Commission on Public Secondary Schools

Report of the Visiting Committee for
Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

Acton, Massachusetts 01720
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STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS

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

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this visiting committee report of Acton-Boxborough Regional High School to be a privileged document submitted by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to the principal of the school and by the principal to the state department of education. Distribution of the report within the school community is the responsibility of the school principal. The final visiting committee report must be released in its entirety within sixty 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 Acton-Boxborough Regional High School in terms of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting team.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Findings</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and Community Profile</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School’s Statement of Mission and Expectations for Student Learning</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and Learning Standards</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Expectations</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of Student Learning</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of Teaching and Learning Standards</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and Organization</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Resources for Learning</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Resources for Learning</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up Responsibilities</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Roster of Team Members</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Commission Policy on Substantive Change</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 six Commissions: the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), the Commission on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS), the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI), the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools (CPEMS), and the Commission on American and International Schools Abroad (CAISA).

As the responsible 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 Commission. Those Standards are:

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

- Support of Teaching and Learning Standards
  - Leadership and Organization
  - School Resources for Learning
  - Community Resources for Learning

The accreditation program for public schools involves a threefold process: the self-study conducted by the local professional staff, the on-site evaluation conducted by the Commission's visiting committee, and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own self-study and the valid recommendations of the visiting committee and those identified by the Commission in the Follow-Up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school be reevaluated at least once every ten years and that it show continued progress addressing identified needs.
Preparation for the Evaluation Visit - The School Self-Study

A steering committee of the professional staff was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, a committee of eight 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 Acton-Boxborough Regional High School extended over a period of 22 school months from September 2008 to June 2010. The visiting committee was pleased to note that students, parents, and school committee members joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations.

Public schools evaluated by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's mission, learning expectations, and unique student population. In addition to using the Self-Study Guides developed by a representative group of New England educators and approved by the Commission, Acton-Boxborough Regional High School also used questionnaires developed by The Global Institute at Endicott College to reflect the concepts contained in the Standards for Accreditation. These materials provided discussion items for a comprehensive assessment of the school by the professional staff during the self-study.

It is important that the reader understand that every subcommittee appointed by the steering committee was required to present its report to the entire professional staff for approval. No single report developed in the self-study became part of the official self-study documents until it had been approved by the entire professional staff.
The Process Used by the Visiting Committee

A visiting committee of 18 evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School. The Committee members spent four days in Acton, MA, reviewed the self-study documents which had been prepared for their examination, met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents, shadowed students, visited classes, and interviewed teachers to determine the degree to which the school meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented teachers, building administrators, and central office administrators, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Acton-Boxborough Regional High School.

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

- review of the school’s self-study materials
- 54 hours shadowing 36 students
- a total of 8 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 50 teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning
- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers
- the examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

Each conclusion on the report was agreed to by team consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting committee appear in parenthesis in the Standards sections of the report. The seven Standards for Accreditation reports include commendations and recommendations that in the team’s judgment will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and to better meet Commission Standards.

This report of the findings of the visiting committee will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Secondary Schools which will make a decision on the accreditation of Acton-Boxborough Regional High School.
Overview of Findings

Although the conclusions of the visiting committee on the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation appear in various sections of this report, the committee wishes to highlight some findings in the paragraphs that follow. These findings are not intended to be a summary of the report.

Teaching and Learning at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

The mission and expectations for learning were developed by a representative group of the school community. They were publicized widely throughout the school, with the mission receiving widespread publicity throughout the community. The mission reflects the fundamental values and beliefs about student learning and has played an important role in the operation and decision-making in the school.

The expectations for student learning include four learning expectations and five civic and social expectations. Rubrics have been written for the learning expectations, although there is no formal method for measuring them and ensuring that all students meet them. Indicators have not been developed for the civic and social expectations, so they also are not measured, although it appears that the school does much to ensure that the spirit of the civic and social expectations plays a large role in the school.

There is no formal review process for the mission and expectations for student learning. The school must develop a plan to do so for the future.

While the curriculum is not explicitly aligned with the school-wide academic expectations, there is a strong correlation between the two. The curriculum is rigorous and engages students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills. It emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage. Up-to-date resources are available to teachers to implement the curriculum. The school provides numerous opportunities for students to extend learning beyond normal course offerings both on and off campus. However, the curriculum provides very few opportunities for interdepartmental or cross curricular connections. Also, while many teachers work informally to develop and revise curriculum, there is not sufficient time, financial resources, or personnel to continually revise the curriculum.

While the mission and expectations for student learning are informally incorporated into teaching strategies, there is no formal plan in place to do so. Instructional strategies are generally varied in classrooms, engaging students in their learning. Peer observations are a valuable tool for teachers to discuss instructional strategies and learn from each other. Technology is readily available, but additional professional development in the use of that technology will help teachers to make better use of it. Finally, large class sizes and teacher loads inhibit the use of creative instruction that will best benefit students.

While a large variety of classroom assessment tools is used by most teachers, their connection to the school-wide expectations for learning is informal. Many teachers use course-specific rubrics to measure student progress. Many teachers meet collaboratively on their own initiative to share student work to revise curriculum and instruction. Student progress is reported to students and their families through a large variety of ways. Parents report that they are satisfied with the communications they receive on student success.
Support of Teaching and Learning at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

The school committee and superintendent provide the principal with a high level of autonomy to lead the school. The principal has communicated her vision to the school community through many programs she has supported or initiated. She has worked with teachers, other staff, parents, and students to include them in the decision-making process. Student needs are addressed through a large number of programs and through the overall structure and organization of the school. Student success is celebrated both in the school building and in school programs. The overall environment in the school is supportive of and safe for students.

Several issues must still be addressed by the school leadership. The high class size inhibits quality instructional practices. A more formal advisory/mentoring program will help to ensure that all students have an adult to turn to when needed. Finally, the very tight structure to keep teachers within their discipline does not allow for a cross disciplinary approach to learning.

Student support services, including counseling, special education, library services, and nursing all add to the well-being of students. They provide services that help to make school learning and life more successful. Counselors are available before, during, and after the school day and provide many programs to help all students. They do so in spite of a large student load. The special education teachers provide many programs to meet student needs. They also have an extremely large number of students for whom they are responsible. Library services would also benefit from more support to meet the many demands of students and teachers. While librarians would like to spend more time supporting teachers in all disciplines, the lack of personnel prevents them from doing so. Health services are comprehensive and creative in helping students and staff remain healthy. This includes a program to help relieve stress, a goal undertaken by the entire school.

The community has been very supportive of education in general, passing three overrides in the past ten years, providing many community programs to help and support students, and providing additional funds from the undesignated fund balance so that class size, already very high, would not grow even more. The renovations completed five years ago resulted in a building that provides wonderful resources for the student population. While additional staffing would greatly benefit school programs, the community should be commended for the effort it has made to support the school.
The Community

Acton-Boxborough Regional High School (ABRHS) is located in Acton, Massachusetts, approximately 25 miles northwest of Boston. Acton (population 20,331) and Boxborough (population 4,868) have historical ties to the American Revolution, were agricultural towns for most of their history, and experienced the transformation to high tech suburbs in the 1970s and 1980s. Residents of the two communities tend to be highly education (69% of adults with college degrees in 2000 compared to 33% in Massachusetts), and almost all families who have moved to Acton and Boxborough in recent years report they have moved here because of the school system.

In November 2009, ABRHS was the recipient of the Blue Ribbon School Award from the United States Department of Education, one of only seventeen public high schools in the country to be so honored.

In 2009, Action was also named by *Money Magazine* as number 16 on their list of Best Places to Live-Small Town, citing the town’s historical sites, diversity, progressive/highly ranked school system, and relatively stable job market.

The high school is located near the geographical center of Acton and approximately three miles from the geographical center of Boxborough. It is part of a larger campus shared by the junior high school and two elementary schools. The campus is bordered by highways (routes 495 and 2), but the surrounding neighborhoods are largely residential.

The median household income at the time of the 2000 census was $91,624 for Acton (updated to $108,189 in 2007) and $87,618 for Boxborough (no update available). Individuals below the poverty level represented 2.9% of Acton’s population and 2.8% of Boxborough’s population. Of Action residents, 14.7% spoke a language other than English at home; the comparable figure was 13.1% in Boxborough. The largest ethnic minority was Asian.

The area’s multi-cultural composition is a key change in recent years. The Action Chinese Language School, which meets on Sunday afternoons in the junior high school building, offers language, culture, and recreation programs for Chinese families and others. The area has Korean and Brazilian churches, a Latino Family Network, and Indian cultural groups. The presence of these resources attracts still more international families.

Unemployment rates are 5.3% for Acton and 6.0% for Boxborough as of November 2009. Acton and Boxborough’s businesses are a mix of retail, other small businesses, and light industry. Some notable local businesses include Cisco Systems, which located its east coast engineering headquarters in Boxborough in 2000, and The Haartz Corporation, a manufacturer of automobile fabrics located near the high school. Seventy percent of local property taxes are allocated to the towns’ school.
The School District

As of 2009 there are 2,959 students registered in the school district, which is composed of R.J. Grey Junior High School and Acton-Boxborough Regional High School. Of school-age students, 5.5% from Acton and 6.9% from Boxborough attend non-public schools.

Acton-Boxborough’s per pupil expenditure is $12,228, slightly below the Massachusetts average high school per pupil expenditure of $12,489.

Just fewer than 4% of the students attending Acton-Boxborough Regional High School are residents of other towns and attend Acton-Boxborough through the state’s school choice program.

There are five elementary schools in Acton and one in Boxborough. Parents in Acton choose which school their children will attend (space permitting). The five Acton schools and one Boxborough school feed to one junior high, which then feeds to the high school.

Superintendent Dr. Stephen Mills, who is also superintendent of the Acton Public Schools, came to the district in August 2009. Leadership at ABRHS has been remarkably stable over the years; the school has had only four principals since becoming a regional high school in 1955. The current principal, Dr. Alixe Callen, become principal in July 2008.

The School and Students

The high school has 1953 students in grades 9-12. Fifty-two percent of students are male and 48% are female. The school population is 75% white, 20% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 2% other. The Asian population has risen dramatically in recent years, from 8% in 2000 to the current 20%. The Brazilian population is estimated to be 1% of the total school population and is highly mobile. Awareness of diversity in sexual orientation has increased in recent years. The school’s gay-straight alliance has been part of this process, as have several openly gay faculty members. In the past five years, the overall student population has grown by about 300 students but is projected to be stable for the next few years.

The high school currently has 132.4 full-time equivalent teachers, resulting in a student to teacher ratio of 15 to 1. Teacher attendance rate in 2007-2008 was 96%. Class sizes range from 3 to 68 students. The average class sizes for the five academic departments range from 21.2 to 23.3. The average teacher load by department ranges from 96 to 112, which does not include any of the small group, specialized classes. Although the planning periods of teachers teaching the same course may overlap, common planning time is not built into teachers’ schedules.

The school schedule is an eight period day, six day cycle that includes one full period for lunch. Each class period is 47 minutes long. The school offers non-leveled elective courses but most academic courses are leveled: Standard Prep (SP), College Prep (CP), Accelerated/Enriched (AE), and Honors (H). Advanced Placement courses are generally designate honors courses. In addition, the school provides instruction through specialized programs, which includes special education and regular education programs. Over 80% of A-B students take some or all of their leveled courses at an “upper level” (AE or H). In the five academic departments in 2009-2010, the percentage of students taking classes at the A/E or H level ranged from 62% to 77%.

During 2008-2009, the student attendance rate was 93.7% and there were no dropouts.
Students are recognized for their accomplishments in a variety of ways. Each term’s honor roll is published in the local newspaper. Four students are chosen each month to receive the Principal’s Recognition Award for service to school and/or community. At the school’s annual Awards Night in May, students in all four grades are recognized for academic, extracurricular, and athletic achievement. Other awards ceremonies are held for some individual departments, performing arts groups, athletic teams, and students who complete community service. Local businesses, civic organizations, other groups and businesses sponsor local scholarships, which are awarded at a special ceremony during graduation week. Achievements in competitions beyond the local community are highlighted in school and community publications.

With a large and hardworking student body and the high expectations of students and families, the individual and group achievements at ABRHS are many. Some indicators of excellence are: seventeen National Merit semi-finalists and 63 commended students in the Class of 2010; 172 students in the Classes of 2009 and 2010 named Advanced Placement Scholars; an Academic Decathlon team which has won the state title nine years in a row; an award-winning marching band, jazz band, and concert choir as well as students named to regional student performing groups; fifteen individual students recognized in the 2009 Boston Globe Scholastic Art Awards competition; two students from the Class of 2009 who were regional winners in the Siemens Competition in Science and Technology; and a drama group which mounts a critically-acclaimed series of shows each year and places well in the New England High School Drama Festival. The athletic department at ABRHS, with 33 programs and 59 teams spread over three seasons won the Dalton Trophy for the highest percentage of regular season wins across all sports in 2007-2008. The school consistently has teams that win league and division championships and has had several state championship teams in recent years (field hockey and girls’ soccer in 2007, girls’ tennis in 2008, field hockey in 2009) as well as a football team that broke the state record for consecutive wins (52) in 2001-2005.

In 2008 ninety-one percent of seniors took SATs compared to 84% in Massachusetts and 46% nationally. Average scores on the three portions of the SAT were at least 100 points higher than national averages. The average total SAT score was 1865 (national average 1509), and the average SAT subject test score was 705. A total of 436 students took 871 AP exams, with 58% scoring a 5.

With regard to Massachusetts standardized state tests (MCAS), students at Action-Boxborough perform well above state averages. Only 4% of students score in the “Needs Improvement” or “Failing” categories on the first attempt compared to state levels of 19% in English Language Arts and 26% in Math. Given additional tutoring and testing opportunities, students who leave high school without passing are limited to those with severe learning disabilities, social/emotional issues, or severely limited English language skills.

AB students attend school for 180 days a year, receiving a minimum of 990 hours of instruction each year. The teacher contract calls for 182 work days per year.

Special education students make up 14.5% of the school population, while students in ELL classes make up 0.7%.

In 2008-2009, 99% of seniors graduated. Ninety-eight percent of graduating seniors reported plans to go on to some form of post secondary education, with 92% expecting to attend four-year college, 6% attending two-year college, prep or technical schools, and 2% entering military service or other endeavors.
Students and community members may access resources at Minuteman Career and Technical High School in Lexington, as well as a wide variety of offerings through the Action-Boxborough Community Education Program. This program offers more than 1,200 classes for children, teens, and adults.

**School Initiatives**

Action-Boxborough Regional High School has engaged in a variety of school initiatives to improve student learning. From 2001-2004 ABRHS underwent a 54 million dollar building project. In the process of planning the building, ABRHS looked at school needs and strengths and designed spaces that would foster the learning experience. The entire school community, including faculty from every department, administrators, and parents, had input into this process. A key part of the building renovation was providing teachers with laptop computers and equipping classrooms with multi-media capabilities.

The culture of AB is one of mutual respect and trust that fosters personal responsibility. The administration, staff, and students have created a graduated privilege program to help students learn to manage their time well before they graduate. Under this program, freshmen are assigned to a study hall during any free periods. Older students, in general, do not have to report to a study during their free periods. They may spend their free time in any approved area of the school (library, student centers, cafeteria, etc) and can use this time to see counselors and teachers. Juniors (after first term) and seniors can apply for approval to leave campus when they do not have a class. Campus monitors, in partnership with the faculty, help to manage the privilege program.

Several recent initiatives have grown out of faculty-identified needs. An academic integrity committee has worked to educate students in this area. A stress management committee has looked at factors that contribute to student stress and has worked to make some changes. English teachers have created an elective for a senior independent project to help students develop independent learning skills, and alternative programs for “at risk” students have been enhanced. To address the needs of students new to the high school and/or the community, ABRHS has strengthened orientation programs and instituted an ambassador program to support new students. The number of languages taught in the World Language Department has grown from two to five in recent years, with the addition of Italian and Chinese and the re-introduction of Latin.

ABRHS has strong support from the local business community. Classrooms and the career exploration programs benefit from these resources, which includes speakers and job shadowing, internships, and other opportunities for students. Community groups and businesses also provide extensive support for community service, performing arts, athletic, and other extracurricular activities.

Parent involvement is also extensive. In addition to the regional parent organization, there are active parent booster groups for individual sports, and there are separate parent support groups for the music program and the drama program, as well as a local foundation to help fill the gap between the financial needs of athletics and extracurricular activities and the operating budget.

The school has no service learning or community service requirements, but almost all AB students participate in community service during their time in high school. A recognition
program and annual Senior Community Service Day are two features of the community service program.

**School Improvement Planning**

School improvement planning occurs in several ways: responding to end-of-year surveys of faculty and seniors, which leads to identification of needs and steps to address those needs; regular meetings of the School Council, Faculty Advisory Council, and Student Council, which discuss concerns and strategies for addressing those concerns; and reviewing standardized test results, including MCAS, to determine areas for improvement. The school officially adopts a school improvement plan for each school year.

**Critical Challenges**

While the committee identified no truly critical challenges facing the community presently, ongoing issues of budget and finance will surely present themselves in the coming years.
Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Mission Statement

Together we promote respect for self, others, and learning.

Learning Expectations

In our effort to promote high standards and create life-long learners, students will:

1. Respect others, demonstrate tolerance, and accept different perspectives and cultures.
2. Set goals, meet challenges, and adapt to change in the pursuit of academic excellence.
3. Self-advocate and respect one’s self by making positive decisions to maintain balance, health, and safety in one’s social and academic life.
4. Communicate effectively through verbal, visual, and written language.
5. Demonstrate problem-solving skills, apply knowledge, and think critically and creatively.
6. Read for understanding, synthesize information, and develop a coherent argument.
7. Access, utilize, and gain proficiency in technology to enhance learning and understanding.
8. Work effectively with others by listening, communicating, and collaborating.
9. Be responsible and active citizens at local, national, and global levels.
TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

CURRICULUM

INSTRUCTION

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING
The school's mission statement describes the essence of what the school as a community of learners is seeking to achieve. The expectations for student learning are based on and drawn from the school's mission statement. These expectations are the fundamental goals by which the school continually assesses the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Every component of the school community must focus on enabling all students to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.

1. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall be developed by the school community and approved and supported by the professional staff, the school board, and any other school-wide governing organization.

2. The school's mission statement shall represent the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning.

3. The school shall define school-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations that:
   - are measurable;
   - reflect the school’s mission.

4. For each academic expectation in the mission, the school shall have a targeted level of successful achievement identified in a rubric.

5. The school shall have indicators by which it assesses the school’s progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations.

6. The mission statement and the school’s expectations for student learning shall guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and shall be evident in the culture of the school.

7. The school shall review regularly the mission statement and expectations for student learning using a variety of data to ensure that they reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state and national standards.
CONCLUSIONS

The mission and expectations for student learning were developed by the school community, approved by the faculty with near unanimity, presented to student and parent focus groups, and approved by the school committee in May, 2009. Results of the Endicott Survey reflect that 93% of parents indicated familiarity with the mission and 98% with expectations for student learning. The mission is posted in all classrooms, displayed on the school flagpole, and hung in the school lobby. The mission appears in the student handbook and the counseling center. Students clearly know and live the mission. Following approval of the mission and expectations, school-wide rubrics were developed and approved for the academic learning expectations in the fall of 2009. Because of the involvement of all the stakeholders, the mission has widespread acceptance. (panel presentation, school committee, self-study)

The mission statement reflects the fundamental values and beliefs about student learning held by the school community. Students’ respect for self, others, and learning are core values shared and promoted by all. This is clearly evident in observations in the hallways and cafeteria and in conversations with parents, students, and school staff members. The mission statement was reviewed by the school council, student council, senior advisory group, the gay-straight alliance (Common Ground), the athletic leadership group, and the alternative learning programs to ensure it had full community input. The mission statement is concise and intentionally crafted to ensure that it is memorable and that it embodies core values. Students, teachers, and parents have a deep understanding of the mission and the fundamental values of the community. (school committee, teachers, students, panel presentation)

School personnel have defined the school’s academic, social, and civic expectations for student learning in specific, measurable ways. School-wide achievements such as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), SAT scores, graduation rate, and college acceptances indicate a high level of academic performance. However, rubrics developed to assess the academic expectations are not being used to measure student success. In addition, the expectations are not being used formally to determine individual course expectations. Teachers use various assessment methods, but they lack connection to the academic expectations and school-wide rubrics. Thus, the academic expectations for student learning do not have direct impact on student learning. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team)

The school-wide rubrics for academic learning expectations have not yet identified targeted levels of successful achievement. In June 2009, the faculty agreed to pilot a draft of the school-wide rubrics. The rubrics have four levels that range from great to unsuccessful, but the school community has not determined what performance level a graduate must attain. School leaders indicated that the next steps regarding the academic expectations include determining a targeted level of performance. Currently, the school cannot determine if a student is reaching the desired level to be successful on the expectations for student learning. (teacher interviews, teachers, department heads, school leadership team)

The school has developed an extensive set of civic and social expectations. The impressive offerings of clubs, community service, and support programs offer opportunities for students to meet the social and civic expectations. However, the school has not determined the specific indicators for those expectations. The social and civic expectations reflect important values held by the school community, but they are not measured. Discussions around what the indicators
should be have not yet taken place. Thus, the school cannot ensure that all students are making progress in achieving the civic and social expectations. (self-study, school leadership team, teachers)

The mission statement has guided the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and is evident in the school culture. The new stress awareness program and discussions around cyber bullying are examples of the mission affecting the culture of the school. The production of The Laramie Project with the approval of the school committee indicates the greater community’s application of the mission. Another indication that the mission has guided the school is student engagement as active partners in the operation of the school. As a result of using the mission to make decisions, many effective policies and outstanding programs have been developed. (school committee, school leadership team, teachers)

The school does not have a formal and regular review process for the mission statement and expectations for student learning. While the school uses data to review its practices, it needs to use a variety of data to ensure that the mission and expectations reflect student needs, community expectations, and state and national standards. The implementation of school-wide rubrics is the initial step in assessing and informing decisions surrounding mission and expectations. A formal review process will ensure that the school remains mission-driven. (self-study, school leadership team, department heads)

**COMMENDATIONS**

1. Involvement of a wide range of school and community members in the development of the mission statement
2. A mission statement that represents community values and beliefs
3. An extensive set of civic and social expectations
4. A school culture driven by the mission
5. The procedures, policies, and decisions based on the mission

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Establish a targeted level of achievement for all academic learning expectations
2. Develop indicators to assess student and school progress for achieving school-wide civic and social expectations
3. Develop and implement a plan for the review of the school’s mission and expectations for student learning that is based on an analysis of data and that involves all members of the school community
The curriculum, which includes coursework, co-curricular activities, and other school-approved educational experiences, is the school’s formal plan to fulfill its mission statement and expectations for student learning. The curriculum links the school’s beliefs, its expectations for student learning, and its instructional practices. The strength of that link is dependent upon the professional staff’s commitment to and involvement in a comprehensive, ongoing review of the curriculum.

1. Each curriculum area shall identify those school-wide academic expectations for which it is responsible.

2. The curriculum shall be aligned with the school-wide academic expectations and shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations.

3. The written curriculum shall:
   - prescribe content;
   - integrate relevant school-wide learning expectations;
   - identify course-specific learning goals;
   - suggest instructional strategies;
   - suggest assessment techniques including the use of school-wide rubrics.

4. The curriculum shall engage all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.

5. The curriculum shall:
   - be appropriately integrated;
   - emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.

6. The school shall provide opportunities for all students to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings and the school campus.

7. There shall be effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district.

8. Instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, staffing levels, and the resources of the library/media center shall be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum.

9. The professional staff shall be actively involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on assessments of student performance in achieving the school’s academic expectations and course-specific learning goals.

10. The school shall commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum.

11. Professional development activities shall support the development and implementation of the curriculum.
CONCLUSIONS

The school’s curriculum can be found online at http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/academics/curriculum.shtml. Each curriculum area adheres to the prescribed format and clearly outlines the following: department philosophy, guiding principles, content, learning goals, assessments, and materials. Some curricular areas provide learning objectives that specifically address technology and health. The written curriculum for each area aligns learning objectives with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (MCF). Thus, teachers, students, and parents have access to the content and learning objectives involved in each curricular area. (curriculum guides, teachers, self-study)

The curriculum engages students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills. Examples of higher order thinking can be found in all academic levels and across all curricular areas. Although teachers and students acknowledge differences between academic levels, academic challenge and opportunities to practice higher-order thinking skills are present in all academic levels. For example, students in European history participate in an inquiry-led discussion that requires application of knowledge and skills from other classes and curricular areas. Teachers in the American Studies course use essential questions to frame students’ learning through thematic units. Students in world languages apply skills in authentic settings through writing newspaper articles and making videos and podcasts. Therefore, students benefit from opportunities to use higher-order thinking skills for the authentic application of knowledge. (classroom observations, self-study, teachers)

The curriculum clearly emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage. The majority of teachers and students believes that all departments emphasize depth of understanding over breadth. Parents report numerous opportunities for in-depth study. A variety of elective courses allows students to explore various topics of interest in great depth. This creates an intellectually rigorous curriculum that engages students. Although there is great interest on the part of the faculty to create interdisciplinary opportunities, there is only one interdisciplinary course in the program of studies. Formal structures to enhance the development of these co-operative units are not in place. Despite this obstacle, cross-curricular connections are being made by some groups of teachers based on their personal interests and commitment. For example, the English and visual arts departments collaborate on the Broadside Project to integrate knowledge of poetry and art. The majority of students reports that their teachers include topics from other subject areas in their lessons. However, formal structures are needed to provide opportunities for students to engage in interdisciplinary curricular courses and to add these to curriculum documents so their use can be consistent. (teachers, self-study, survey information)

Teachers in curricular areas have not identified those school-wide academic expectations for which they are responsible. The mission statement and learning expectations were developed after the written curriculum guides were completed. Consequently, teachers are not aware of how the curriculum is linked to the school-wide learning expectations. As a result, teachers have no way to measure student achievement in terms of the school-wide learning expectations. (teacher interviews, curriculum guides, teachers)

The curriculum is not explicitly aligned with the school-wide academic expectations. While there is a correlation between the curriculum and learning expectations, neither teachers nor
students can identify intentional connections made between these two. The lack of alignment between the curriculum and school-wide learning expectations impacts the school’s ability to ensure all students receive sufficient practice to achieve the school-wide learning expectations. (curriculum guides, students, teacher)

The school provides numerous opportunities for students to extend learning beyond normal course offerings and the school campus. For example, career breakfasts provide opportunities for students to meet with professionals from various fields. Seniors have the opportunity to participate in internships. A hybrid AP Environmental Science course is offered that includes connections to online assignments, labs, and assessments. Students participate in curriculum-related international travel. Finally, the school offers a wide variety of clubs and athletic teams that cater to the diverse interests and needs of the student body. Therefore, students have ample opportunities to extend their learning beyond the school day and the course offerings. (self-study, panel presentation, students)

There are formal structures and informal opportunities that facilitate coordination and articulation between and among most academic areas within and between schools. For example, regional department leaders (RDLs) meet every two weeks. RDLs also meet monthly with their department members at the high school. In addition, the building department leaders (BDLs) from the junior high school meet monthly with their department members. RDLs and BDLs meet regularly, and the RDLs attend department meetings at the junior high school. Further, some eighth grade teachers meet yearly with ninth grade teachers to discuss student placement and curricular expectations. There are informal opportunities for coordination within departments, but they are usually teacher-initiated, and the frequency of these initiatives varies by department. Although there is collegial sharing within curriculum areas and between grade levels, there is no formal procedure to ensure comprehensive consistency of curriculum within departments and between schools. (self-study, teachers department leaders)

Teachers have many up-to-date resources at their disposal to implement the curriculum. Materials include new textbooks, consumables for labs, and primary source documents. Technology includes ceiling-mounted LCD projectors in each classroom, teacher laptops, a well-equipped library/media center with instructional technicians for teacher support, graphing calculators, and two language labs. Additionally, the teachers have access to mobile laptop labs that can be brought directly to classrooms for student work. However, the Macintosh computers in the visual art department are outdated and in need of replacement. Despite the availability of these resources, some teachers do not make regular use of these technologies to support the delivery of the curriculum. Some teachers use old-fashioned, light operated overhead projectors on carts to display acetate slides instead of the ceiling-mounted LCD projectors connected to their laptops. As a result, the uneven use of technology to support the delivery of curriculum impacts all students’ dynamic engagement with the course material. (students, teacher, classroom observations)

The professional staff is informally involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum. Groups of teachers meet informally to analyze data on standardized tests and classroom assessments to determine curricular strengths and weaknesses. This process would benefit from formalizing curriculum development to ensure continuity in all areas. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team)
The district does not commit sufficient time to the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum. While the school provides two early release days and one full day for professional development during the year, much of this time is taken up by initiatives other than curriculum development and revision. There are additional opportunities for curriculum development during the summer, but there is no formal requirements or structures to support this work or integrate its results into the written curriculum. Some departments have looked at student work and developed common assessments on their own, but these practices are not formally incorporated into a curriculum review process. Consequently, timely, relevant, and lasting revisions to the curriculum are not formally made. (teachers, central office administrators, department leaders)

The curriculum development and revision process has not been sufficiently enhanced through professional development opportunities. Teacher-led and teacher-initiated book groups provide opportunities for faculty members to examine and revise curriculum on an informal basis only. RDLs work within departments to provide professional development opportunities such as book groups; however, there is no process to take this work and formalize it in the written curriculum documents or to sustain revisions long-term. At the district level, goals have been established for literacy across the curriculum, but no plan for professional development to implement literacy goals has been established nor have literacy practices been incorporated into all curricula. The lack of a systemic approach to professional development focused on curriculum and curriculum-related skills results in curriculum guides that do not reflect the taught curriculum. This systemic approach must be created and implemented along with a formal curriculum process that insures consistency and relevance. (teachers, department leaders, self-study)

**COMMENDATIONS**

1. Curriculum documents that are written in a standard format for all areas and are accessible to parents, teachers, and students
2. Rigorous curriculum that stresses inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills across all levels of instruction
3. Multiple opportunities across curricular areas for authentic application of knowledge and skills
4. Teacher commitment to developing cross-curricular opportunities despite time constraints
5. Wide variety of co-curricular activities
6. Library resources and programs that support the entire curriculum
7. Informal but ongoing intradepartmental efforts to evaluate and revise curriculum
8. Faculty commitment to ongoing informal evaluation and revision of written curriculum
9. Teachers’ active research and proposals for the review and implementation of new or supplementary curriculum materials

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Identify the school-wide learning expectations for which each curricular area will be responsible and inform all teachers and students
2. Identify a variety of effective instructional strategies within the written curriculum for all areas
3. Develop and implement formal cross-curricular opportunities for learning
4. Provide a formal policy and record for curricular coordination and articulation within and between schools
5. Provide additional professional development opportunities to support the integration of technology in the curriculum
6. Develop and implement district-and school-wide processes for formal evaluation and revision of curriculum
7. Designate specific time to support a formal procedure for the review and revision of curriculum
INSTRUCTION

The quality of instruction in a school is the single most important factor affecting the quality of student learning, the achievement of expectations for student learning, the delivery of the curriculum, and the assessment of student progress. Instructional practices must be grounded in the school’s mission and expectations for student learning, supported by research in best practice, and refined and improved based on identified student needs. Teachers are expected to be reflective about their instructional strategies and to collaborate with their colleagues about instruction and student learning.

1. Instructional strategies shall be consistent with the school’s mission statement and expectations for student learning.

2. Instructional strategies shall:
   - personalize instruction;
   - make connections across disciplines;
   - engage students as active learners;
   - engage students as self-directed learners;
   - involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding;
   - provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge or skills;
   - promote student self-assessment and self-reflection.

3. Teachers shall use feedback from a variety of sources including other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents as a means of improving instruction.

4. Teachers shall be expert in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective about their own practices.

5. Discussion of instructional strategies shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.

6. Technology shall be integrated into and supportive of teaching and learning.

7. The school’s professional development program shall be guided by identified instructional needs and shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies.

8. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes shall be used to improve instruction for the purposes of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs.
CONCLUSIONS

Teachers utilize the mission and expectations for student learning in instruction so that they are achieved through many classes. For example, there is respect for self, others, and learning demonstrated through daily interactions and academic collaboration. Goals and challenges are set and met in the majority of the subject areas. English, world languages, and social studies students are required to communicate effectively through varying modes. Problem-solving and application of knowledge is evident in math and science classes. Courses and activities are also designed to encourage students to be socially and civically responsible, as seen through community service and the recycling club. Because the incorporation is pervasive and implicit rather than explicit, there is no assurance that students are actively understanding the meaning and value of the expectations even though they may demonstrate them in daily work and benefit from teacher use of the expectations as teaching principles. (self-study, student work, classroom observations, students, teachers, school leadership team)

Many of the teachers use a variety of instructional strategies that personalize, challenge, and engage students as active and self-directed learners. Instructional strategies include teacher-centered instruction, peer teaching, student presentations, demonstrations, laboratory activities, project-based assessments, and cooperative learning. In many classes, students are encouraged to personalize their learning by making choices that excite students about their academics. Students are often engaged in their classes, whether it be role-playing in social studies, using scooters to act out photosynthesis in science, or discussing Romeo and Juliet in English. In visual art, history, and English, students reflect on and assess their own work through corrections of papers and revisions of projects. Students, however, rarely have the opportunity to make connections across disciplines. Although specific interdisciplinary focus is lacking, students receive engaging, varied instruction in most classes. (self-study, student work, classroom observations, students, teachers, parents, school leadership team)

While there is an expectation that instructional strategies are based on the mission and expectations, large class size in many subjects inhibits high quality instruction. Out of 644 classes, 159 contain twenty-five students or more. While teachers work hard to overcome these difficulties in providing engaging instruction, all students would get more consistently personalized learning opportunities in smaller classes. (teachers, students, parents, school committee, school leadership teams)

Many teachers use formal and informal feedback from teachers, students, and supervisors as a means of improving instruction. However, most communication between teachers and parents focuses on individual student performance rather than instructional strategies. Some teachers utilize peer observation and collegial discussions to improve instruction, and the school provides substitute coverage for teachers to engage in peer observation. Most feedback is from formal evaluations by supervisors, which take place three times a year for pre-professional teachers and once every other year for teachers with professional status. While multiple sources of feedback are used, all teachers would benefit from more frequent formal observations and more formal time for reflection on practices and discussion with colleagues. (self-study, school committee, teachers, students, parents)

Teachers are knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and most are reflective about their own practices. The majority of students and parents reports that
teachers are experts in their content. Regional department heads (RDLs) circulate academic journals while other teachers engage in graduate course work on instructional practices through local and on-line universities with Teachers as Scholars, Primary Source, and the Educational Collaborative for Greater Boston, Inc. The district also offers a mentoring program for all new teachers that includes instructional approaches and reflective journaling as part of its curriculum. Since the new teacher meetings began in 2001, 64% of the faculty has attended. Some departments share best practices or meet after exams to analyze results and adjust their instructional approaches appropriately. The superintendent and school leadership team have made a commitment to improving instructional strategies. This results in high quality learning opportunities for all students. (self-study, parents, teachers, school leadership team)

The professional culture of learning is very high for the faculty. Many teachers participate in book group studies on specific topics within their discipline from which they create lesson plans. Teachers take graduate classes in both their discipline and pedagogy although there is limited money in the budget to cover the cost of those classes. Teachers share instructional strategies informally. The discussion is rich and results in instructional strategies that support student learning, but because of the informal nature of this work, discussion about practice of varied instructional strategies is not consistent nor inclusive of all faculty members. Thus, a formal, dedicated opportunity for the exchange among professional peers provided by the school would be valued and productive. (teachers, school leadership team, self-study)

Technology is used as a communication tool among teachers, students, and parents in support of teaching and learning. Many teachers communicate with students about assignments, providing extra help via e-mail and enrichment through web pages. Students and parents have access to end of term grades online. Some textbooks are online, and some teachers use online course management systems. Thus, the technology available to teachers has enhanced communication and supports learning. The integration of technology in classrooms is inconsistent, however. All rooms have LCD projectors, and all teachers have laptops. Four class sets of laptops are available for teachers to use. Some classes use computers for simulations and virtual learning, and some classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards. Although teachers have access to technology, they need increased opportunities to improve their skills to integrate technology more fully into their instruction. Because the available technology is not used to its full capacity, all students do not get the same benefits from the instruction they receive. Thus, a more technology-oriented climate for teaching, learning, and assessment would enhance the educational process. (self-study, classroom observations, students, teachers, facility tour)

While informal collaboration is a regular feature of the professional culture, there is a clear desire for more structured planning and professional development time to allow formal discussion around instruction. Professional development opportunities are often the result of the initiative of individual teachers or departments, and these are likely to focus on content rather than instruction and are rarely interdisciplinary. In response to this, funding is provided in the budget for substitutes to cover classes so teachers can observe their peers, and the district is working on defining high quality instruction and creating an instrument to evaluate it. All teachers would benefit from more formal time devoted to professional development that focuses on instructional strategies to offer teachers more varied methods to deliver their content. (department leaders, teachers, self-study)
The supervision and evaluation process for teachers is used to improve instruction, to enhance learning, and to meet students’ needs; however, the instrument used is outdated and time intensive. Teachers without professional status are observed three times a year and receive feedback from both the regional department leader (RDL) and the principal to use to improve their craft. Faculty members with professional status are observed once every two years by the RDL. The RDLs supervise all members of their departments. Their focus is directed at new teachers but, because of time constraints, veteran teachers receive limited feedback. Efforts are underway at the district level to develop a more effective evaluation system. Implementation of a plan for effective, research-based instructional strategies will prove valuable to teachers and administrators and must include regularity and relevant feedback. (teachers, school leadership team, central office administrators)

**COMMENDATIONS**

1. Informal incorporation of mission and expectations for student learning into classroom instruction
2. Varied instructional strategies used in many classrooms
3. Widespread informal discussion of instructional strategies as a means to improve teaching
4. Expertise of teaching staff
5. Faculty commitment to expand knowledge in their content area
6. Technology used to communicate among teachers, students, and parents
7. Widespread informal teacher dialogue as part of the professional culture
8. School encouragement of peer observation to support learning new instructional strategies

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Ensure that all instruction be consistent with the school’s mission statement and expectations for student learning
2. Increase personalization and active participation in all classes
3. Design and implement formal opportunities for interdisciplinary instruction
4. Provide class sizes that will allow teachers to ensure high quality instruction for all students
5. Provide time for teachers to learn and share instructional strategies
6. Provide professional development opportunities to integrate technology in support of teaching and learning
7. Implement the technology plan to ensure integration of technology into instruction
8. Develop and implement a viable supervision and evaluation system which promotes teacher reflection and instruction
Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Its purpose is to inform students regarding their learning progress and teachers regarding ways to adjust the curriculum and instruction to respond effectively to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates to the school community the progress of students in achieving the school’s expectations for student learning and course-specific learning goals. Assessment results must be continually discussed to improve curriculum and instruction.

1. The school shall have a process to assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations in the mission based on school-wide rubrics.

2. The school’s professional staff shall use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its civic and social expectations.

3. For each learning activity teachers shall clarify to students the relevant school-wide academic expectations and course-specific learning goals that will be assessed.

4. Teachers shall base classroom assessment of student learning on school-wide and course-specific rubrics.

5. Teachers shall use varied assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.

6. Teachers shall meet collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessments for the purposes of revising the curriculum and improving instructional strategies.

7. The school’s professional development program shall provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies.

8. The school’s professional staff shall communicate:
   - individual student progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to students and their families;
   - the school’s progress achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community.
CONCLUSIONS

The school is developing a process for assessing school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations of the mission statement based on school-wide rubrics. The school recently developed school-wide rubrics for student learning expectations, and will next use them to measure student success in achieving them. Student learning expectations are posted throughout the school, and will be used when designing assessments. Some faculty members reported evaluating their students’ learning based on implicit school-wide goals, while others have not yet done so. With systematic use of effective school-wide rubrics, teachers in all disciplines will track student progress on the complex learning goals embodied in the school’s learning expectations. (student work, meetings with teachers, students, teacher interviews)

The school is identifying indicators for assessing the accomplishment of its school-wide civic and social expectations. Data sources have been identified, but there is not yet a formal system to use the data to assess progress on achieving these expectations. The school has many extracurricular activities and community service projects that have ties to these expectations, and the program of studies lists courses with ties to social and civic expectations. In addition, civic and social expectations, particularly with regard to the new mission statement, are implicit in lesson design and instructional practice. When the expectations are articulated explicitly, students will have a clear indication of actions they must take to achieve these goals. (teachers, school leadership team, self-study)

Teachers provide course syllabi and unit outlines to students and make clear the course-specific learning goals on which students will be assessed. In addition, some teachers provide rubrics that use descriptors to clarify levels of quality for specific components of a particular product or performance. Some of these are individual teacher rubrics, some are course-specific, and some are departmental. Students have clear directions and information about how they will be graded on specific assignments, but there is not yet a system in place to ensure that students are made aware of how course activities relate to school-wide goals and how they are progressing toward meeting those goals. (classroom observations, students, teachers, student work)

Many teachers base classroom assessments of student learning on course-specific rubrics, but not on school-wide rubrics. As a result, teachers and students lose an opportunity to make interdisciplinary connections based on overarching school-wide principles, and the school does not have a data base of student achievement to report to students nor of information related to student assessment to use to inform school improvement of curriculum or instruction. (self-study, teachers, student work)

While there are no guidelines or expectations in place at the departmental or school level, some teachers use a variety of assessment strategies to determine students’ knowledge, skills, and competencies and to demonstrate growth over time. These assessments include portfolios of student writing and art work, skits, posters, Socratic seminars, student blogs, and project-based assessments. Some students undertake a senior project, choosing their own area of focus to further their own knowledge of a topic of interest through a variety of self-directed activities, such as interviewing an expert, conducting research, and presenting the results to an audience. In addition, many teachers use formative assessments to inform their instruction and provide
students the opportunity to assess their learning before they take high-stakes assessments. As a result, many students have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways, and students in some settings are offered a way to demonstrate their skills and understanding in a less stressful way than would be the case with only summative assessments. (student work, teachers, self-study)

Teachers meet collaboratively within departments to share student work and the results of student assessment to revise curriculum and instruction. Some departments concentrate on analysis of final exams while others focus on intermediate assessments. Regular time for collaboration is limited to department meetings and one or two building-based in-service days. Teachers may also apply for summer professional development time to collaborate on projects tying curriculum revision to assessment data. Teachers report little opportunity for interdepartmental collaboration, however. (self-study, teachers, department leaders)

The district provides a variety of professional development opportunities for teachers. These include: district-sponsored study and discussion groups, course reimbursement, conferences through the Education Collaborative for Greater Boston (EDCO), Teachers as Scholars, Primary Source, and school-wide professional development days. A release day in March of 2010 provided the faculty the opportunity to begin professional development on assessment. Many teachers understand the role of assessment in the design of instruction and use a variety of assessment strategies, but others use mostly traditional assessment strategies. As a result, not all students receive the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in nontraditional ways that may better suit varied learning styles and not all students receive timely feedback to help them determine their progress on learning goals. (self-study, teachers, student work)

The school provides information on student progress to students and their families in a variety of ways, including e-mail, telephone contact, counseling meetings, interim reports, and mail, but this information is not explicitly linked to school-wide learning expectations. Both parents and teachers can request a conference to deal with a student concern. Many teachers have websites that allow parents to monitor course work and homework expectations. The special education department mails home quarterly progress reports to students, and interpreters are available at meetings when parents speak a language other than English. The school informs parents and the community about student and school achievement on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), SAT, and Advanced Placement (AP) exams. In addition, mechanisms are in place to communicate and celebrate students’ success in a variety of arenas. The school does not have a process for measuring and communicating individual and school progress on achieving school-wide expectations. Thus, families and the public receive a wide range of information on student achievement, but they lack an explanation of the explicit connection between student achievement and school-wide learning expectations. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers)
COMMENDATIONS

1. Clear communication to students of assignment-specific expectations
2. Use of course-specific rubrics for classroom assessment
3. Teacher initiative in designing and using a variety of assessment strategies
4. Teacher willingness to collaborate informally for curriculum and assessment revision
5. School’s commitment to sharing information with the community on student achievement

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Design and implement a formal system to use school-wide rubrics to measure student progress toward achievement of academic expectations
2. Develop a formal system for using data to assess the success of the school in achieving its civic and social expectations
3. Design and implement a system of aligning course-specific rubrics with school-wide learning expectations and school-wide rubrics
4. Provide additional school-wide professional development in varied assessment practices including the use and interpretation of rubrics
5. Communicate individual student progress on achieving the school-wide academic expectations to students and families
6. Communicate the school’s progress in achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community
SUPPORT STANDARDS

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING
LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

The way in which a school organizes learning for students, fosters leadership, and engages its members has a profound effect on teaching and learning. The professional culture of the school must be characterized by thoughtful, reflective, and constructive discourse about decision-making and practices which supports student learning and well-being.

1. The school board and superintendent shall ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning.

2. The principal shall provide leadership in the school community by creating and maintaining a shared vision, direction, and focus for student learning.

3. Teachers as well as administrators other than the principal shall provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school.

4. The organization of the school and its educational programs shall promote the school’s mission and expectations for student learning.

5. Student grouping patterns shall reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school’s mission and expectations for student learning.

6. The schedule shall be driven by the school’s mission and expectations for student learning and shall support the effective implementation of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

7. Meaningful roles in the decision-making process shall be accorded to students, parents, and all members of the school staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.

8. Each teacher shall have a student load that enables the teacher to meet the learning needs of individual students.

9. There shall be a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor who personalizes each student’s educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning.

10. The professional staff shall collaborate within and across departments in support of learning for all students.

11. All school staff shall be involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.

12. Student success shall be regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed.

13. The climate of the school shall be safe, positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.

14. The school board shall support the implementation of the school’s mission and expectations for student learning.
CONCLUSIONS

The school committee and superintendent provide the principal with a high level of autonomy in decision-making and the authority to lead the high school. The school committee defers to the professional judgment of the principal in staffing and budget decisions. During the principal’s brief tenure, she has shown strong leadership in helping faculty and students develop a highly effective mission statement. Students and faculty members know and support the mission statement, and will next develop a system to have the learning expectations drive decision-making. (self-study, school committee, central office administrators)

Since her arrival in 2008, the principal has established several strong methods of communicating her vision to the school community. There is a ninth grade parents’ night as well as an ABRHS Back to School night. A weekly online newsletter is published, and regular contributions are made to the Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) newsletter. The principal has also used her leadership to enlarge the Transitions and Merriam Alternative Program (MAP) programs. The principal’s focus on student learning supports the large number of courses and levels offered. The principal does an effective job of communicating, and school community members are connected and informed. This allows the principal to lead the school and receive community support for her initiatives. (self-study, parents, panel presentation, teachers)

Teacher leadership is encouraged by the administration. Teachers choose textbooks, revise curriculum, and advise more than eighty student groups. Veteran teachers mentor new teachers and provide professional and personal support. A faculty advisory group meets regularly with the principal, and regional department leaders (RDLs) supervise and evaluate all professional status teachers. The assistant principals handle discipline, extra-curricular events, and act as liaisons with departments. The principal’s collaborative leadership style has created an environment where teacher leadership is valued. Teachers and administrators regularly exert influence and shape school policy and practice. (school leadership team, teachers, self-study, panel presentation)

School organization and educational programs address all student needs. In addition to advanced course offerings, alternative programs exist for non-traditional learners. The MAP, the school to work program (SWAP), and the occupational development program (ODP) are designed for both general education at-risk students and special education students. More than 60 support personnel function in support of students. The school and its educational programs effectively serve the school’s mission. These programs support student learning and promote equity by allowing students to access the curriculum in the way that best supports their learning style. (self-study, teachers, students)

The school offers four levels of instruction: honors/advanced placement; accelerated/enriched; college preparatory; and standard preparatory. The enrollment data within these levels reflects the diversity of the student body. The school’s grouping patterns reflect the learning expectation for pursuit of academic excellence, and elective course offerings are heterogeneously grouped. Students are able to access all course levels, moving to more challenging course levels by teacher recommendation, extra coursework in the summer, or applying for an override of teacher level recommendation. Considerable effort has been made to accommodate student learning needs. Through the extensive course offerings and levels, advanced, general and special education students are effectively served by the student grouping and organization. (students, teachers, self-study, classroom observations)
The schedule reflects the mission and learning expectations in its design and implementation. Students are scheduled for seven of eight periods and are required to have an entire period for lunch. This allows students time to maintain a balance in their social and academic lives as encouraged by the learning expectations. The school day is longer than in some surrounding districts so that students can take a challenging course load and still have free time during the day. The schedule supports students’ needs. While 84.4% of teachers reports that the schedule supports their professional efforts, only 25% agrees that there is opportunity to collaborate with other departments. The schedule has been in place for over fifteen years, demonstrating the school’s belief that it is an integral part of student success. (self-study, teachers, parents, Endicott Survey)

There are many meaningful opportunities for staff members, parents, and students to contribute to the decision-making. Students demonstrate ownership of the process through the student council and principal’s advisory group. The PTSO plays an active role in decision-making, and parent and student representatives serve on search and hiring committees. The school council also advises the principal on school policy and practices. RDLs oversee professional development and workshops. The school provides multiple vehicles for staff members to become involved in decision making and to take ownership and responsibility. Students, parents, and school staff members share in the responsibility of community building. The involvement of all three groups results in a feeling of ownership and pride in the school. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers, school leadership team)

Class sizes and number of classes taught by full-time faculty members show a high student to teacher ratio. Some teachers teach more than 125 students. The administration works with RDLs to establish and maintain class sizes that meet the needs of students, yet 36% of students feels that teachers do not have time to spend with them one-on-one. Particularly at the honors levels, time for personalized learning is limited. Efforts to keep standard preparatory (SP) and college preparatory (CP) class sizes around twenty students have resulted in the increase of the average honors class size to 27. Budgetary constraints have prevented optimal class sizes. The current student load does not allow teachers to personalize the learning of every student and hinders the variety of instructional and assessment strategies teachers are able to use. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team)

There is no formal advisory or mentoring program through which students connect with an adult in the building. While some students report feeling strongly connected to guidance counselors and individual teachers, a recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported that 20-25% of students do not feel connected to an adult in the building who can assist that student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning. Since some students cannot foster such relationships through classroom or extra-curricular interactions, they will not establish an adult connection without a formalized program. Until such a program is established, a portion of the student population will remain underserved. (self-study, school leadership, students)

The physical layout of the school has most teachers grouped by discipline. This allows for regular collaboration within a department. Yet it also means that there are limited opportunities for teachers of different subjects to engage in course development or to have discussions about student work. As reported in the survey, 51% of teachers agrees they have time to collaborate in their subject area, but only 25% agrees that this same opportunity exists across the curriculum. Interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers is limited. As a result, there are very few courses or course units that allow opportunities to collaborate across departments in support of student learning. (self-study, teachers, survey information)
All faculty and staff members at the high school are invested in the well-being and learning of all students. Guidance counselors and the counseling center are accessible at all times of the day, and three school psychologists meet regularly with students. The student assistance team (SAT) meets weekly to discuss students of concern, and faculty members chair the stress management committee focused on student well-being. Campus monitors ensure student safety, and school resource officers work with the regional schools to build relationships. School nurses promote the safety and wellness of students, and support student efforts to manage stress. The cafeteria workers provide healthy food, and the custodial staff maintains a clean and safe facility. The entire school community is invested in the well-being of the students. As a result, there are many resources for students to maintain a balance of learning and healthy living. (students, teachers, self-study)

Student successes are widely celebrated by the entire school community. Student academic and co-curricular achievement is an ongoing source of community pride, and the school is bedecked with awards and banners that proclaim student accomplishments. Student successes are lauded in the school publications and in daily announcements. Student work is prominently displayed in classrooms and in hallways. There are language awards at all levels, good sportsmanship “High Five” recognition, and an awards night. Student artwork is displayed around the building and in the local library. Formal acknowledgements include mention in the local newspaper of National Merit Scholars and the ABRHS Principal’s Recognition Awards awarded monthly to students. Recognition for student accomplishments fosters the success that is part of the school culture. Because students know they are important to the community, they strive to achieve. (students, teachers, panel presentation)

The mission states that students and adults need to work together to sustain a respectful and supportive environment. Though they acknowledge that it can be stressful, students thrive on the academic challenges and appreciate the accommodating nature of the teachers. Students believe that teachers are invested in their success and that their peers support their achievement. Student participation in making of policy and school governance promotes a climate of respect and ownership. Students are counted upon to be student ambassadors and to advocate for themselves and others. There are peer mentors and tutors, and student organizations such as Common Ground make sure that conversations around tolerance and respect are ongoing. School monitors and resource officers provide a physically safe space for students, and school staff members wear identification at all times. The school is clearly dedicated to providing emotional and physical safety to the students, and the mutual respect among students is evident. Students feel the school is a safe zone, whether marked by a sign or not. (self-study, students, facility tour)

The decisions and policies approved by the school committee support the implementation of the mission and expectations. The school committee and central office staff view learning beyond the high school as part of the greater school community. Activities support the development of social and emotional skills for all students and promote active citizenship. All stakeholders are involved in the decision-making processes such as the hiring of new faculty members, and they share a vision of creativity and excellence. The school community’s commitment to academic success and staffing levels was evident in the 2003 and 2005 budget overrides. There is transparency and frankness among the principal, the superintendent, and central office staff members. Administrators feel strongly supported by the school committee. This provides a productive working relationship between the committee and the school that supports a positive culture for implementing all teaching and learning goals. (central office personnel, administrators, school committee, school leadership team)
1. The autonomy provided to the principal by the school committee
2. The superintendent and school committee for the comprehensive support they provide
3. The principal’s frequent communication with the school community
4. The variety of media used by the principal to communicate
5. The principal’s support of programs for at-risk students
6. Decision-making shared by teachers and administrators other than the principal
7. Number of teachers who advise/coach co-curricular activities
8. The range of alternative programs offered
9. The faculty’s and principal’s support of alternative programs
10. The grouping patterns that support pursuit of academic excellence
11. Accommodation of various student learning needs
12. Balanced schedule that meets student needs
13. Course offerings that allow students to pursue a range of learning interests
14. Opportunities for meaningful input into decisions by faculty members, parents, and students
15. The school’s recognition of students’ need to manage stress
16. The safe and respectful environment maintained by school monitors
17. The welcoming decor and warm staff in the cafeteria
18. The cleanliness of the school as maintained by the custodial staff
19. The wide variety of methods that celebrate the achievement and successes of students
20. Students’ support of one another
21. Orderly, respectful atmosphere of the school that supports a rigorous academic environment
22. Trust and communication between the school committee and administration

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide resources to reduce student load and enable teachers to meet individual learning needs of students
2. Develop a formal adult-student advisory program
3. Develop and implement formal structures for interdisciplinary collaboration
Student learning and well-being are dependent upon adequate and appropriate support programs and services. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of integrated resources to enhance and improve student learning and well-being and to support the school's mission and expectations.

All Student Support Services

1. The school's student support services shall be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

2. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.

3. Student support personnel shall enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and by utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.

4. All student support services shall be regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning.

5. There shall be a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and identified student needs.

6. Student records, including health and immunization records, shall be maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law.

7. There shall be sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library media services.

Guidance Services

8. The school shall provide a full range of comprehensive guidance services, including:

- individual and group meetings with counseling personnel;
- personal, career, and college counseling;
- student course selection assistance;
- collaborative outreach to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers;
- appropriate support in the delivery of special education services for students.

Health Services

9. The school’s health services shall provide:

- preventive health services and direct intervention services;
- appropriate referrals;
- mandated services;
- emergency response mechanisms;
- ongoing student health assessments.
Library Information Services

10. The library/information services program and materials shall be fully integrated into the school’s curriculum and instructional program.

11. Library/Information services personnel shall be knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation.

12. A wide range of materials, technologies, and other library/information services that are responsive to the school’s student population shall be available to students and faculty and utilized to improve teaching and learning.

13. Students, faculty, and support staff shall have regular and frequent access to library/information services, facilities, and programs as an integral part of their educational experience before, during, and after the school day.

14. The library/information services program shall foster independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty to use various school and community information resources and technologies.

15. Policies shall be in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet.

Special Education Services

16. The school shall provide special education services related to the identification, monitoring, and referral of students in accordance with local, state, and federal laws.
CONCLUSIONS

The student support services are designed and implemented in concert with the school’s mission and expectations for student learning. The mission statement is used to create an inclusive and respectful community of learners where an extensive array of guidance and counseling, special education, health services, and library services are responsive to student needs. As a result, all students have access to comprehensive and effective services to support their learning. (self-study, teachers, students)

The school allocates resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school’s expectations for student learning. There are programs such as Merriam Alternative Program (MAP), the ABRHS School-to-Work Alternative Program (SWAP), the Transition program, and the academic support center (ASC) that serve both special education and regular education students. In addition, the special education department provides IEP-driven services in four learning centers and three specialized programs: the occupational development program (ODP), the supported career education program (SCEP), and the relational emotional and academic learning program (REAL). (self-study, school support staff, teachers)

The counseling department provides a variety of services for the entire student body. They provide small group counseling as well as individual counseling. This begins with a freshman transition program. The department has three career breakfasts and several informational nights held throughout the year. During sophomore year, students are introduced to the Naviance program. Additionally, the counselors work collaboratively with special education personnel, library staff members, and health services personnel to remain proactive in dealing with student issues. (department leaders, students, school leadership team)

The range of health services is comprehensive and extensive. Grant sources provide supplemental programs, including the establishment of a relaxation room for students. The library provides appropriate materials to support the curriculum. Students access the library with classroom teachers and independently before and after school and during their free periods. The wide range and quality of the school support services ensures that students receive the resources they need in order to obtain a balanced education. (self-study, teachers, students)

The special education department, counseling department, and health services staffs routinely make use of community resources, including collaborating with town social workers, local and regional mental health facilities, substance abuse counselors, and well-being programs. The special education department has a partnership with local businesses to participate in the SWAP work program. Within the school setting, there is a youth officer to provide information and collaborate with the administrators regarding legal matters with students and a part-time social worker focusing on drug and alcohol issues. The counseling department provides numerous opportunities for career exploration including job shadowing, school-to-work options, and three breakfast counseling career days. As a result, students have access to a broad range of resources to meet their academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. (school support staff, school leadership team, shadowing of students)
Student learning is enhanced by the strong relationships between the support staff and the professional staff. There are partnerships among the health services, counseling department, and special education department to support students with a variety of needs. Also, the library staff works cooperatively with many teachers to enrich and support classroom instruction. As a result, students receive a coordinated approach to address emotional, physical, academic, and social needs. (support staff, department leaders, teachers)

Student support services are regularly evaluated and revisions are made to support improved student learning and well-being. The district health services staff meets monthly to discuss current issues and evaluate policies and procedures. In addition to a coordinated program review, the special education department meets regularly and informally assesses overall compliance issues. Its members also look at a variety of data regarding the special education department and student progress. The counseling department meets weekly to evaluate current practice. This data regularly drives changes within the counseling department. The library staff meets monthly to assess collections and services in order to improve program effectiveness. The recently-formed Student Library Advisory Board (SLAB) meets regularly to collaborate with staff members on library policies and programming. Regular evaluation and revision of school support services results in improved student learning. (self-study, teachers, students, department leaders)

There are extensive structures in place for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school staff members designed to keep all stakeholders informed about the types of available student support services. The health office uses the school and district web-sites to communicate and update parents on current health issues, such as flu screenings. It also writes a “Health and Wellness” column each month in a counseling services’ newsletter for parents. The library web-site is updated regularly, as are library brochures, bulletin boards, and a faculty/staff newsletter. The special education department maintains communication with teachers, parents, and the school through email, phone communication, annual reviews, quarterly progress reports, current functioning reports, newsletters, the parent advisory council and special education night for college-bound students. Students and parents communicate with the counseling department through email and the phone system. Also, there is a monthly newsletter that is sent home. Naviance and PowerSchool are also used to communicate with families. Thus, the communication about the availability of services for students and all stakeholders is timely and effective. (parents, school support staff, students, self-study)

Student records, including health and immunization records, are maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law. Records of the special education department are treated respectfully and securely and are available to authorized staff members. Confidential special education files are stored in the pupil services office, and only authorized staff members have access. Special education teachers also maintain a locked file cabinet containing the most current IEP, current testing, quarterly progress reports, and school/parent communication for students on their caseload. Health services use a program called School Nurses Assistance Program (SNAP) that allows the department to log information, track students, and set medical alerts for specific students. Only the nurses have access to this program. In the counseling department, records are maintained in a confidential and secure manner. Library circulation records for all patrons are private and confidential. Student confidential information is secure. (teachers, school support staff, self-study)
Currently, there are not sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective special education, counseling, and library media services. There is not a sufficient number of special education staff members in the four learning centers to meet the needs of students. Teachers within learning centers have caseloads of 40-50 students. These teachers are responsible for writing IEPs, generating quarterly progress reports, chairing annual review meetings, performing academic testing for three-year re-evaluations, and supporting students during class periods. A building department leader (BDL) position has been developed to help alleviate required evaluation testing responsibilities, but teachers do not have time for formal tracking of daily progress, nor are there many opportunities for common planning/meeting time among regular education and special education staff members. As a result, the time devoted to ensuring and monitoring delivery of daily IEP services for students has been diminished. (school support staff, school leadership team, self-study, teachers, central office administrators)

The special education assistants provide support in the learning centers, specialized programs, and the regular education classroom. While there are nineteen full-time special education assistants, the ability to collaborate with teachers in regular classrooms could be enhanced to better meet the needs of students. In addition, special education assistants could benefit from professional development that allows them to collaborate more with regular educators in the classroom. Thus, there is a need for training special education assistants on how to incorporate best practice while implementing appropriate accommodations and modifications to better meet the needs of students. Providing professional development on the most effective way for special education assistants to be utilized in the classroom and in collaboration with the regular education staff would improve inclusive instruction for students on IEPs. While students may be served in learning centers, the learning and instruction for students is not as cohesive as is needed for this type of learner. (teachers, department leaders, classroom observations)

Current staffing caseloads in the counseling department are 1:230. Taking into consideration the broad range of services that counselors provide, this level of staffing creates challenges in providing a personalized program of comprehensive guidance and counseling services. (teachers, parents, department leaders, central office administrators, school leadership team)

The library is staffed with one professional and two and one half paraprofessionals. The recent reduction in library staffing inhibits the ability of the librarian to collaborate with teachers and offer students one-on-one and small-group instruction. (teacher interviews, teachers, school support staff, self-study)

The school provides a full range of student services that includes a comprehensive guidance curriculum. Every student is assigned a counselor in grade nine, and that student remains with the counselor for the remainder of the student’s high school career. This provides continuity and allows students to feel comfortable with their individual counselor. Students are seen regularly in groups and individual sessions. The counselors assist with course selection and consult with families and faculty members to resolve student issues. They provide support with delivery of special education services and consult with outside agencies as needed. Counselors assist students with post-college planning using Naviance as a tool for guidance and meet regularly with students throughout the college application process. Students are encouraged to complete a job shadowing program, attend the three career breakfasts, and attend all small group sessions as well as the many evening informational sessions provided by the counselors.
Students are encouraged to take the Senior Seminar and complete a senior project. With the wide range of services provided by the counseling department, students feel comfortable that issues of academics and well-being are addressed. (teachers, students, department leaders)

The counseling department provides support for students in special education and in the academic support center by training peer mentors and peer leaders. In addition, peer mentors volunteer within the community, other schools, and regular classrooms, providing additional individualized attention and support for student learning. (classroom observations, students, department leaders)

**Health Services**

Health services provide a full range of high quality services which include preventive health and interventions, appropriate referrals, mandated services, emergency response mechanisms, as well as ongoing student health assessments. In addition, school nurses provide direct services to students on a daily basis, including administering medications and conducting ongoing health appraisals. The school nurses also manage a newly-designed relaxation room. Generally, health services staff members regularly collaborate and work closely with counseling staff, including participation in the student assistance team (SAT) referral process, and special education personnel to assist with any health-related issues or accommodations under a 504 plan or IEP. However, there is an expressed need for improved communication between health services and counseling regarding those students re-entering school after long-term illnesses and hospitalizations and between health services and the athletic department concerning sports-related injuries both on and off the field. As a result, although systems are in place to respond to and proactively address most student health needs, communication between counseling, health services, and athletics needs to improve. (self-study, teachers, support staff)

**Library Information Services**

The library services program, though active, is not fully integrated into the school’s curriculum and instructional programs. Thirty percent of students feels the library is not used often during their classes. Less than half of the faculty collaborates with the library staff on student learning. English and social studies teachers collaborate frequently with library staff members, but library use by other departments is limited. Some teachers and students are not using the library to its full potential. (teachers, self-study, students)

Library staff members are knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation in a variety of ways. The librarian is a member of the student handbook committee and co-chairs the academic integrity committee. Further, the librarian serves on the newly-formed district teaching and learning committee, but she does not participate in RDL meetings when curriculum is discussed resulting in gaps regarding the library staff’s ability to respond to changing curriculum needs. (survey information, teacher interviews, meetings with teachers)

A wide variety of print and non-print materials, technologies, and other library/information resources is available. These include hard copy and online periodicals, several online subscription databases and reference resources, and multiple hard copies of all content-area textbooks. Recently, the library staff has worked to expand the collections to include materials
for English language learners, for students in the occupational development program, and for gay and lesbian students, as well as students in various alternative education programs.

Students can search for print and non-print materials using Destiny, a web-based card catalog. There are numerous desktop and laptop computers for student and staff use as well as an adjacent computer lab. This results in in-house collections that are both responsive and available to the school’s student population and staff in order to improve student learning. (survey information, teachers, teacher interviews)

The library, a large and inviting space with updated furnishings and collections, is accessible to the school community before, during, and after school. Open from 7:00 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. Monday through Friday, the library averages 650 student visits and five whole-class visits per day. Students freely access the facility and services during their free periods as well as during their directed studies. However, managing high student demand for access during the lunch periods is an issue. Because the library is welcoming and very accessible, it is utilized at a high level by students throughout the day. (teachers, students, self-study, panel presentation)

Currently, the library program does not foster a culture of independent inquiry for all students. According to an information-literacy skills assessment, 48% of the school’s students struggle to select a topic, direct their own research, and choose authoritative resources. There is no intentional, integrated information skills curriculum, nor is there a systematic way to ensure that all students are oriented to the collections, services, and programs the library has to offer. Consequently, not all students are acquiring information literacy or independent inquiry skills. (self-study, teachers, survey information)

The library has policies in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet. Written selection and reconsideration policies are available online through the district’s website. The acceptable use of school technology is clearly defined in the student handbook and is also outlined on the library’s website as well. Consequently, over 81% of students is aware of the school’s policies regarding Internet use during school. (self-study, teachers, teacher interviews)

**Special Education**

The school provides special education services to students in accordance with local, state, and federal laws. Prior to being referred for eligibility determination of special education services, students are first referred to the Student Assistance Team (SAT) by a parent, teacher, school counselor, student, or administrator. The SAT, comprised of classroom teachers, the school counselor, a school psychologist, an administrator, a special educator, and a nurse, discuss appropriate pre-referral strategies. If warranted, a special education evaluation may be pursued and determination of eligibility is completed through the formal initial evaluation process as mandated by state and federal regulations. If a student qualifies for special education services, an IEP is written and a student is placed in a learning center or a specialized program. The learning centers are led by a special education teacher and two special education assistants. These assistants also go into some regular education classes to support those students as required in their IEPs. The three specialized programs, occupational development program (ODP), supported career education (SCE), and the relational emotional and academic learning program (REAL) target students with specific needs. These programs are taught by special education teachers and staffed by assistants. Services in speech/language are provided and are
sometimes taught in conjunction with the school psychologist. Instruction in social skills is provided. Consequently, the programs available provide a wide range of services that allow for flexibility and personalization to meet the needs of students displaying a variety of disabilities. (self-study, school support staff, teachers)

COMMENDATIONS

1. The mission as the driving force in the development and delivery of student support services
2. The academic support center which provides teacher and mentor support throughout the school day
3. Ambassador program that supports freshman transition day
4. The freshman transition program
5. The relaxation room which is designed to reduce stress in students
6. The extensive partnerships with community resources
7. Student library advisory board
8. The amount and quality of information disseminated to parents, families, and students about school support services
9. Systems to ensure student record confidentiality
10. The relationships that develop between students and counselors over four years
11. The counseling efforts in the extensive college planning process
12. The broad scope of counseling programs
13. The high quality health services
14. Regularly updated library collections
15. Availability of all current textbooks for student use in the library/media center
16. Extensive student use of the library
17. The accessibility of library policies and procedures both online and in hard copy
18. Focus of the special education staff on meeting individual student needs
19. Individualized, personalized, flexible programming for students
20. The learning centers staff that delivers specific supports to students
21. The effective occupational development program and supported career education programs that focus on individual special education student needs
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reduce the high professional staff caseload for counselors
2. Provide professional development for special education assistants and classroom teachers to collaborate on the design and delivery of classroom instruction and assessment
3. Increase the staffing in counseling to ensure delivery of the wide range of programs
4. Increase staffing in the library
5. Improve communication concerning students’ well-being between health services and counseling services
6. Improve communication concerning students’ well-being between health services and athletics
7. Integrate the library’s collections, programs, and services as a resource for faculty and their classes
8. Increase library staff participation in regional department leader meetings when discussing curriculum that affects library purchases
9. Develop and implement an integrated library information skills curriculum for all disciplines and grade levels
COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEADING

Active community and parent participation, facilities which support school programs and services, and dependable and adequate funding are necessary for the school to achieve its mission and expectations for student learning.

1. The school shall engage parents and families as partners in each student’s education and shall encourage their participation in school programs and parent support groups.

2. The school shall foster productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning.

3. The school site and plant shall support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning.

4. The physical plant and facilities shall meet all applicable federal and state laws and shall be in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.

5. Equipment shall be adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate.

6. A planned and adequately funded program of building and site management shall ensure the appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school plant.

7. There shall be ongoing planning to address future programs, enrollment changes, staffing, facility, and technology needs as well as capital improvements.

8. The community and the district’s governing body shall ensure an adequate and dependable source of revenue to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, personnel, services, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning.

9. Faculty and building administrators shall have active involvement in the budgetary process, including its development and implementation.
CONCLUSIONS

The school actively engages parents and families as partners in each student’s education and encourages their participation through a variety of school programs and parent support groups. There are numerous programs and support groups active in the high school community. Many programs facilitate collaboration among home, school and community. Examples include parent teacher student organization (PTSO), the special education parent advisory council (SEPAC), school council, a principal-led parent book group, and a monthly newsletter. The school website is an essential and highly effective vehicle for communicating about school events, workshops, and youth advocacy. As a result of these focused efforts, strong partnerships thrive among the school, parents, and the community. (self-study, teachers, panel discussion)

The school fosters productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning. The part-time school-business liaison facilitates partnerships that represent a diverse group of business leaders. The Worker’s Credit Union bank branch is located in the school to provide students with work and business foundations. Several special education and alternative programs offer job training such as the school-to-work alternative program (SWAP), the occupational development program (ODP), and the supported career education program (SCEP). In addition, students volunteer at a wide variety of community sites, including the Acton Community Pre-school, local hospitals, libraries, museums, and nursing homes. Representatives from the various colleges and universities work with the students at the college fair. The counseling department organizes a yearly visit to Middlesex Community College to introduce students to college life. Through job shadowing, internships, career speakers, and the work study program, students make connections with local businesses and organizations. Student educational experience is directly linked to authentic learning and real-life applications. (self-study, students, teachers)

The school’s physical plant enhances all aspects of educational programs and support services. As the result of a major renovation in 2005, numerous student areas promote the school’s student-centered focus. The state-of-the-art science labs, the art and fine arts departments, the library/media center, computer labs, radio station, community access studio, counseling center, and fitness center provide a positive learning environment for the school and the community. As a result of increasing enrollment, the physical plant is at capacity, and is now beginning to hinder the delivery of educational and support service needs. Technologically, the building is well equipped, and an educational technology plan is in place for 2010-2013. All teachers have personal computers or laptops; all classrooms have ceiling-mounted LCD projectors; and some classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards. Spacious, bright classrooms and clean facilities create an inviting learning environment. The physical plant and its campus renovations are a source of pride for the administration, the faculty, the student body, and the community. (panel discussion, teachers, facility tour)

The physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations. The facilities director and school administrators inspect the building daily and expeditiously address any concerns. The building is fully handicapped accessible, equipped with two elevators that access all floors, and boasts a stair-slide in the middle of the second floor hallway for wheelchair-bound individuals. The bathrooms are located on each level with appropriate accessibility. Administrators, hallway monitors, and key staff members are equipped with mobile phones for emergency situations. Additionally, school resource officers work to maintain a safe environment for the entire school community. The school facility provides a safe and comfortable environment for learning. (self-study, facility tour, classroom observations)
As part of the extensive renovation, the school has satisfactorily updated technology and the equipment in the fitness facilities, library, and media centers. The director of facilities and the educational technology director oversee, supervise, and coordinate most of the equipment within the school. An HVAC technician, master electrician, and master plumber handle specific maintenance concerns. Custodians maintain a clean facility and handle light maintenance while some services are contracted out. Work request forms are available and easily accessible, and needed repairs are completed in a timely manner. The technology resources center is responsible for the maintenance, replacement, and support of computer hardware and software. The educational technology director keeps multiple databases for the inventory and maintains records of all hardware and software in the school district. The principal is responsible for the acquisition of furniture and non-specialized equipment, but no formal inventory system is used for items under $5,000 in value. Regional department leaders (RDLs) oversee department-specific equipment which is maintained and replaced when needed. An audio-visual technician maintains multimedia systems throughout the building. The school community demonstrates a strong commitment to the students by providing a well-equipped, well-maintained, safe, and comfortable learning environment. (teachers, classroom observations, facility tour)

The school has a planned and adequately funded program of building and site management that ensures appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school plant. Students, staff members, and parents agree that the school is cleaned and well maintained. Ten full-time and two part-time custodians provide 5 day/24 hour custodial coverage plus additional coverage for special events. A thorough cleaning is completed every summer, including floor resurfacing and any other work that is needed. Other maintenance contracts cover roofing, elevators, and fire safety and suppression systems. Long-term maintenance contracts are in place for athletic fields including turf, sod, and irrigation. The custodial staff and entire school community demonstrate a strong commitment to funding the maintenance for the physical plant. (self-study, facility tour, panel discussion)

The school community sufficiently addresses future programs, enrollment changes, staffing, facility needs, and capital improvements. School personnel utilize the PowerSchool and Naviance programs for record keeping, attendance, grades, scheduling, and most local and state data-driven reports. At the community level, the Acton Leadership Group (ALG) and the Boxborough Leadership Group create three-year projections for school enrollment, school budget, and potential capital projects. Given the relatively recent building renovation, there is currently no formal long-range capital improvement plan; however, there is one in the process of being written. Also, the technology plan needs to be updated and implemented. Planning is underway to address funding the staffing issues, higher student enrollment, overcrowded classrooms, and the updating of curriculum materials. The school community is highly invested in its future programs and is fully aware of the need to continue planning for ongoing facility maintenance and enhancement. (self-study, panel discussion, teachers)

The community and the school committee adequately ensure dependable funding to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, staffing, services, facilities, equipment, technology support, and instructional materials. The budget is data-driven, using the student enrollment as the basis for future planning. Most budgeting decisions are student-centered and supportive of staff needs. Communication between the principal, the superintendent, and the school committee is both open and constructive. Three successful override votes in the past ten years show the strong relationship between the town and the school district. In addition, approximately 70% of the town budget is allocated to schools. Also, the town used two million dollars from the undesignated fund balance so the reduction of teachers positions would not be necessary in a recent budget. One of the greatest challenges for the school is to maintain
appropriate and effective class size. The school community understands this concern, and it is a focus of the budget conversation. There is a level of trust and respect among school committee members, superintendent, and building administrators regarding the allocation of financial resources for the school. (self-study, panel discussion, teachers)

Faculty and building administrators are actively involved in the budgetary process, including its development and implementation. Teachers, RDLs, and the principal begin the bottom-up budget process with a focus on available resources. RDLs share their faculty’s needs with the school administrators. Administrators and faculty members collect and analyze data such as test scores, class sizes, and the number of students identified as requiring accommodations in order to allocate resources effectively for various programs. The sense of trust and transparency among the RDLs, the high school principal, superintendent, the school committee, and Acton Education Association to determine realistic financial resources is evidence of a strong commitment to the budgetary process from all key stakeholders. (self-study, school committee, central office administrators, panel discussion)

COMMENDATIONS

1. Deep culture of partnership among school, students, and community
2. Extensive parent and community support for school programs
3. Effective partnerships for community organizations
4. Effective use of existing technology for communication
5. Collaboration of community organizations and school groups to help support students in need
6. School business partnership committees
7. The career breakfast program that brings professionals from the community to the school
8. Student involvement with Danny’s Place Youth Services
9. Health suite equipped with a stress relief center
10. Full-time monitors for hallways and monitoring parking
11. Clearly delineated cleaning and maintenance schedules
12. Clearly accessible work forms for maintenance/repair requests
13. Extensive parent and community support for site management
14. Clean and well-maintained building
15. Collaboration between community organizations and the school groups to provide appropriate resources
16. Effective communication between community and school district to meet budgetary needs
17. Undesignated fund allocation to eliminate the need to reduce teaching positions
18. Trust and transparency among all stakeholders as they develop the annual budget

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement and revise the educational technology plan
2. Develop and implement a long-range capital improvement plan
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 in Acton-Boxborough 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 Commission requires that the evaluation report be made public in accordance with the Commission's Policy on Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report.

A school's initial/continued accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing valid recommendations of the visiting committee and others identified by the Commission as it monitors the school's progress and changes which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle. To monitor the school's progress in the Follow-Up Program, the Commission requires that the principal of Acton-Boxborough School submit routine Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports documenting the current status of all evaluation report recommendations, with particular detail provided for any recommendation which may have been rejected or those items on which no action has been taken. In addition, responses must be detailed on all recommendations highlighted by the Commission in its notification letters to the school. School officials are expected to have completed or be in the final stages of completion of all valid visiting committee recommendations by the time the Five-Year Progress Report is submitted. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards are not being met in a satisfactory 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 Commission has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty days (60) of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for 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 CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix on page 53. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report which is required of each member school to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

The Commission urges school officials to establish a formal follow-up program at once to review and implement all findings of the self-study and valid recommendations identified in the evaluation report. An outline of the Follow-Up Program is available in the Commission's Accreditation Handbook which was given to the school at the onset of the self-study. Additional direction regarding suggested procedures and reporting requirements is provided at Follow-Up Seminars offered by Commission staff following the on-site visit.

The visiting committee would like to thank the steering committee, the faculty, staff, administration, parents, and students in Acton-Boxborough Regional High School for their hospitality during the four-day visit. The organization by the steering committee allowed the visiting committee to focus on the school, its many successes, and the ways in which it can improve. The visiting committee also appreciated the many personal touches provided throughout the visit.
NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
OCTOBER 3-6, 2010

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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change in the school which has a negative impact on the school’s ability to meet any of the Commission’s Standards for Accreditation. The report of a substantive change must describe the change itself as well as detail the impact of the change on the quality of education in the school. The following are potential areas where there might be negative substantive changes:

◆ available programs, including fine arts, practical arts, and student activities
◆ available facilities, including upkeep and maintenance
◆ level of funding
◆ school day and/or school year
◆ administrative structure, including the number of administrators and supervisors
◆ number of teachers and/or guidance counselors
◆ number of support staff
◆ student services
◆ the use of distance educational programs or courses
◆ educational media services and personnel
◆ student enrollment
◆ grades served by the school
◆ the student population that causes program or staffing modification(s), e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency.