training to calibrate the observation and evaluation process and ensure inter-operator reliability
7. Provide an opportunity for department heads to take an active role in evaluation process
8. Ensure that specific administrative responsibilities are clearly communicated and that all aspects of student and staff behavior are effectively addressed and processed promptly to ensure equity
9. Assess and revise, if needed, the building administrator's roles for specific departments in relation to the other management issues they oversee to ensure that they can be more effective in sharing a combined view of their vision and instructional leadership with staff members
10. Ensure that changes to policies or procedures are communicated to students and staff in a clear, concise manner
11. Ensure that staff and students are provided with meaningful roles in the school's decision-making process and opportunities to contribute to the achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills
12. Provide students and staff with a transparent and clearly defined vehicle to provide their input, and ensure that any concerns are acknowledged and addressed in a timely manner
13. Ensure that there is a transparent, truly meaningful and collaborative process, which includes all key stakeholders, in making programmatic changes, that focuses on the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
14. Ensure that authority of building-based responsibilities and decisions rests with the building principal in order to more effectively manage the instruction, expectations, and management of the building
15. 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

# 6

## School Resources for Learning

*Student learning and well-being are dependent upon adequate and appropriate support. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of coordinated programs and services. These resources enhance and improve student learning and well-being and support the school's core values and beliefs. Student support services enable each student to achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.*

1. The school has timely, coordinated, and directive intervention strategies for all students, including identified and at-risk students, that support each student's achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
2. The school provides information to families, especially to those most in need, about available student support services.
3. Support services staff use technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student.
4. School counseling services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
  - deliver a written, developmental program
  - meet regularly with students to provide personal, academic, career, and college counseling
  - engage in individual and group meetings with all students
  - deliver collaborative outreach and referral to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers
  - use ongoing, relevant assessment data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
5. The school's health services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
  - provide preventative health services and direct intervention services
  - use an appropriate referral process
  - conduct ongoing student health assessments
  - use ongoing, relevant assessment data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
6. Library/media services are integrated into curriculum and instructional practices and have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
  - are actively engaged in the implementation of the school's curriculum
  - provide a wide range of materials, technologies, and other information services in support of the school's curriculum
  - ensure that the facility is available and staffed for students and teachers before, during, and after school
  - are responsive to students' interests and needs in order to support independent learning
  - conduct ongoing assessment using relevant data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
7. Support services for identified students, including special education, Section 504 of the ADA, and English language learners, have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
  - collaborate with all teachers, counselors, targeted services, and other support staff in order to achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
  - provide inclusive learning opportunities for all students
  - perform ongoing assessment using relevant data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.

## Conclusions

Nashoba Regional High School (NRHS) has timely coordinated and directive intervention strategies for all students including identified and at-risk students that support each student's achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Freshmen are assigned to one of five guidance counselors and participate in the freshman transition program including Chieftain Day, guidance seminars, and a study skills class. Sophomores and juniors participate in guidance seminars. The guidance counselors serve as 504 coordinators for their students. English language learners (ELL) are identified upon enrollment and are individually supported through language acquisition classes and transitional support. Special education services are delivered through learning centers, specialized programs, and inclusion support. The Student Teacher Administrative Team (STAT) meets to coordinate responses for individual students and to adjust intervention strategies. Because the school support staff work collaboratively to coordinate services, students are able to access the curriculum and achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, teacher interviews, parents, program of studies)

The school consciously and deliberately provides information to families, especially to those most in need, about available student support services. The principal makes an automated weekly phone call to all homes informing students and families of upcoming events, opportunities to volunteer, and student successes. An administrative assistant in the main office sends a daily message home for absent students. All parents are introduced to PowerSchool, the school's student management system, where they are provided a portal through which they can access important information about their students and can track their performance. The guidance department regularly publishes a newsletter, and frequently updates its website. A freshman transition guide is given to all eighth graders at a parent night. The nurse works with parents to coordinate both temporary and ongoing health care plans. Special education professionals send home regular progress reports, home logs, and test results. There is ongoing parent contact, team meetings, and parent consults. The school bullying plan summary is sent home to all families. Effective communication with the school community concerning all available services supports student learning and wellbeing, and is critical in promoting student social and academic success. (program of studies, teacher interviews, freshman transition guide, students, parents, self-study)

Support services staff regularly use technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student. The guidance department uses PowerSchool to track student progress, build the school's master schedule, notify teachers of 504 Plans, and disseminate special alerts. The special education department utilizes E-Sped software to generate and maintain Individual Education Plan (IEP) documentation and by the guidance department to generate and maintain 504 accommodation plans. The guidance department uses Naviance software to deliver college and career curriculum. The library uses technology to deliver a variety of services including Destiny software for managing circulation and cataloguing, Google Forms for pre- and post-assessments of student learning in the area of information literacy, and tracking of library devices and spaces. Students are trained on the effective use of library and mobile technology. Mindful use of technology to monitor and deliver services enables and facilitates continuing access to support services and enhances student success. (teacher interviews, classroom observations, freshman transition guide, self-study, panel presentation)

The school counseling department has a sufficient number of certified personnel and support staff to deliver a wide array of support services, however there is a perception on the part of some students that access is inconsistent from grade to grade. Five guidance counselors service 1,037 students. Each counselor has a student load of 200-250 students spread across four grade levels. Guidance counselors deliver a written, developmental curriculum that meets MASCA standards providing academic, college, and career counseling. Transition plans for freshmen include Chieftain Day and a specially designed

program of studies including only those offerings available to freshmen. The freshman curriculum is comprised of three seminars including a learning styles inventory and strengths inventory. The learning styles inventory is used in the freshman study skills class to help students develop organizational habits and study skills. The sophomore curriculum is a sequence of three class sessions administered through the health courses which focuses on an introduction to college planning, resume writing, and career interest inventories. Junior and senior guidance seminars focus on post-graduate planning. Guidance counselors endeavor to meet individually with students at least twice a year in their freshman and sophomore years to review adjustment to high school, academic progress, and goals and activities for the coming year. The number of scheduled meetings increases in the junior and senior years as the demands of college and career planning become more immediate, however demands upon their time can make that difficult. The career counselor coordinates a school-wide career day every other year and a reality fair in conjunction with the local Rotary Club every year. The guidance department hosts a Massachusetts Public College Fair and two Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority programs each year. Additionally, there is a college admissions panel in January and five or more “Decision Days” with community colleges and some state colleges and universities. The school social worker and speech pathologist offer group counseling primarily in the area of social skills. One guidance counselor is assigned to students from the Robert F. Kennedy Lancaster School and attends bi-weekly meetings there in order to coordinate services. Guidance counselors provide and recommend information to families on area mental health services upon parental request based upon information gathered in an outreach three years ago to all mental health providers in the surrounding towns. This information includes both contact and procedural data. After each event or seminar, students are surveyed to determine the efficacy of the event, however the guidance department does not have a formal process to gather and analyze data and feedback from the school community to improve its services to students. Overall, parents and students are satisfied with the support services available at NRHS; however 65.2 percent of the students do not feel they meet with their school counselor regularly. While collaborative and comprehensive services are consistently provided to students at NRHS, when they have a process in place to gather and analyze relevant data to assess the effectiveness of the many programs and services they provide, all students will have a better opportunity to achieve the school’s 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (student surveys, self-study, Endicott survey, counselor interview, students)

The school’s health services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who provide comprehensive preventative health services and direct intervention services. The health office at NRHS is staffed with one full-time and two half-time certified nurse positions that provide adequate preventative health services and direct intervention services to all students. Direct nursing care is provided as needed to meet the needs of students; 69.5 percent of students report that they feel comfortable going to the nurse’s office, while 21.7 percent is undecided. Nurses provide training to faculty for blood borne pathogens, seizures, Epipen use, and choking. A majority of staff report that they think the nursing staff does a good job providing direct intervention and preventative health services to their students. Programming is provided to students with guest speakers on such topics as drinking and driving, dating violence, social responsibility, sexting, and more. However, the nurse reports that she has little input into classroom health curricula.

NRHS conducts ongoing health assessments. The nurses provide health screenings as required by Massachusetts statutes; they observe students on a regular basis to detect individual health needs. Postural screening is provided to 9<sup>th</sup> graders; 10<sup>th</sup> graders are screened for BMI, vision, and hearing. Individual health plans are created for students, when required. Nursing and guidance staff members are included in the Student Teacher Administration (STAT) team that determines which students may need outside referral services. Referrals are made to numerous agencies for mental health or medical services,

as well to services such as local food pantries. The school's health services regularly use ongoing, relevant assessment data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Health records are maintained on all students. A new software program, SNAP (School Nurse Administrator Program) was implemented in 2015, and the nurses report that this new program is more "nurse friendly" and provides faster access to data. Teachers are alerted to information about current students through the "Health Alerts" section of PowerSchool. Nurses participate in a group made up of a district-based school nurse leader, school physician, and the School Health Advisory Council, made up of health professionals, students, teachers, community members and administrators, which is developing a school health program. The group uses data to develop the school health program such as the Youth Risk Behavior survey, developed by Emerson Hospital, which was administered to students, parents, and community members. They use the data to develop health interventions in the district. Data from the 2014 survey indicated a need to address mental health issues. Action has been taken in the form of providing training to all nursing, guidance, and health personnel on mental health intervention, as well as for instituting mental health screenings for students. As a result of having dedicated, certified health professionals providing a wide range of available services, NRHS students have access to comprehensive and responsive health services which ensures their emotional and physical well-being and contributes to their academic success. (Endicott survey, self-study, school nurse, students, parents)

Library/media services are partially integrated into the curriculum and instructional practices, and have limited certified /licensed personnel who are available to teach information literacy skills and other 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills to NRHS students. The librarian collaborates with classroom teachers by providing resources and instruction for classes, particularly for the departments of English, social studies, and interdisciplinary electives. For example, the librarian teamed with the interdisciplinary teachers for an elective that combines epidemiology and British literature through the centuries. The librarian and the technology integration specialist maintain a website that includes research guides for all departments, as well as pathfinders for almost fifty specific class assignments. The librarian also visits classrooms to teach and assist student with NoodleTools (electronic notecard and citation program) and questions about plagiarism and the ethical use of information. However, the library resources and instruction are not integrated into the curriculum in a way that it reaches every student. Only 28.1 percent of students agreed that they used the library often for classes.

The library provides a wide range of materials, technologies, and other information services in support of the school's curriculum. The library's budget is sufficient, allowing the librarian to supplement the collection with electronic databases that cover many disciplines and that are continuously updated. The budget also supports a robust print collection. Evidence of diverse, current titles, both fiction and nonfiction, are extensively displayed throughout the library. The library provides computers and Chromebooks for use in the library, sometimes circulating up to 30 Chromebooks at a time. According to the Endicott survey, 76.5 percent of students believe that the library has appropriate materials.

The library is available and staffed for students before, during, and after school with one full-time library media specialist and two full-time paraprofessionals. The librarian reports that collaborative teaching in the library occurs primarily in the teacher's classroom. This results in inadequate staffing in a very large and busy school library. Additional staffing will allow more collaboration and co-teaching to allow students to gain 21<sup>st</sup> century information literacy skills. The library is open for 45 minutes before the beginning of the school day and open after school until 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and until 3:00 p.m. on Friday. According to the Endicott survey, 81.5 percent of students believe the library is available to them throughout the day.

The library is responsive to students' interests and needs in order to support independent learning. During library studies, staff members are available to assist students locating resources, using technologies, and finding resources available from outside the library via interlibrary loans. Students (79.7 percent) believe that the library provides a wide range of services. The library is developing formal assessment to evaluate its services, including using Follett Destiny software to determine the relevancy of the collection, and using the Endicott survey to aid in future decisions about the library. Students at NHRS consistently have access to services provided by knowledgeable library personnel and to a wide range of print and digital resources; when information literacy instruction is integrated into the curriculum school-wide, all students will have a better opportunity to achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (library website, teacher interviews, Endicott survey, self-study, classroom observations)

Support services for identified students, including special education and section 504 of the ADA have a sufficient number of certified personnel and support staff who collaborate with counselors, ancillary services, and support staff; however, NHS does not have certified personnel to staff the ELL program. NRHS is home to several programs designed to support the learning of identified and at-risk students. The life skills program is a substantially separate program designed to teach pragmatics as well as core academic subjects to students with moderate to severe disabilities. The transition program services students with moderate to severe disabilities that are 18-22 years old and focuses on providing vocational training and work experiences. Students from this program have been placed at area work sites. There are three learning center programs staffed by six teachers, seven aides, and two adjustment counselors. One of the learning centers is devoted to students with emotional or therapeutic needs in a therapeutic learning environment with a fluid level of inclusion. Additionally, special education professionals support and co-teach with general education teachers in an inclusion setting. Guidance counselors are responsible for 504 accommodation plans. IEP teams have a full complement of regular education special education and guidance professionals and 504 teams consist of regular education and guidance staff. Both teams include parents and students. The Best Buddies program is widely regarded as an opportunity for regular education and special education students to interact in both social and academic settings. In addition to having the Best Buddies club, NRHS has fully incorporated the program into the school's program of studies, culture, and school community. Additionally, there are two unified athletic teams. There is a transitional segment of the population from a nearby DCF facility for whom the staff is currently working to define the appropriate supports; however, staff reports that some students are yet to receive the support they require. One of the guidance counselors has been assigned this caseload and attends bi-weekly meetings at that facility to further connect with their caseworkers and to work to gather all appropriate documentation to adequately support their learning at NRHS. Although the ELL teacher frequently collaborates with teachers, guidance counselors, and support staff to tailor programming to ELL students' needs, there is no ELL curriculum in place to assure that students are achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. School psychologists administer all testing in accordance to IEP guidelines in the areas of academic, behavioral, vocational, social, and emotional realms. Ancillary service providers perform testing for speech and occupational therapy/physical therapy. The state access test is administered to ELL students, however its results are not used to inform curriculum. Staff (83.7 percent) and parents (71.6 percent) agree that the school has timely and coordinated strategies to meet the needs of all students, however there is no ongoing, formal process to gather and assess feedback from parents, students, and staff to improve services to students. When NRHS clearly defines its intervention services for all students, fully supports all programs with certified personnel, and develops a process to use relevant data to assess the effectiveness of its programs and services, all students will be supported in a way that they can better achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (Endicott survey, NRHS handbook, teacher interviews, teachers, self-study)

**Commendations:**

1. The integration of the Best Buddies program into the fabric of the school
2. The caring and concerned support staff who are responsive to students' needs
3. The freshman transition program is a coordinated and targeted effort to ensure a solid foundation for new freshmen at NRHS
4. The collaboration of all service providers results in effective support for all students
5. The comprehensive college and career developmental guidance curriculum that prepares students for life after high school
6. The extensive collaboration with outside agencies that provides additional support for students
7. The collaboration between the librarian and classroom teachers that results in student projects reflecting higher order thinking
8. The school website that provides access to multiple resources, pathfinders, and guidance to assist teachers and students with teaching and learning
9. The budget that supports a wide range of materials and electronic resources in the Library Media Center to support the curriculum
10. The library that is available to students and teachers for before, during, and after school
11. The district-wide school health plan developed by a group consisting of many stakeholders (staff, parents, students, community members)
12. The use of relevant assessment data to respond to the health needs of students

**Recommendations:**

1. Provide appropriate certified personnel to staff the ELL program
2. Ensure privacy for students using health services
3. Include nurses and health professionals in curriculum discussions related to health topics
4. Develop formal strategies for the gathering and analysis of feedback from a variety of sources including parents, students, and staff to improve student service programs
5. Increase scheduled individual student contact with his/her guidance counselor
6. Increase collaborative opportunities between the librarian and classroom teachers to ensure all students acquire 21<sup>st</sup> century skills



## Community Resources for Learning

*The achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations requires active community, governing board, and parent advocacy. Through dependable and adequate funding, the community provides the personnel, resources, and facilities to support the delivery of curriculum, instruction, programs, and services.*

1. The community and the district's governing body provide dependable funding for:
  - a wide range of school programs and services
  - sufficient professional and support staff
  - ongoing professional development and curriculum revision
  - a full range of technology support
  - sufficient equipment
  - sufficient instructional materials and supplies.
2. The school develops, plans, and funds programs:
  - to ensure the maintenance and repair of the building and school plant
  - to properly maintain, catalogue, and replace equipment
  - to keep the school clean on a daily basis.
3. The community funds and the school implements a long-range plan that addresses:
  - programs and services
  - enrollment changes and staffing needs
  - facility needs
  - technology
  - capital improvements.
4. Faculty and building administrators are actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget.
5. The school site and plant support the delivery of high quality school programs and services.
6. The school maintains documentation that the physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
7. All professional staff actively engage parents and families as partners in each student's education and reach out specifically to those families who have been less connected with the school.
8. The school develops productive parent, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support student learning.

## Conclusions

At Nashoba Regional High School (NRHS), funding is provided for a wide range of school programs and services, sufficient professional and support staff, sufficient equipment and instructional materials but not for professional development, or technology equipment or support. Dependable funding affords a wide range of school programs and services including a robust Advanced Placement curriculum, an EMT certification program, and a host of special education, technology, and performing arts courses. Seventy-seven percent of students agree that the school has a wide range of programs and services. New classes offered are aligned with student demand and space availability. Core content areas provide enough classroom options to meet the needs of all students. Core content areas also offer a variety of elective courses. The school is increasing the drama teacher's course load from .6 FTE to .8 FTE. However, due to budget constraints and in order to reduce caseloads, a full-time groundskeeper, who also assumed some custodial responsibilities, was eliminated and a counselor who has been serving solely as a college and career advisor will be assuming a .3 FTE traditional guidance counselor role. For professional development, \$53,000 is available for tuition reimbursement for the entire district, and \$103,000 is allocated for district-wide professional development. The NRHS professional development budget varies by department. Professional development funds do not support curriculum revision or content-specific professional development. There has been a total decrease of \$3364 (29 percent) for professional development funds since 2010, and the district budget for technology decreased by 14 percent for the acquisition of computer hardware. The current replacement cycle specified in the 2010-2014 District Technology Strategic Plan is inadequate. Four computer technicians work throughout the district to cover the needs of seven buildings leading to an apparent inconsistent focus on addressing the needs of the high school. Frequently, software and hardware tickets are not closed in a reasonable amount of time. Only 42 percent of teachers agree that the community and district's governing body provide dependable funding for a wide range of technology support. The school does have necessary science equipment and the food services area, gymnasiums and locker rooms also have the necessary equipment. World language teachers report not having access to sufficient numbers of workbooks. Sixty-three percent of staff and teachers agree that the community provides dependable funding for instructional materials. When the community and district's governing body provides schools with dependable and sufficient funding to support all programs and services, including technology and staff development, then Nashoba will be able to offer a learning environment that totally supports a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum. (district budgets for FY12-FY16, teachers, students, school support staff, 2010-2014 District Technology Strategic Plan, parents, self-study)

NRHS develops, plans and funds programs to ensure the maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the building and school plant; however, the process for maintenance, cataloguing and replacement of technology is insufficient. According to the Endicott survey, 76 percent of students, 77 percent of teachers and 92 percent of parents state that the school is clean and well-maintained. Teachers report that day-to-day maintenance requests such as light bulb replacement, are handled in an expedient manner through the use of School Dude, a school maintenance request software program. The employment of an in-district master plumber and electrician, each of whom are also cross-trained in HVAC, makes preventive maintenance more realistic. Additionally, the head custodian and his crew work very hard to keep the physical plant clean on a daily basis. Furthermore, the willingness of maintenance crew to monitor snowfall on the roof of the school, and shovel the roof so as to prevent snow buildup around heating and refrigeration vents, shows a dedication to the overall smooth running of the building. The boiler room is kept clean and clutter-free.

The proper maintenance, cataloguing, and replacement of equipment, specifically technology equipment such as teacher laptops and tablets, are not addressed in a timely manner. Teachers and students report

bandwidth problems with wireless Internet access, specifically if adjacent classrooms are trying to utilize the wireless network at the same time. Teachers report being told to make arrangements with neighboring teachers to ensure that adjacent classrooms are not trying to utilize the wireless network at the same time. Teachers and students report frustration with the need to overcome significant inconveniences if they wish to bring the Chromebook carts to certain areas of the building. Teachers and students both report that certain areas of the building have no wireless access. Teachers also report that when technology requests are made, such as repair to a laptop, teachers should be prepared to be without the machine for extended periods of up to three or four weeks. In addition, students were observed being denied entry to the media center due to a lack of available machines for them to work on. It is clear that because the physical plant is kept clean and orderly and the basic classroom needs of teachers are met, students can learn with fewer distractions; however, when proper maintenance of technology equipment is efficient and reliable, students will truly learn in a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment. (Endicott survey, teacher interviews, students, facility tour, head custodian, director of maintenance, classroom observations)

The community funds and the school implements a long-range plan that addresses facility needs and capital improvements. The scheduled maintenance plan for fiscal year 2014 through fiscal year 2018 addresses facility needs and capital improvements for that time period, including, but not limited to, parking lot improvements, science lab updates, boiler replacement and roofing projects. However, the school does not implement a long-term plan that addresses programs and services, enrollment changes and staffing needs, or technology. The most recent available District Technology Plan was for 2010-14. There are a few mentions of technology needs in the most recent budget proposal, but no mention of cost or an implementation plan for buying Chromebooks and/or approaching a 1:1 plan for NRHS students. Additionally, there is no mention of a long-term plan to address programs and services, or enrollment changes and staffing needs. When a school implements long-term plans to address programs and services, enrollment changes and staffing needs, and technology, students experience a more comprehensive, consistent and less frequently interrupted educational program (scheduled maintenance plan, High School Building Task Force Draft Needs Summary, principal, self-study)

There is evidence that teachers and school administrators are actively involved with the development and implementation of school and department budgets. The principal and department heads meet to discuss a proposed budget. Department heads solicit requests from the teachers in their departments and present that list to the principal who may make adjustments to the budget requests depending on rates of increase. The principal and superintendent then review the proposed budget. Teachers are involved in spending allocated funding. For example, individual science teachers are provided with a dollar amount by the department chairperson and can choose how to best utilize funds for his/her classroom and program. The math department head surveys teachers and prioritizes spending that best supports student learning. The technology instruction department head sits with the teachers to gather input on budget spending. The STEM coordinator was recognized by teachers for soliciting input on district spending for the science department. When teachers and school administrators are actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget, spending better meets the needs of programs and classrooms, positively impacts student learning and achievement, and demonstrates a commitment to the school's I-CARE core values and beliefs. (self-study, principal, department leaders, teacher interviews, Endicott survey)

The NRHS facility is adequate and is sufficiently maintained in order to support the delivery of school programs and services; however, the facility requires updating in order to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum. The areas beyond the core facilities, including the food preparation area, gymnasiums, auditorium, locker rooms, and restrooms are clean and well maintained. The teachers continue to have

department workspace with the exception of special education. However, the school does not have enough science labs to safely provide the effective delivery of science curriculum and instruction nor are the science labs updated to reflect the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. In 2013, the Massachusetts School Building Authority designated the NRHS science labs as deficient and eligible for inclusion in the Science Lab Initiative. The deficiencies include inadequate ventilation and configuring space safely for labs and the number of students in a classroom. The lack of needed science labs has reduced the number of science courses offered with an accompanying additional lab period. Due to a shortage of lockers, students share lockers which are located on both sides of the narrow hallways causing them to be too crowded for timely passing especially for staff/students with mobility issues and teachers traveling with carts. In addition, the cafeteria does not provide adequate seating for its current and growing population. Teachers identify this issue in interviews although the students do not identify this as a major issue. There is inconsistent access to dependable technology, including the wireless infrastructure. Outside, the school parking lots do not provide adequate spaces for visitors, faculty, staff, and students and students express anger over paying to park and not being able to park, due to a shortage of available space, often as a result of snowfall. When the school facility is well maintained and provides adequate space for all curriculum delivery, effective workspace, and adequate parking, then administrators, teachers and staff will be better able to collaboratively implement a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum and to ensure that students achieve the school's learning expectations. (self-study, teachers, students, Endicott survey, High School Building Task Force Draft Needs Summary)

NRHS maintains documentation that the physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations. The school maintains fire, health and safety regulations and inspection reports as of 2014. The director of facilities and maintenance provided reports of successful inspections of the fire alarm system, the fire extinguisher inspection and service, the sprinkler and standpipe system, the drinking water program, waste water treatment program, smoke hood and fire hood suppression system, building elevators, and pest management from 2014. When schools work to comply with local, state, and federal laws and safety regulations, students will be safe and secure in their learning environment. (fire, health and safety inspection reports, school support staff, self-study)

NRHS' professional staff actively engages parents and families as partners in each student's education and reaches out specifically to those families who have been less connected to the school. Parents report a strong relationship with the guidance department, even though parents believe the department is "stretched thin." Parents appreciate the newsletters from the guidance department, as well as the superintendent's blog, and the principal's weekly voicemail and email updating them on various past and upcoming events at the school. The school frequently updates its website in order to keep parents and families informed of academic, athletic, and co-curricular events at the school. Teachers report an appreciation for the group email functions on PowerSchool, as it not only provides timely, frequently updated gradebooks, but can also allow them to reach families of all students in class in order to inform them of events going on in class. Additionally, all teachers are required to keep and maintain a website for parent and student access, and doing so appears to be the norm among faculty. The school has identified reaching less successful students as a goal in its School Improvement Plan, but does currently have several programs in place to reach this end, such as peer tutors, peer guides for students entering from outside of the district, and a liaison with Robert F. Kennedy Lancaster School from which a number of students transition to NRHS. Teachers and guidance counselors also make individual efforts to email and call parents of struggling students. When a school and family combine to assist all students in their learning, parents are able to remain well informed about their students' education, and students meet with greater academic success in achieving the school's stated learning expectations. (parents,

teacher interviews, School Improvement Plan, teachers, self-study, teacher call logs/emails, guidance counselor call logs/emails, Endicott survey)

NRHS has worked successfully to develop productive parent, community, business and higher education partnerships that support student learning. Parents are highly engaged in a variety of programs which work to support students and enhance their learning experience at NRHS. The parent-run Friends of Drama and Friends of Music support students in the arts and the athletic booster club supports all of the athletes in the school. Parents are also involved in a number of active councils at the school such as the school community council, student health advisory council, and comprehensive reporting committee. The NRHS Endowment Fund is also another example of a productive parent-school relationship. The group, which exists as a result of parent initiative, raises funds to support various educational projects in the school such as start-up costs for the robotics and math teams, as well as the *Nashoba News* newspaper, and they fund teacher grants and have provided various pieces of technology equipment such as classroom SMARTBoards and projectors. The school also has developed effective lines of communication to successfully engage members of the school community. Parents report having access to newsletters from administration and the guidance department, and enjoy receiving the principal's weekly voicemail message and email. Parents also report visiting the school's website regularly to find out upcoming events at the school, and the administration utilizes parent feedback via the school council. The partnership that the school has with the local EMTs is unique and well received. This program provides its students with a truly authentic experience that embodies the notion of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Teacher interviews reveal that NRHS has a solid relationship with local businesses, including a working branch of Clinton Savings Bank in the school at which students can learn real-life banking skills and can even find employment opportunities at the bank, a relationship with special education students at a local orchard, hospital and pizza restaurant, as well as a job shadowing opportunity with the head custodian for special education students. Students also have the opportunity for dual enrollment at either Quinsigamond Community College or Mount Wachusett Community College in NRHS' Twelfth Year Program. When schools provide varying and authentic partnerships with agents outside of the school, students realize the real-world applicability and importance of their high school education. (parents, self-study, teacher interviews, program of studies)

### **Commendations:**

1. The dependable funding provided for a wide range of school programs and services
2. The dedication of the custodial, grounds, and maintenance staff to keeping a well-maintained and clean facility
3. The proactive approach to staffing highly qualified skilled tradesmen on the maintenance staff
4. The good faith plan to update plant facilities and general maintenance of the physical plant
5. The active engagement of parents in several booster groups that support students in the arts and athletics
6. The parent initiated Endowment Fund which supports teaching and learning
7. The effort to reach out specifically to those families who have been less connected to the school
8. The dynamic and unique EMT program that provided authentic learning experiences for students
9. The development of strong and productive parent, community, business and higher education partnerships that support student learning

### **Recommendations:**

1. Provide additional technology support staff in order to implement an effective process for technology maintenance and repair

2. Provide appropriate bandwidth to ensure consistent internet access for all areas of the school building
3. Provide access to sufficient and dependable technology to support a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment including replacement of outdated equipment
4. Develop and implement short- and long-term plans to ensure that the Nashoba physical plant will be supportive of effective instructional practice
5. Develop and implement long-term plans that address programs and services, as well as enrollment changes and staffing needs
6. Develop a more comprehensive and transparent method for keeping track of scheduled maintenance
7. Identify and address facility needs to provide adequate space for effective teaching and learning
8. Ensure completion of projects on the scheduled maintenance plan such as parking lot improvements, science lab updates, boiler replacement and roof replacement

## 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 at Nashoba Regional 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 Committee requires that the evaluation report be made public in accordance with the Committee's Policy on Distribution, Use and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report.

A school's initial/continued accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing valid recommendations of the visiting committee and others identified by the Committee as it monitors the school's progress and changes which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle. To monitor the school's progress in the Follow-Up Program the Committee requires that the principal of Nashoba Regional 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 Committee 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 Committee may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards are not being met in a satisfactory manner or if additional information is needed on matters relating to evaluation report recommendations or substantive changes in the school.

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Committee has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that principals of member schools report to the Committee within sixty days (60) of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts on the school's adherence to the Committee's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact which the change has had on the school's ability to meet the Standards for Accreditation. The Committee's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix on page xx. 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 Committee office has current statistical data on the school.

The Committee urges school officials to establish a formal follow-up program at once to review and implement all findings of the self-study and valid recommendations identified in the evaluation report. An outline of the Follow-Up Program is available in the Committee'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 Committee staff following the on-site visit.

The visiting committee extends its appreciation to Nashoba Regional High School for the hospitality extended throughout the visit. From the inspiring video during the panel presentation and the wonderful welcoming reception, to the comfortable accommodations provided to the visiting team, all of which contributed to a very positive experience for visiting team members. The visiting committee is very appreciative of the effort expended by everyone at Nashoba Regional High School to produce an

especially candid and accurate self-study. This contributed to making the work of the visiting committee significantly more efficient which allowed the members to focus more appropriately on crafting purposeful and productive recommendations to help drive school improvement. The visiting committee also thanks the school's faculty and staff for their participation in various meetings, including the thirty-two teacher interviews on Sunday afternoon, and for the willingness of teachers to welcome visiting team members into their classrooms as the team shadowed sixteen Nashoba Regional High School students for half a day each. Thanks as well to the shadowed and interviewed students, parents, school board members, and central office personnel who took time from their professional and personal schedules to meet with the visiting committee members on Sunday and during the three school days of the visit.

Finally, congratulations and thank you to the co-chairs of the Nashoba Regional High School self-study, the remaining members of the steering committee, the chairs of the seven self-study subcommittees, and to the superintendent, principal, and administrative staff members for their assistance and their support throughout the visit.

**Nashoba Regional High School  
NEASC Accreditation Visit  
March 8-11, 2015**

**Visiting Committee**

<p>Paul Mangelinkx New England Association of Schools and Colleges Burlington, MA 01803</p>	<p>Thomas Feir Tyngsborough High School Tyngsborough, MA 01879</p>
<p>Garrett Dukette Bacon Academy Colchester, CT 06415</p>	<p>Leslie Lomasson Amherst Regional High School Amherst, MA 01002</p>
<p>Erin Gerardi Lawrence High School Lawrence, MA 01841</p>	<p>Craig Juelis North Attleboro High School North Attleboro, MA 02760</p>
<p>Christine Sweklo South Hadley Public Schools South Hadley, MA 01075</p>	<p>Deborah Rossman Gateway Regional High School Huntington, MA 01050</p>
<p>Jamie Congdon Shepherd Hill Regional High School Dudley, MA 01571</p>	<p>Shawn Sheehan Easthampton High School Easthampton, MA 01027</p>
<p>Matthew Murray Enfield High School Enfield, CT 06082</p>	<p>Peter Gillen Taunton High School Taunton, MA 02780</p>
<p>Alison von Rohr Narragansett Regional High School Baldwinville, MA 01436</p>	<p>Barbara Kallin Millbury Memorial Junior-High School Millbury, MA 01527</p>
<p>Kathleen Hatch Southbridge Middle/High School Southbridge, MA 01550</p>	<p>Michael Sexton Woonsocket Public Schools Woonsocket, RI 02895</p>

## NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS &amp; COLLEGES

## Committee on Public Secondary Schools

## SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

Principals of member schools must report to the Committee 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 Committee'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
- grade level responsibilities of the principal
- 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
- takeover by the state
- inordinate user fees
- 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

## Nashoba Regional High School

### Commendations

#### Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations

1. The dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process used to develop the I-CARE set of core values, beliefs, and expectations
2. The I-CARE set of core values and beliefs which allows students to identify and internalize the values, to take ownership of their school culture and community, and to practice and achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
3. The development of challenging and measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations which flow directly from the school's core values and beliefs
4. The 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations analytical rubrics which are deeply rooted in the I-CARE statement
5. The school culture that embodies the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
6. The increased focus on student engagement, technology, and interdisciplinary courses
7. The incorporation of the I-CARE core values and beliefs on the school-wide discipline referral form

### Curriculum

1. The creation of innovative and challenging course content that relates to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
2. The teachers' commitment to continuous professional improvement
3. The informal collaboration by teachers to improve teaching and learning
4. The enhanced graphics computer lab which fosters real-world 21<sup>st</sup> century learning
5. The high level of student participation in co-curricular programs
6. The creativity of teachers in working around the space, materials, and technology challenges the facility creates
7. The use of Atlas Rubicon to develop and provide access to curriculum and to help ensure the thorough inclusion of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
8. The development of interdisciplinary classes to promote student achievement of core learning expectations
9. The varied opportunities for students to experience authentic learning both within the school and in the community

### Instruction

1. The dedication of teachers to the practice of teaching and their investment in the success and well-being of all students
2. The collegiality among all staff to support teaching and learning
3. The positive and constructive relationships between faculty and individual students
4. The engagement of students as active learners

5. The many opportunities for all students to apply knowledge and skills to authentic tasks
6. The willingness to provide additional support to students whenever needed
7. The varied instructional practices that support the achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
8. The use of formative assessment during instructional time
9. The authentic learning opportunities provided for students
10. The integration of technology into daily lessons and activities

### **Assessment of and for Student Learning**

1. The modification of assessment and grading practices to meet the needs of all students
2. The informal collaboration among colleagues to examine student work, revise curriculum, and improve instructional practices despite time and space limitations
3. The wide use of varied formative and summative assessments to determine student performance and to inform instruction
4. The effort on the part of many teachers to provide students with specific, timely, and corrective feedback on assessments
5. The frequent use of teacher-generated, course-specific rubrics to inform students of assessment expectations
6. The collection, disaggregation, and analysis of data by individual departments to improve teaching and learning
7. The use of the Mastery Manager program by a few teachers to provide a detailed analysis of formative assessments

### **School Culture and Leadership**

1. The creation of a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive school community
2. The development of a strong sense of community and family that is working to becoming more inclusive of new students and those with diverse needs
3. The variety of courses that are accessible to all students based on academic ability and interest
4. The commitment of the staff to voluntarily seek out opportunities for professional collaboration and discourse
5. The willingness of staff to independently seek and arrange professional collaboration
6. The reasonable class size and teacher course loads which enable teachers to personalize instruction and to meet the needs of all learners
7. The approachability of building administrators and their willingness to listen to parents' concerns before making a decision
8. The collaborative spirit of teachers as leaders within the building

### **School Resources for Learning**

1. The integration of the Best Buddies into the fabric of the school
2. The caring and concerned support staff who are responsive to students' needs
3. The freshman transition program is a coordinated and targeted effort to ensure a solid foundation for new freshmen at NRHS

4. The collaboration of all service providers results in effective support for all students
5. The comprehensive college and career developmental guidance curriculum that prepares students for life after high school
6. The extensive collaboration with outside agencies that provides additional support for students
7. The collaboration between the librarian and classroom teachers that results in student projects reflecting higher order thinking
8. The school website that provides access to multiple resources, pathfinders, and guidance to assist teachers and students with teaching and learning
9. The budget that supports a wide range of materials and electronic resources in the Library Media Center to support the curriculum
10. The library that is available to students and teachers for before, during, and after school
11. The district-wide school health plan developed by a group consisting of many stakeholders (staff, parents, students, community members)
12. The use of relevant assessment data to respond to the health needs of students

### **Community Resources for Learning**

1. The dependable funding provided for a wide range of school programs and services
2. The dedication of the custodial, grounds, and maintenance staff to keeping a well-maintained and clean facility
3. The proactive approach to staffing highly qualified skilled tradesmen on the maintenance staff
4. The good faith plan to update plant facilities and general maintenance of the physical plant
5. The active engagement of parents in several booster groups that support students in the arts and athletics
6. The parent initiated Endowment Fund which supports teaching and learning
7. The effort to reach out specifically to those families who have been less connected to the school
8. The dynamic and unique EMT program that provided authentic learning experiences for students
9. The development of strong and productive parent, community, business and higher education partnerships that support student learning

### **Recommendations**

#### **Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations**

1. Resolve the restricting and confusing nature of the analytic rubrics
2. Implement the school-wide analytic rubrics consistently to measure student progress on the achievement of the school's learning expectations
3. Provide funding for professional development dedicated to collecting and analyzing the data regarding core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
4. Develop and implement a formal review of the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
5. Ensure that the established core values, beliefs, and learning expectations inform all aspects of the school's policies, procedures, decisions, and allocation of resources

## **Curriculum**

1. Provide appropriate, teacher-driven professional development opportunities which will enhance curriculum development and revision to improve student learning
2. Increase space within the facility to support student learning and reduce teacher inconvenience
3. Update science laboratories to meet curricular needs
4. Ensure adequate staff to meet student curricular needs
5. Provide reliable support for the integration of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology in all classrooms
6. Ensure curriculum coordination and articulation within NRHS and with its sending schools
7. Complete the development of curriculum guides and ensure that assessments, essential questions, and instructional strategies are included for all units
8. Provide time for teachers to collaborate regarding best practices and pacing as defined in curriculum guides, specifically those teaching the same course
9. Develop a process to review taught curriculum to ensure alignment with written curriculum
10. Continue to increase offerings in cross-disciplinary learning
11. Link essential questions, enduring understandings, essential skills and content standards to specific course schedules, syllabi and lesson plans
12. Embed the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations into the written and digital curriculum
13. Identify which departments are responsible for specific learning expectations and ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century skills across varying subject areas

## **Instruction**

1. Provide opportunities for teacher input into district-wide decisions about instructional practices and professional development planning
2. Provide teachers more formal, systemic opportunities to examine their own practices and to collaborate with colleagues in order to improve their instructional practices
3. Develop more opportunities for CP level students to engage in higher order thinking skills and to take greater responsibility for their learning
4. Provide professional development and programming to address the needs of the alternative, at-risk, and low motivation student populations at NRHS
5. Provide professional development for all instructional staff to ensure an in-depth understanding of strategic differentiation
6. Provide more common planning time and meaningful, content-specific professional development to ensure that all teachers meet the needs of all students in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and core values
7. Provide additional training and support in the implementation of Atlas Rubicon and *Understanding by Design*
8. Improve communication between teachers and district/building administration about decision-making processes for professional development

## **Assessment of and for Student Learning**

1. Ensure that the school-wide rubrics are used across the curriculum to assess individual and whole-school progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
2. Develop and implement a formal process to communicate individual student and whole-school progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations

3. Establish a system through which individual academic departments take ownership for the assessment of specific 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
4. Provide professional development regarding 21<sup>st</sup> century skills instruction and the implementation of school-wide rubrics
5. Communicate relevant 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectation to all students prior to each unit of study
6. Provide time and appropriate professional development to enable teachers to more effectively analyze student data to inform curriculum and instruction
7. Provide teachers with common planning time so that all teachers can collaborate on the development of formative and summative assessments
8. Ensure teacher access to and the appropriate use of shared data from sending schools and other relevant sources
9. Ensure formal opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively within and between departments to review assessment data, revise curriculum, and improve instructional practices

### **School Culture and Leadership**

1. Provide formal meeting time for faculty members to collaborate with each other within and across departments to focus on the learning needs of all students
2. Explore other schedule models that would support greater professional collaboration and support the learning needs of all students
3. Develop and implement a formal, ongoing program or process through which each student has an adult in the school (other than his/her guidance counselor) who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century goals
4. Develop and implement a professional development plan to support 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning
5. Clarify the roles of all administrators involved in teacher supervision ensuring that building-based administrators are charged with the primary role of teacher evaluations
6. Provide all evaluators with annual training to calibrate the observation and evaluation process and ensure inter-operator reliability
7. Provide an opportunity for department heads to take an active role in evaluation process
8. Ensure that specific administrative responsibilities are clearly communicated and that all aspects of student and staff behavior are effectively addressed and processed promptly to ensure equity
9. Assess and revise, if needed, the building administrator's roles for specific departments in relation to the other management issues they oversee to ensure that they can be more effective in sharing a combined view of their vision and instructional leadership with staff members
10. Ensure that changes to policies or procedures are communicated to students and staff in a clear, concise manner
11. Ensure that staff and students are provided with meaningful roles in the school's decision-making process and opportunities to contribute to the achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills
12. Provide students and staff with a transparent and clearly defined vehicle to provide their input, and ensure that any concerns are acknowledged and addressed in a timely manner
13. Ensure that there is a transparent, truly meaningful and collaborative process, which includes all key stakeholders, in making programmatic changes, that focuses on the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
14. Ensure that authority of building-based responsibilities and decisions rests with the building principal in order to more effectively manage the instruction, expectations, and management of the building

15. 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

### **School Resources for Learning**

1. Provide appropriate certified personnel to staff the ELL program
2. Ensure privacy for students using health services
3. Include nurses and health professionals in curriculum discussions related to health topics
4. Develop formal strategies for the gathering and analysis of feedback from a variety of sources including parents, students, and staff to improve student service programs
5. Increase scheduled individual student contact with his/her guidance counselor
6. Increase collaborative opportunities between the librarian and classroom teachers to ensure all students acquire 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

### **Community Resources for Learning**

1. Provide additional technology support staff in order to implement an effective process for technology maintenance and repair
2. Provide appropriate bandwidth to ensure consistent internet access for all areas of the school building
3. Provide access to sufficient and dependable technology to support a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment including replacement of outdated equipment
4. Develop and implement short- and long-term plans to ensure that the Nashoba physical plant will be supportive of effective instructional practice
5. Develop and implement long-term plans that address programs and services, as well as enrollment changes and staffing needs
6. Develop a more comprehensive and transparent method for keeping track of scheduled maintenance
7. Identify and address facility needs to provide adequate space for effective teaching and learning
8. Ensure completion of projects on the scheduled maintenance plan such as parking lot improvements, science lab updates, boiler replacement and roof replacement