

New England Association of School and Colleges, Inc.

Commission on Public Schools



Commission on Public Schools

Report of the Visiting Team for Westford Academy

Westford, MA

March 21, 2021 - March 24, 2021

**Carl Johnson, Chair
, Assistant Chair
James Antonelli, Principal**

School and Community Summary

School and Community Summary

Westford Academy was founded as a private school in 1792, *"for the purpose of instructing the youth of both sexes in useful science and literature and in the principles of morality."* In 1912, the Westford School Committee took administrative control of the Academy. The town purchased the grounds and the school building for \$3,000 in 1928. Westford Public Schools

kept the name "Westford Academy" so that graduates would continue to be eligible to receive scholarships from trust funds established by the Westford Academy Trustees. Surrounded by open and wooded land and bordering residential areas, the current building opened in 1973 and underwent a major renovation between 1998 and 2000, with the new facility opening for the 2000-01 school year. Westford is located 35 miles northwest of Boston, and Westford Academy serves as the four-year public high school for the town of Westford, Massachusetts.

Since 1980, the population of Westford has increased significantly. The current high school population of 1,653 students is expected to increase over the next several years and reflects an increase of roughly 75 students since the writing of the last School and Community Profile, prepared in 2009. Westford is one of the fastest-growing communities in Massachusetts, in part because of its proximity to major highways and cities and the quality of education that students receive through the Westford Public Schools. According to the 2010 Census, the total population of Westford was 21,951. According to the most recent demographic data released in December 2017, the population of Westford is approximately 23,850 people. This increase in the population represents an 8.7 percent population change and is the highest population change in the area during that time.

The district population is 4828 students as of January 6, 2021. The Robinson, Nabnasset, and Miller Schools are organized pre-K through grade 2; the Day, Abbot, and Crisafulli Schools include grades 3-5. Blanchard and Stony Brook Middle Schools house grades 6-8, and Westford Academy serves students in grades 9-12. Fifty-five Westford students attend Nashoba Valley Vocational and Technical High School, and one student attends Minuteman Technical High School. Eighteen students attend Middlesex Community College full time as Dual Enrollment students. In 2018, 20 students utilized school choice (tuition), and in 2019, 22 students will use school choice to attend Westford Academy from surrounding communities. Current grade enrollments in grades 9 through 12 range from 441 in last year's senior class to 388 in the current freshman class.

Student daily attendance averaged approximately 96.4 percent during the 2019-2020 school year, while the state saw slightly lower daily attendance numbers, 94.7 percent. The drop-out percentage rate from the 2017-2018 school year was 0.1 percent (1 student), and the 2018-2019 school year was 0.2 percent (4 students). The four-year graduation rate for students in the 2019 cohort showed that 99.3 percent of students graduated.

A growing number of major businesses, small industries, and retail operations are located in Westford. According to the 2000 Census, the occupations of Westford residents can be broken down to include: management, professional, and related occupations: 60.4 percent; service occupations: 7.7 percent; sales and occupations: 20.1 percent; farming, fishing, and forestry occupations: 0.1 percent; construction and maintenance occupations: 5.2 percent; production, transportation, and material moving occupations: 6.6 percent. Also, according to the latest 2017 Community Survey data, the educational background of Westford residents (25 years of age or older) reflects the following breakdown: less than high school: 2 percent; high school diploma, including equivalency: 12 percent; some college, no degree: 12 percent; associate's degree: 6 percent; bachelor's degree: 34 percent; masters, professional degree or doctorate: 34 percent.

During the 2016-2017 school year, Westford Academy began implementing the One-to-World program. The goal of this program was to create a 1:1 computer to student ratio. This program was designed to give students increased access to the world of knowledge and to create new, engaging opportunities for students to learn. As of the 2018-2019 school year, all students have a Chromebook. Digital Learning Specialists provide professional development for teachers and in-class assistance in utilizing these devices to maximize learning. In the 2017-

2018 school year, Westford Academy utilized 141 FTEs (full-time equivalent positions) broken down as follows: administrative: 6; instructional: 119.1; office/clerical/administrative support: 6; instructional support/shared SPED support: 10. The average annual salary in the Westford School District in 2016 was \$78,942; a new contract was negotiated in 2017-2018, which will increase the average salaries of teachers.

Approximately 50 percent of students earn honors or high honors status each quarter. Student success (academic, athletic, co-curricular) is recognized through a variety of mediums, including but not limited to National Honor Society induction, Senior Awards Night, Underclassmen Awards Night, Renaissance Program (Caught You Being Good Awards), Athletic Awards Dinners, Most Worthy Representative, WA Trustee Excellence awards, the Student-of-the-Month Program, Principal's Friday Emails, and the Principal's Quarterly Newsletter. Students have 68 clubs and organizations from which to choose extracurricular involvement. Student voice is heard through the Dean's Council, Student Council, Student Handbook Committee, School Improvement Council, class officer meetings, and individual meetings between students and administrators and/or guidance counselors, to name a few.

The ethnic and cultural composition at Westford Academy somewhat reflects that of the adult population in Westford. According to 2017-2018 Enrollment Data found in the School and District Profiles, Westford Academy's student population consists of White: 72.7 percent; African-American: 0.8 percent; Asian: 21.3 percent; Hispanic: 1.5 percent; Native American: 0.0 percent; Multi-Racial, Non-Hispanic: 3.7 percent. The percentage of male to female students is approximately 51:49, respectively. In recent years, Westford Academy has made a concerted effort to infuse diversity into the curriculum and school life and to broaden opportunities for all students to learn and appreciate the differences among them. One example of this focus was "Diversity Day." Diversity Day was created in collaboration with a group of students from a human rights club, building administration, teachers, and guidance counselors. This day featured an important panel discussion with speakers representing several ethnic and religious groups within the community, presentations on a variety of topics, and guest speakers. Also featured was the documentary, *Floating on Lotus Flowers: A Journal of Cambodia* by Wathana Eang. This documentary was created by a Westford Academy teacher and tells the story of his life as a Khmer Rouge survivor. Westford has had several professional development sessions (PD) centering on the theme of diversity and understanding. One PD was specifically connected to celebrating diversity and being more inclusive of students. One specific student group that was highlighted during the professional development was transgender students. PD has given the faculty and staff a better ability to guide students in their understanding of the world around them. Westford Academy has also partnered with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to incorporate the "A World of Difference" (AWOD) program. Students have been trained by the ADL to become peer leaders and have presented to homerooms about the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Some students have also attended the ADL's No Place for Hate Youth Summit, where they've participated in discussions and exercises with other students throughout New England. The WPS district is committed to continuing to train its staff and making systemic changes relating to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the future.

The average score for Westford Academy students taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) has consistently been above the state and national averages. The average SAT score recorded in the 2019-2020 SAT performance report in the DESE School and District Profile was: Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW), 622; Mathematics, 641; compared to the state average for EBRW, 555; and Mathematics, 557. In the 2019-2020 school year, 474 students took 950 Advanced Placement exams. According to the 2019 AP School Summary, 97 percent of test-takers earned a score of 3 or above.

Westford Academy prides itself on a comprehensive college counseling program offered by eight guidance counselors, one who also serves as the grade 6-12 guidance coordinator. The Plans of Graduates (2019-2020) in the Westford Academy School and District Profile indicates that 95 percent of students planned to move on to a four-year college, 2.6 percent planned on continuing their education at a two-year institution, 1 percent plan to seek employment opportunities, 1 percent will enter the military and 0.4 percent plan an apprenticeship or gap year. In addition, two full-time school adjustment counselors provide counseling services and consultation for students in need of Tier 2 and Tier 3 counseling support.

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores for Westford Academy students continue to be above the state averages for English, mathematics, and science. MCAS data that was last updated by DESE on October 18, 2017, shows 99 percent of grade 10 students scored in the advanced or

proficient categories in English/language arts (state average was 91 percent) while 97 percent scored in the advanced/proficient range for mathematics (state average was 79 percent) and 97 percent scored in the advanced/proficient range for Science Tech/Eng (state average was 74 percent). Westford Academy was identified as a Commonwealth Compass School in 2007. This award is given to schools in Massachusetts that have demonstrated continuous improvement. In addition, Westford Academy was recognized as a National Blue Ribbon school in 2008.

The philosophy of Westford Academy is that educating children is a cooperative effort between home and school. Parents are an integral component of this partnership and are active in the life of the school through a variety of means, including the Westford Academy School Improvement Council, the Challenge Success team, Back-to-School Night, Curriculum Night, athletics boosters, Friends of Westford Academy Theatre Arts, FAME (Friends Advancing Music Education), volunteering for various activities, and through their consistent attendance at a variety of school activities and performances. In addition to the above-mentioned formal mechanisms, parents are regularly kept informed of school events through the principal's Friday emails, quarterly newsletters, regular communication from teachers via email and telephone, arranged appointments with individual teachers, the Guidance blog, SCOIR emails, REMIND texts, and the *ConnectEd* telephone system which is used in times when a mass-delivery of information is needed.

Westford Academy is fortunate to have a Board of Trustees which oversees the majority of scholarship funds and provides a sum of \$20,000 for other school projects. The class of 2017 received over \$80,000 in scholarships awarded by the Trustees. The Westford Education Foundation awards mini-grants twice each school year to teachers and school personnel for innovative programs. Trustees have donated \$100,000 to the track renovation project. Another group that donated a significant amount of money was the Community Preservation Commission who donated \$700,000 to the renovation

Westford Academy strives to personalize each student's educational opportunities. In addition to the wide range of courses offered through the Program of Studies (including 18 AP courses), students also have access to VHS (Virtual High School), independent studies with teachers, and course offerings at regional colleges and universities, including the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, Fitchburg State College, Merrimack College, and Middlesex Community College. Eighteen Westford Academy students are enrolled full-time in the Dual Enrollment program with either UMass-Lowell or Middlesex Community College. Westford Academy has expanded the senior Capstone program, allowing students to explore career possibilities before their graduation from high school. The Senior Capstone Program is accessed by over 95 percent of graduating seniors and gives valuable experience in their desired fields.

The Alternative Education program at WA is designed to customize educational programs in major subject areas for students who need closer attention in a more structured yet relaxed learning atmosphere. The Bridge program, developed in 2014 and modeled after the BRYT (Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition) program, supports students returning from hospitalization for any reason. An intake session is held with relevant parties prior to the student's return to school, and an individualized plan is developed to ease their transition back into their classes. In addition, in 2019-2020, a classroom was created for at-risk students with significant social-emotional needs. This classroom is supported by a special education teacher as well as a dedicated (newly hired) full-time school adjustment counselor.

The average household income in Westford, according to the 2017 census bureau, was \$130,739. The number of families living below the poverty level accounts for approximately 2.1 percent of the population. In the 2017 American Community Survey, the average cost of an existing home in Westford was \$468,500. Significant residential growth (including affordable housing projects) has contributed to the town's tax base. However, the cost of services has outpaced this increase in tax revenue. Excluding Nashoba Tech, excluding Capital, and including Fringe Benefits such as health insurance and retirement contributions, the percentage of the Town's Operating budget that is allocated to Westford Public Schools is 63.1 percent. If Nashoba Tech is included, the percentage used for education is 63.9 percent. In addition, another \$2,500,000 will be used from fee-based activities to support the School Department. Local taxation is not allocated specifically to any department in the Town. The percentage of the Town's revenue that comes from property taxes and other local sources is 80.3 percent.

For the fiscal year 2016, the in-district expenditure per pupil was \$12,783.01 compared to the state average of \$15,023.88. Citizens support the schools, and budgets have historically been approved with few problems, although tighter budgets are making for more difficult administrative decisions. A major challenge in the next few years may be maintaining sufficient financial resources to support the increasing population at all grade levels in Westford. The percentage of the Town's revenues that comes from state aid is 19.7 percent. The latest average teacher salary published by DESE is for FY17. The FY17 average was \$80,072. The current average will be higher due to the fact that the FY18-FY20 Teachers' contract was settled with higher wage brackets.

In summary, Westford Academy is a school rich in tradition and culture. All faculty and staff take a great deal of pride in the accomplishments of the students, as well as the level and scope of services that continue to be offered despite the continuous growth of the school population. Westford Academy has emphasized understanding and embracing the diversity of its school population and has made resources available through professional development and student-led organizations. Westford Academy has managed to maintain the feel of a small school environment despite this rapid growth.

Core Values, Beliefs, and Vision of the Graduate

A Westford Academy graduate demonstrates readiness to succeed in life by persevering, using emotional intelligence, problem solving, communicating and contributing.

Perseverance	Emotional Intelligence	Problem Solving	Communicating	Contributing
I will persevere and be resilient when met with a challenge and grow as a life-long learner.	I will regularly use emotional intelligence with success across all life domains.	I will problem solve and think critically to develop creative and innovative solutions.	I will communicate knowledge effectively through a variety of methods.	I will contribute productively to the school, town and global community.

Core Values: Respect, Responsibility, Personal Excellence, and Kindness

Skill	Definition	Performance Outcomes
-------	------------	----------------------

Contributing	Give in order to help achieve or provide something	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I display respect and make positive contributions to local, global, and digital communities • I can synthesize various perspectives and cooperative strategies to make team decisions, manage conflicts, and accomplish common goals • I can receive and give feedback in order to improve outcomes and products • I can reflect on the effectiveness of my actions and can take responsibility for myself and my team
Communicating	Share or exchange information news or ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am able to speak and write with clarity • I can convey well-developed ideas using a variety of tools, materials, and methods • I know my audience, understand the purpose, and choose precise language • I use different listening and comprehension strategies such as asking questions, paraphrasing ideas, or making connections that further my understanding and recognize others' point of view.
Problem Solving	Process or act of finding a solution to a problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can think critically • I am creative, flexible, and comfortable taking risks when solving problems • I can break down a problem, access information, analyze that information and develop innovative solutions • I can use evidence to describe and support claims
Perseverance	Continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can learn and grow continuously (Growth Mindset) • I can make mistakes and build upon them • I can take risks in order to strive for excellence • I can be persistent and self directed • I can identify something that I want to accomplish and establish measurable goals and timeframes (Goal Setting)

**Emotional
Intelligence**

The process through which students understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

- **I can accurately recognize my emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior**
- **I can regulate my emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations**
- **I can take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports**
- **I can establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups**
- **I can make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.**

LEARNING CULTURE

Learning Culture

The school provides a safe learning culture that ensures equity and fosters shared values among learners, educators, families, and members of the school community. These shared values drive student learning as well as policy, practice, and decision-making while promoting a spirit of collaboration, shared ownership, pride, leadership, social responsibility, and civic engagement. The school community sets high standards for student learning, fosters a growth mindset, and facilitates continuous school improvement to realize the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.

1. The school community provides a safe, positive, respectful, and inclusive culture that ensures equity and honors diversity in identity and thought.
 - 1a. The school community provides a safe environment.
2. The school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate drive student learning, professional practices, learning support, and the provision and allocation of learning resources.
 - 2a. The school has a written document describing its core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.
3. The school community takes collective responsibility for the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional well-being of every student and can demonstrate how each student is known, valued, and connected to the school community.
4. The school community's professional culture demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement through the use of research, collaborative learning, innovation, and reflection.
5. The school's culture promotes intellectual risk taking and personal and professional growth.
6. The school has an inclusive definition of leadership and provides school leaders with the authority and responsibility to improve student learning.
7. The school culture fosters civic engagement and social and personal responsibility.

STUDENT LEARNING

Student Learning

The school has a vision of the graduate that includes the attainment of transferable skills, disciplinary/interdisciplinary knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary to prepare learners for their future. Students are assured consistent learning outcomes through a defined curricular experience and have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in a variety of creative ways. Students actively participate in authentic learning experiences while practicing the skills and habits of mind to regularly reflect upon, and take ownership of, their learning.

1. The school has a vision of the graduate that includes the attainment of transferable skills, knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary for future success and provides feedback to learners and their families on each learner's progress in achieving this vision.
2. There is a written curriculum in a consistent format for all courses in all departments that includes units of study with guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills and integrates the school's vision of the graduate.
- 2a. There is a written curriculum in a consistent format for all courses in all departments.
3. Curriculum ensures that learners demonstrate a depth of understanding over a breadth of knowledge.
4. Instructional practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student.
5. Students are active learners who have opportunities to lead their own learning.
6. Learners regularly engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills.
7. Learners demonstrate their learning through a variety of assessment strategies that inform classroom instruction and curriculum.
8. Learners have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning, receive corrective feedback, and use this feedback in meaningful ways to support their learning.
9. Learners use technology across all curricular areas to support, enhance, and demonstrate their learning.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

Professional Practices

The school maintains and implements a school improvement/growth plan, organizational practices, and productive community relationships to meet and support student learning needs. Educators engage in ongoing reflection, collaboration, and professional development to improve their practice and examine evidence of student learning and well-being to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, programs, and services.

1. The school engages all stakeholders in the development and implementation of a school improvement/growth plan, which reflects the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.
 - 1a. The school has a current school improvement/growth plan.
2. Educators engage in ongoing reflection, formal and informal collaboration, and professional development to improve student learning and well-being.
3. Educators examine evidence of student learning and well-being to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, and programs and services.
4. Collaborative structures and processes support coordination and implementation of curriculum.
5. School-wide organizational practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student.
6. Educators develop productive student, family, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support learning.

LEARNING SUPPORT

Learning Support

The school has timely, directed, and coordinated interventions for all students. The school provides targeted supports to meet each student's individual needs, including counseling services, health services, library/information services, and other appropriate support services to assist each student in meeting the school's vision of the graduate.

1. All students receive appropriate intervention strategies to support their academic, social, and emotional success.
 - 1a. The school has intervention strategies designed to support students.
2. All students receive counseling services that meet their personal, social, emotional, academic, career, and college counseling needs from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.
3. All students receive health services that ensure their physical and emotional well-being from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.
4. All students receive library/information services that support their learning from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.
5. Identified English Language Learners and students with special needs and 504 plans receive appropriate programs and services that support their learning from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning Resources

The school has adequate and appropriate time, funding, and facilities to support the realization of its core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate. The school and school community provide time, funding, and facilities for student learning and support; teacher collaboration and professional growth; and full implementation of curricular and co-curricular programs in the school. The school has appropriate plans, protocols, and infrastructure in place to ensure consistent delivery of its curriculum, programs, and services.

1. The community and district provide school buildings and facilities that support the delivery of high-quality curriculum, programs, and services.
 - 1a. The community and district provide school buildings and facilities that support the delivery of curriculum, programs, and services.
2. The school/district provides time and financial resources to enable researched-based instruction, professional growth, and the development, implementation, and improvement of school programs and services.
3. The community and the district's governing body provide adequate and dependable funding to fully implement the curriculum, including co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities.
4. The school/district has short-term and long-term plans to address the capital and maintenance needs of its building and facilities.
5. The school has infrastructure and protocols in place to ensure effective responses in crisis situations.

Introduction

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 three Commissions: the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS); the Commission on Public Schools (CPS), which is comprised of the Committee on Public Elementary, Middle, and High Schools (CPEMHS), and the Committee on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI); and the Commission on International Education (CIE).

As the responsible agency for matters of the evaluation and accreditation of public school member institutions, CPS requires visiting teams to assess the degree to which schools align with the qualitative Standards for Accreditation. The Standards are *Learning Culture*, *Student Learning*, *Professional Practices*, *Learning Support*, and *Learning Resources*.

The accreditation program for public schools involves a five-step process: the self-reflection conducted by stakeholders at the school; the Collaborative Conference visit, conducted by a team of peer educators and NEASC representatives; the school's development and implementation of a growth/improvement plan; the Decennial Accreditation visit conducted by a team of peer educators and NEASC representatives; and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own self-reflection, the recommendations of the visiting team, and those identified by the Committee in the follow-up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school participate in the accreditation process over the ten-year cycle and that it shows continued progress addressing identified needs.

Preparation for the Accreditation Visit

Accreditation coordinators and a steering committee comprised of the professional staff were appointed to supervise the school's Accreditation process which includes the self-reflection, the Collaborative Conference visit, the development and implementation of a growth plan, and the Decennial Accreditation Visit. At Westford Academy, a committee of fourteen members, including the principal, supervised all aspects of the Accreditation process.

Public schools seeking Accreditation through the Commission on Public Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their alignment with the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's core values, beliefs, the vision of the graduate, and unique student population. In preparation for the decennial visit, schools are required to complete a Decennial Summary Report to inform the team about their progress since the time of the Collaborative Conference visit.

In addition, the professional staff was required to read and come to a consensus on the summary report to ensure that all voices were heard related to the school's progress on their priority areas for growth.

The Process Used by the Visiting Team

A visiting team of seven members was assigned by the Commission on Public Schools to conduct a Decennial Accreditation visit to Westford Academy in Westford, Massachusetts. The visiting team members spent four days conducting a virtual visit to the school; reviewed the self-reflection, Collaborative Conference report, and Decennial Summary Report documents; met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents; and visited classes to determine the degree to which the school aligns with the Committee on Public Secondary Schools' and Public Elementary and Middle Schools' Standards for Accreditation and the degree to which the school is making progress toward their identified priority areas for growth as indicated in the

school's improvement/growth plan.

Each conclusion in the report was agreed to by visiting team consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting team are included within each section of the report. The report includes commendations and recommendations that, in the visiting team's judgment, will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and implement its plan for growth and improvement. The report also includes an analysis of the conceptual understanding, commitment, competency, and capacity (4Cs), which is a framework used to evaluate the school's ability for continuous growth and improvement as a learning organization.

This report of the findings of the visiting team will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Schools, which will make a decision on the Accreditation of Westford Academy.

Foundational Element 1.1a - Learning Culture

Foundational Element 1.1a

Westford Academy provides a safe environment across the school. Students and staff feel safe and secure at the school. Students highlight the feeling of safety they have, the ALICE training, anti-bullying work, and the overall sense of community at the school. The school employs both indoor and outdoor camera systems as an added layer of security. There is a school resource officer from the Westford Police Department whose duty is primarily dedicated to the school. The school also has a crisis response team that drills regularly in preparation to respond appropriately to a crisis situation. The school completed a security audit in the 2019-2020 school year and is implementing recommendations from that audit. In the fall of 2021, adults will be using ID badges to gain access to the building, and, thereafter, students will begin to use the same system. The school has also taken numerous steps to ensure the safety of students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 1.2a - Learning Culture

Foundational Element 1.2a

The school has a written document describing its core values and beliefs about learning and has developed a vision of the graduate. It has a clear plan for adoption which includes incorporating district input. The school has a pervasive commitment to its core values, from the school committee down to the students. These core values, Respect, Responsibility, Personal Excellence, and Kindness, are evident across the school community. There is a clear sense of identity directly related to its culture as a school community, manifesting from the core values. The school has a vision of the graduate that articulates the skills that Westford Academy sees as necessary for its students to attain before leaving the school, which are the skills of Perseverance, Emotional Intelligence, Problem Solving, Communicating, and Contributing. The vision of the graduate was created with input from the faculty, students, and parents. The school anticipates its vision of the graduate, with potential revisions informed by input from the other schools and district stakeholders, being adopted into a district-wide vision of the graduate in the upcoming Westford Public Schools 3-year strategic plan. The school has a clear path and an evident commitment to implementing a vision of the graduate.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 2.2a - Student Learning

Foundational Element 2.2a

Westford Academy has a written curriculum that is in a consistent format for all courses in all departments across the school. After the Collaborative Conference Visit in 2018, the school dedicated a significant amount of work to meet this foundational element. The school adopted the Understanding by Design model as a consistent format for all curriculum in the school. Departments have continually worked to align units of study with guiding questions, concepts, and skills within the content areas and in a cross-curricular fashion. All department curriculum is organized in a shared Google Drive with department folders and is subdivided by grades, subject area, and course level. All department folders are consistently updated with new or revised documents, including links that are in line with state standards and frameworks, and provide various instructional and assessment strategies to ensure student understanding. The school is committed to the UbD format, as well as updating the curriculum to reflect the desired results, evidence of student learning, and the learning plan for all courses in all departments.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 3.1a - Professional Practices

Foundational Element 3.1a

Westford Academy has a current school improvement plan that includes specific school goals. The improvement plan is created by the Westford Academy School Council which meets monthly. The plan includes the input of stakeholders from the school community. The improvement plan is then adopted by the Westford School Committee each year for the following year's work. The improvement plan for 2020-2021 incorporated the continued work on the Priority Areas for Growth as identified during the Collaborative Conference Visit. The improvement plan shows a commitment to continuous improvement for the school and growth related to the Priority Areas.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Elements 4.1a - Learning Support

Foundational Elements 4.1a

Westford Academy has intervention strategies designed to support all learners. The school has a range of strategies in place to support academic growth, social-emotional needs, and post-secondary needs. The school uses an instructional support team (IST) to identify and refer students who need additional support and interventions. The team is made up of school counselors, school psychologists, administrators, nurses, and social workers. The team meets regularly to review student referrals that can be made by faculty or parents. The school counseling department has continually distributed mindfulness resources to students, provides open opportunities for students to meet with counselors, and runs the school's advisory program. The school also has a variety of additional services available to students, including in-class accommodations, co-taught classes with special education teachers, and directed learning classes. The school also has an alternative education program, a Bridge program, and a transition program for students receiving special education who are 18-21.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 5.1a - Learning Resources

Foundational Element 5.1a

The school site and plant at Westford Academy support the delivery of curriculum, programs, and services. The building underwent an extensive addition and renovation in 1998. It has a rated capacity of 1,800 students. The current enrollment is over 1,700. The building includes spaces appropriate for the current enrollment and the current curriculum, programs, and services, and there are few unused spaces in the building during the school day. The school has a performing arts center, a library learning commons, a gymnasium, an auxiliary gym, a large cafeteria, general education classrooms, and science labs. The school has a field with synthetic turf and handicap-accessible bleachers, as well as a new track that was installed in the spring of 2018. The school is clean and well maintained. It is attractively decorated with school pictures and student paintings throughout the building. The school buildings and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Elements Ratings

Foundational Element Ratings

Foundational Elements	Collaborative Conference School's Rating	Collaborative Conference Visitors' Rating	Decennial School's Rating	Decennial Visitors' Rating
1.1a - Learning Culture	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
1.2a - Learning Culture	Does Not Meet the Standard	Does Not Meet the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
2.2a - Student Learning	Does Not Meet the Standard	Does Not Meet the Standard	Does Not Meet the Standard	Meets the Standard
3.1a - Professional Practices	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
4.1a - Learning Support	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
5.1a - Learning Resources	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard

Priority Area 1

Priority Area

Develop and implement core values and a vision of the graduate (Foundational Element 1.2a)

Action, Impact, and Growth

This priority area focused on developing and implementing core values and a vision of the graduate (VOG). To accomplish this goal, Westford Academy is seeking to implement a K-12 VOG. Westford Academy has recently hired a new superintendent, and there is a new three-year strategic plan that includes incorporating the vision of the graduate district-wide.

The school formed a subcommittee comprising administrators and staff members. This committee surveyed parents, staff, students, and community stakeholders to revise the VOG. Staff members attended a two-day workshop hosted by NEASC to support this Priority Area. A staff survey was conducted and 90 percent responded favorably to the proposed VOG.

The school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate drive student learning, professional development practices, learning support, and the provision and allocation of learning services. The school community expects to revise its vision of the graduate as feedback is gained during the adoption of a vision of the graduate by the entire school district. As this occurs, it is important that the vision becomes embedded in the curricular maps, instructional practices, assessment strategies, and operational practices of the school. Additionally, communicating that vision clearly to all stakeholders will be a priority.

Even though the vision of the graduate is in its early stages of implementation with anticipated district revisions, students understand the skills that Westford Academy espouses of perseverance, emotional intelligence, problem-solving, communicating, and contributing. These skills are present across the school building both inside and outside of the classroom. For example, senior students participate in a capstone project that may include internships, community service, a research paper, and a culminating project. The seniors present their capstone to visitors, staff, and community stakeholders during a gallery walk held at the school. Students answer questions from any of the invited guests from the school and the community. Students feel confident that Westford Academy is preparing them for the challenges of college and career.

Recommended Next Steps

- Ensure that the vision of the graduate is revised and expanded to include grades K-12 as indicated in the district's; three-year strategic plan
- Provide feedback to learners and their families on each learner's progress in achieving this vision
- Embed the vision of the graduate into the curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
- Create a formal process to assess and communicate individual learner progress toward achieving the school's vision of the graduate

Sources of Evidence

- central office personnel
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations
- school leadership

- school summary report
- students
- teacher interview
- teachers

Priority Area 2

Priority Area

Write all curriculum in a consistent format for all courses in all departments that includes units of study with guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills; instructional strategies; and assessment practices, and integrates the school's vision of the graduate (Standard 2, Principle 2.2, and Foundational Element 2.2a)

Action, Impact, and Growth

Westford Academy is the public high school for the Westford Public School District. As stated on the Westford Public Schools website, the district engages in continuous improvement of instructional and organizational practices through collaboration with building-level leaders and faculty teams. The goal is to meet the needs of the whole child system-wide through a rigorous standards-based curriculum, research-based instructional practices, support, technical innovation, as well as a continued reflection of practice.

Customarily, school curriculum coordinators from diverse subject areas and additional staff involved in curriculum design are encouraged to serve on curriculum committees. These committees are responsible for writing a content-specific curriculum as it aligns with state standards and frameworks. Before the school's Collaborative Conference Visit, *Understanding by Design* (UbD) was implemented in different content areas, but not across all departments. As a result, the shared curriculum was written in a breadth of styles and stages of completion not consistent for all courses in all departments.

After the Collaborative Conference Visit, the school's administrators, faculty members, and staff members moved forward with discussions on how to get all departments under the UbD design, format, scope, sequence, and language. Curriculum coordinators lead regularly scheduled department meetings to receive input from their teams as to what the UbD design should look like across the disciplines. Using the structure of UbD stages two and three to create a universal pacing format, all departments established a subject-specific curriculum that included common language clarity and cohesiveness. The school's providing continuity to all department curriculum permits teachers of different content backgrounds to use the material effectively.

The school took the action of transitioning all faculty to utilize Google Suite as a means of uploading and downloading shared materials across curricula and departmentally. Within the school's curriculum drive, new and pre-existing documents are organized into shared folders by subject matter, by grade levels, and by course number, depending on department structure. The creation of a shared drive and departmental folders alleviated uncertainty when accessing material. Additionally, new and seasoned faculty members have access to materials that aid in lesson design, essential question planning, pacing, and incorporating supplementary resources to enhance learning objectives. The impact of this action allocates reliable and easy access to the curriculum for all teachers and curriculum staff.

Furthermore, digital access to the curriculum proved beneficial as the school was forced to change operational norms in correlation to the COVID-19 pandemic that affected schools across the nation. The prepared curriculum is firmly in place on the shared drive and their designated folders. No matter a faculty member's physical location, materials are accessible, so adherence to curriculum content and pacing can be followed under such special circumstances. Digital access to materials also provides teachers with the opportunity to create choice boards for student work and assessments. This gives teachers a significant level of flexibility in their content area instruction. However, the professional staff acknowledges that the process of aligning all curriculum needs continual modification, as certain content areas, such as history, physical education, and health and wellness, are being revised to meet the updates of the state's standards and frameworks.

These initial actions are substantial in advancing growth in this Priority Area. It is expected that the straightforwardness in gaining access to the curriculum for teachers will be continued, using a consistent UbD source model and pacing guideline format. The professional staff acknowledges the importance of staying within the parameters set in the UbD model. The professional staff understands that the curriculum is a living document that must have levels of standardization and accessibility formatted so teachers, new and veteran, can be successful in teaching their content.

Recommended Next Steps

- Employ professional conversations and meetings to continually reviewed and update the curriculum
- Ensure that the curriculum reflects the vision of the graduate
- Ensure that common language is used across the curriculum in all content areas
- Devise a method to ensure the school-wide curriculum allows the flexibility to include the school's vision of the graduate

Sources of Evidence

- department leaders
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations
- school leadership
- school support staff
- school summary report
- teachers

Priority Area 3

Priority Area

Use of technology across all curricular areas (2.9)

Action, Impact, and Growth

Westford Academy has a 1:1 device initiative firmly established for students and teachers. All students are 1:1 with Chromebook as of about 2 years ago. The 1:1 initiative began 6 years ago with the One to World program in which each incoming freshman received a Chromebook to keep for all of high school. The main focus of this initiative was on seamless equitable access to 1:1 devices. To ensure this integration, if a student forgets or breaks his or her assigned Chromebook, he or she can get a loaner with no questions asked, so that there is no interruption to education. Equity is ensured because all students receive the same Chromebook to use throughout their time as students at the school. However, students can also opt out of receiving a Chromebook by signing a bring your own device waiver and providing their own device if they are more comfortable with it. Now that the 1:1 rollout is completed, Westford Public Schools has developed a plan to replace Chromebooks in grades 6 and 9, and give elementary students the Chromebook returned by seniors. Teachers also have 1:1 with devices, but they are assigned MacBooks. All teacher's classrooms are equipped with microphones, monitors, projectors, and Smart Boards to deliver instruction using technology to both in-person and remote students.

The use of Google Classroom as the school's sole learning management system has been firmly in place since the fall of 2018. The school has purchased the Legacy Google Enterprise license of the Google Suite which allows for upgraded security features and additional options, such as breakout rooms in Google Meet. Teachers use Google Classroom to distribute materials, collect student work, and deliver feedback using comments and rubrics. Google applications, such as Google Docs, are used in classes to facilitate collaboration between students. For example, in AP Literature, students complete a "Pass the Paper" activity by digitally sharing their documents with classmates and writing and providing feedback on each other's work. For student safety, teachers are provided with an approved list of applications that can be used with students and integrated with Google Classroom. If teachers or students want to request to use an application that does not appear on the approved list, they can complete a request form. Students would also need parental consent. For example, an application outside the Google Suite that was used and integrated into Google Classroom was Peardeck. In the remote learning academy (RLA) physical education class, students are given a Peardeck presentation in Google Classroom, and the presentation includes embedded questions so that the teacher uses a formative assessment of students in real-time during lectures. After the class, the students receive a copy of the presentation and their responses.

Professional Development (PD) is provided consistently to help staff feel more comfortable with the Google Suite. For example, an optional 6-week summer course was offered in the summer of 2020 to provide teachers strategies on how to efficiently incorporate digital learning. Shorter PD sessions are also provided throughout the year on PD days, during department meetings, and during Wednesday PD time that focus on meeting teachers where they are, i.e., novice, beginner, intermediate, expert levels. The digital learning specialists send out Tech Tip Tuesday emails to help keep the school informed of tips, ideas, and updates concerning the school's technology software and hardware. For example, a recent Tech Tip included photos and a description of the installation of outdoor Wi-Fi access points around the school's physical plant. Westford Academy's two digital learning specialists have flexible schedules so that they can meet with teachers during their preps or collaborate with classes during lessons.

Infrastructure improvements are in place to ensure that the technology can be used seamlessly in the classroom. For example, two years ago, teachers in the PE department wanted to initiate a digital portfolio but realized the gymnasium did not have the Wi-Fi capabilities that their students needed. Access points were added, and now the entire PE department employs digital portfolios. The school has continued to improve its infrastructure to support the growing demands of classes, such as streaming live Google Meet sessions. It started by adding access points every 2-3 classrooms and has continued to add access points each year. Now every classroom

has its own Wi-Fi access point. The school has also added 10 access points outside the physical plant this year so that teachers can conduct classes outside and still connect in real-time with hybrid and RLA students.

The actions completed by the school have demonstrated that learners pervasively use technology across all curricular areas to support, enhance, and demonstrate learning in alignment with Principle 2.9. Westford Academy has deliberately simplified classroom workflow and allowed students to find, organize, and turn in their work, thereby efficiently improving their learning, achievement, and well-being.

Recommended Next Steps

- Develop and implement technology tools and strategies informed by experiences teaching during the pandemic
- Use technology to bring the outside world into the classroom and vice versa and integrate these opportunities into the school and curriculum
- Assess the impact of Google Classroom on student learning and achievement, and implement strategies to enhance student learning based on the findings
- Provide professional development to help novice and beginner teachers feel more comfortable with the Google Suite
- Develop an explicit digital citizenship curriculum and embed digital learning and collaboration skills into the curriculum

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations
- department leaders
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations
- school leadership
- school summary report
- student work
- teachers

Priority Area 4

Priority Area

Collaborative Planning (3.2, 3.3, and 3.4)

Increase opportunities for common planning time for teachers to reflect on and improve student learning and well-being; to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment; to collaborate on the use of technology and embed its use in instruction and assessment; and to improve school programs and services.

Action, Impact, and Growth

Westford Academy has developed five ways to increase collaboration time among faculty members. Curriculum coordinators intentionally schedule teachers with like classes so they have a common preparation period. This time allows faculty members to review the curriculum, collaborate on assessment and instruction, and focus on a consistent curriculum map. The administrators provide collaboration time during faculty meetings, department meetings, and professional development time. Homeroom teachers who supervise Advisory Blocks may ask for coverage allowing for more collaborative discussions with colleagues. A collaborative conference room was established to support the planning needs of the 6-12 curriculum coordinators. Within the hybrid schedule for the 2020-2021 school year, thirty-five minutes of time was set aside for department collaborations on Wednesdays.

Since the Collaborative Conference Visit, Westford Academy has put these ideas into practice with a positive response from faculty members. The school reports that the teachers improved their ability to provide a more consistent curriculum, improved instruction, and more diversified assessments. There are several examples of how the faculty's collaboration time has benefited the students and curriculum. In U.S. 1, teachers spent much time crafting their grade 10 Civics Project - a graduation requirement that uses an inquiry-designed model developed through collaboration. The grade 9 College Prep Inclusion teachers made use of the advisory time to reshape their lessons. The library/media specialists work with teachers to assist the students in finding resources for their research and reading assignments, and the faculty feels fortunate to have two library/media specialists in the school. The library learning commons has served as a meeting space for teachers when collaborating. The social studies department looked beyond giving traditional tests to find other ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge, so their students can "speak like a historian." This idea of non-traditional assessments is reflected in student work and articulated by students.

There is a collective sentiment that the Google Suite of digital tools has been very useful for collaboration. For example, the art department has created an informative video for grade 8 students that explains the high school offerings, and this year will be hosting a virtual art show through Google Classroom.

The administrative team does not like to say "no" to teachers when asked for time to work together and every effort is made to give teachers what they need. In considering common assessments, the teachers had time in September to review and analyze their final exams with the hopes of adjusting practice for improved student learning in the coming year.

Teachers only meet sporadically to collaborate with their counterparts at the two middle schools; nevertheless, department meetings are typically scheduled for grades 6-8 and then 9-12 each month, and there is flexibility to meet across buildings if needed. The art department meets as a 6-12 team twice per year. When meeting across buildings, the teachers like to ask, "With what skills do you believe your students will leave grade 8?" and, "What skills do the incoming grade 9 students need to have to be successful at the high school?" Additionally, there is good communication between the middle school administrators and the high school team with regard to the special education and 504 plans of incoming freshmen.

Westford Academy has made significant progress in moving forward with growth in this Priority Area.

Recommended Next Steps

- Provide formal time for discussions between the middle schools and the high school to help ensure that the learning experience between buildings is continuous and the curriculum is fully articulated
- Provide formal meeting time between the middle schools and high school professional staffs to ensure a continuation of the anticipated district-wide vision of the graduate's transferable skills, knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary for future success)

Sources of Evidence

- priority area meetings
- school leadership
- school summary report
- student work
- students
- teachers

Part 3 - Reflection on Student Learning

Reflection on Student Learning

Instructional practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student at Westford Academy. Throughout the school, student learning is prioritized, and instructional practices are varied and impactful so as to best address the learning needs of all students. Instruction ranges from the whole groups to small groups facilitated by break-out rooms to individualized support and assessment. Assessment, both formative and summative, frequently includes opportunities for student choice and voice and allows learners to demonstrate their acquired skills and knowledge which informs instruction. Technology is pervasive and used to improve learning. The district adoption of the Google platform provides consistency and common language for all and provides organizational resources for both teachers and students. Learning is personalized through student choice. In English 11 Honors, students are allowed to select from options ranging from a written analysis to a poster, poem, or song to demonstrate understanding of "Our Town" by comparing it to their own town of Westford. Teachers routinely utilize formative assessment practices to inform instruction. For example, in Remote Learning Academy Physical Education, a PearDeck presentation with embedded questions is used formatively to assess student understanding of discussion topics. In English 11 CP, a live participation grade allows the students and teacher to assess understanding. In AP Literature and Composition, the teacher purposefully organizes group learning by leading the class through a "Pass the Paper" activity. Additional support and alternative strategies within the regular classroom occur in Geometry Honors as the teacher addresses individual questions of students as they work through review problems. Spanish 3 Honors students complete a four-week children's book activity centered on the environment and their futures as a means to meet the needs of all learners. Students participate in breakout rooms, listening and assessing peer work. All students complete a Google doc that required commendations and recommendations to the "author" in the target language. Learners access rigorous learning opportunities with structure and support in US History 1. The teacher organizes small groups, having each take a topic from the Gold Rush era. Students collaborate on assignments in break-out rooms in teams.

Most students are active learners and are given choice and voice in opportunities to lead their own learning. Learning experiences are personalized, relevant, and authentic. In RLA Physical Education, students engage in discussions of how to make healthy food choices based on nutrition labels and facts about fresh foods. The students investigate what type of person for which a 2000 calorie diet - the premise of nutrition labels - is intended. Project-based learning is common, e.g., students construct dioramas and write children's books. Project-based learning experiences increased significantly due to pandemic conditions. The students find that they enjoy this learning and gain and retain knowledge this way. The application of knowledge and skills to authentic tasks is prevalent. In Honors Physics, the teacher includes many photos that he had taken locally of guard rails and fitch barriers to show how roads in the community are made safer using the principles of the physics they study in class. In AP US History, students evaluate and compare information from seven primary source documents to develop a historically defensible thesis that includes context, and they provide evidence both from the sources afforded to them as well as other sources. Student discourse and reflection on learning are routine. In US History 1, students are placed into breakout rooms where they discuss various topics on the Gold Rush. Students actively discuss the hardships, risks, and rewards of the Gold Rush. In German 2 Honors, students are sent to predetermined breakout rooms to participate in student-led discussions. All students understand set protocols and remain engaged. Student choice, the pursuit of personal interests, and opportunities for creative expression are widespread. In English 11 Honors, students are allowed to select from multiple options, ranging from a written analysis to a poster, poem, or song to demonstrate understanding of "Our Town" by comparing it to their own town of Westford. The capstone senior experience creates an opportunity for all seniors to learn in and out of school.

Learners engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills regularly. Students in grades 9-12 English classes all engage in analytical text-based writing. In engineering class, students engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, and inquiry-based tasks as they design water rockets and track data on their designs. They are able to use different materials and manipulate fuel and water pressure. Most classes include activities that prioritize deep understanding, analysis, synthesis, creativity, making connections, and understanding

relationships. Foundations of Art students are tasked with creating an arrangement of objects that represent the sentiment of a favorite song or poem. Students photograph their arrangement, solicited peer feedback, and use their photos as a reference for a charcoal drawing. In AP Literature and Composition, students collaborate to make an argument by providing a claim, evidence, and reasoning as a demonstration of critical and creative thinking skills. Dispositions, such as independence, flexible thinking, and persistence are encouraged. In Physical Science, students solve the real-world problem of protecting a ceramic figurine when dropped from a large distance. They then work through an inquiry design process to design, build, and test their solutions. Deliberately designed learning and assessment experiences that are cognitively challenging are the norms. In English 11 CP, students are asked to identify instances of racism within the text and encouraged to ask questions to each other and the teacher. Moreover, they are encouraged to make present-day connections to the text. In US History II, students complete a week-long project that includes summarizing multiple sources, drawing conclusions, and defending those conclusions with evidence.

A wide range of formative and summative assessment strategies steer classroom instruction and curriculum. Assessments range from oral questions and fill-in-the-blanks to discussions, multi-tiered projects, and traditional tests. Assessment strategies vary, based on curriculum, and some lead to immediate shifts in instruction with rapid results. In Symphonic Percussion, the teacher leads students in learning a piece for a variety of percussion instruments and electric guitars. Students with similar rhythmic parts are made aware of each other so they know to whom to listen while performing. Progress becomes audible after rehearsing specific instruments together and then putting the entire ensemble together again. In AP Biology, students complete a week-long project to demonstrate knowledge of cell communication and review for the test. They are assigned a model and may choose a specific example and the materials they will use to model it. Students create various types of presentations to their teacher and peers about their models, e.g., a stop motion video and Google Slides shows. Many classes employ rubrics to provide specific and measurable criteria for success prior to assessments. In English 11 CP, a participation grade provides regular and consistent checks for understanding. Presentation of learning to authentic audiences is the norm. Students in PlayLab write, revise, and produce 10-minute plays in a Zoom format for presentation to a virtual audience. Only plays that met the standards of the assignment are allowed to be present. Students collaborate and problem-solve to ensure their plays meet the standards. Typically, at least twenty-seven plays are presented over three nights.

Across the school, learners have many opportunities to demonstrate their learning, receive feedback, and use this feedback. These opportunities are nearly constant and in all curriculum areas. Students display their learning orally with questioning, discussions, and performances, formally on traditional written tests and quizzes, and creatively through wide-ranging projects. Feedback is targeted to make the most of learning experiences. Oral feedback frequently includes questioning to uncover student thinking and written feedback is abundant on displays of student work, such as the AP European History writing assignment, "The Awkward Reformation Dinner Party." Learners are often given examples and opportunities to improve their work. As part of an AP US History lesson, students examine a writing example from an AP test. The teacher asks them to observe which parts of the question the writing example addresses. The teacher discusses some strategies for this part of the exam. Orchestra students and their teachers engage in post-performance discussions after watching a video in which the performance is assessed and future goals are determined.

Across all curricular areas, learners use technology to support, enhance, and demonstrate their learning. Technology is utilized to communicate clearly and creatively. In English 11 CP, students discuss *The Great Gatsby* as they work on a virtual chart that requires input on impressions made about specific characters. All classes use technology to access, support, document, and supplement their learning, which has been the norm for several years. Students routinely collaborate digitally to support learning. In a typical US history 1 class, learners access technology, including a video game in which they have to survive the Oregon Trail. Each virtual breakout room switches to a different room in which they engage in a different activity. Students engage in learning beyond the constraints of the school building and school day. Virtual High School (VHS) is offered to students. Currently, in all classes, technology enables students to participate in person or remotely.

Part 4 - Capacity for Continuous Growth as a Learning Organization

Conceptual Understanding

The faculty and staff have a shared conceptual understanding of what optimal and effective learning looks like at Westford Academy. Westford's mission and core values are the backbones of its learning community. Perseverance, emotional intelligence, problem-solving, communicating, and contributing are the values that the entire learning community depends on to shape teaching and learning. However, because the district is transitioning to a new superintendent all while working to fully open schools during the pandemic, planning for the future is more challenging. Westford continues to make great progress with its technology plan, writing a common curriculum framed around Understanding by Design (UbD), and the creation and implementation of a system-wide vision of the graduate. This work and growth will become a greater focus once the pandemic subsides and the new superintendent is installed.

Westford Academy is committed to ensuring students are engaged active learners who take responsibility for their learning, contribute to the community and support those who surround them. Evidence of this is on clear display in the Ghost Writer student newspaper, on the stage, in the band and music rooms, and in the murals that line the walls of the school. In the classroom, multifaceted formative assessments are on display, and teachers are often altering their instruction and learning plans to meet the daily needs of students and optimize teachable moments. Strong, positive, and supportive community culture is palpable across all plains of the learning community. Student success is evident through the high college acceptance rate, student involvement in co-curricular activities, and through the words and actions of many students.

Faculty members, staff members, and students are supported by a very strong and well-respected leadership team. Curriculum coordinators, deans, and the principal all work to ensure students are challenged with rigorous expectations and supported socially and emotionally. Presently, they guide curriculum and instruction by an agreed-upon set of core values and mission statement. The professional staff believes that by ensuring that students are supported both socially and emotionally, they will find academic success. Students are encouraged to find balance and seek opportunities to explore personal interests, discover hidden talents, and positively contribute to their local and global communities. This work is supported by the school's commitment to Stanford University's Challenge Success model and is exemplified by the senior capstone project.

The faculty and staff of Westford Academy have a clear conceptual understanding of the need for a clear and consistent format for all content areas and courses and are committed to using the UbD format to work to this end. They realize that the current technology infrastructure is sound and needs to be maintained and grown. Collaborative planning time is being provided and the professional staff recognizes that it also needs to be supported and expanded. With the appointment of a new superintendent and a reprieve from the pandemic, the school community hopes to write a district-wide vision of the graduate that is rooted in the current core values and speaks to the entire district.

Commitment

Westford Academy is committed to aligning with the standards for Accreditation and is thoughtfully and continually working toward a balanced future that partners its tradition of academic rigor and success with the social and emotional needs of students as well as faculty and staff members. The entire community is proud of Westford Academy's reputation for excellence and rigor. Administrators at all levels share a common belief system that is steeped in evident and powerful core values. More importantly, faculty members, staff members, students, and community stakeholders all appear equally committed to and supportive of the school's current and future plans. They have made progress in each of the Priority Areas for Growth identified during the Collaborative Conference Visit and are committed to continuing the work. With the appointment of a new superintendent, they hope to develop a district-wide vision of the graduate that remains true to the current mission and core values and aligns itself with the new superintendent's district strategic plan.

The faculty and staff's commitment and concern for all student's growth and well-being are apparent. Very obvious is the student body's knowledge of this genuine care and concern. The majority of students feel they can seek out an adult to confide in and ask for support on both academic and social-emotional issues. Students feel the school counselors are available to them and that they are afforded many resources to support both their social-emotional and academic well-being. They feel safe and know that bullying of any sort is not tolerated by both staff and other students. The commitment to maintain and grow a positive culture and climate is apparent in the school's commitment to the Challenge Success model, advisory program, and focus on having positive conversations with students around balance.

There is a clear commitment to developing lifelong learners and preparing students for college and careers. Westford Academy supports both students intending to pursue higher education and students planning to work after graduation. The school hosts a job fair, runs a job shadow program for juniors, and offers guidance for non-college track students. Likewise, the school hosts visit from colleges and universities, helps students with their college applications, and guides them throughout the college application process.

Westford Academy and the greater community are focused on a growth mindset and are continually looking for ways to improve and adapt. It is the hope of the entire community that the positive lessons learned during this pandemic will help them better serve all students and each other. The foundation of excellence created by the leadership team is sound and offers a solid footing for growth. Everyone at the school is committed to "shaping the future, one child at a time."

Competency

Westford Academy's professional staff understands and acknowledges the changes that need to be made to align with the Standards for Accreditation. Faculty members, staff members, administrators, and district leaders have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to help students achieve the school's vision and mission. They also realize that only through collaboration and professional development can this vision be fully realized and the Priority Areas met.

The work and progress made toward the four identified Priority Areas are evidence of the school's capacity to meet the goals and objectives of each and continue to grow. The school is a modern facility designed to meet the needs of all students and grow with the community. The technology resources are adequate and are also designed to grow with and adapt to the changing needs of the community. The faculty and administration have a respectful and effective relationship that works collaboratively to provide effective instruction and social-emotional support. The administrators work hard to try to always say yes to both faculty members and students. Each group has a voice and feels heard and valued. The work toward providing collaborative time for teachers only furthers the school's ability to continue to write a curriculum in the UbD format.

The leadership team has committed to providing continued professional development in all Priority Areas and social-emotional instruction. Social-emotional learning at Westford Academy is a critical part of its competency and success. SEL programs should continue to be supported both philosophically and financially beyond the pandemic. The student body finds great comfort and safety in the faculty and administration's willingness to provide multiple supports for their emotional well-being. Students feel safe because they are listened to and asked about by their teachers. Social-emotional teaching strategies are often incorporated into daily instruction.

Competency is fostered through a shared vision, a commonly formatted curriculum, time for collaboration, and supported technology. Westford Academy has laid a strong foundation in all of the areas, and, with continued support from all stakeholders and school leaders, they will continue to find success. The school will face the future with the tools they need to grow, while still holding true to the traditions and reputation the entire community holds in the highest regard.

Capacity

The school's conceptual understanding, commitment, and competency is the foundation for the school's capacity for change and its continued ability to meet and exceed the identified Priority Areas. There is obvious support from the school committee, district leadership, building leadership, community stakeholders, and the faculty and staff that strengthens this capacity and desire for growth. The pandemic, as difficult and unsettling as it has been, only made this capacity more apparent. Students, faculty members, and staff members persevered through this challenging time, demonstrating academic innovation and creativity. They support and ensure the social-emotional well-being of everyone at the school, maintain academic excellence, and help each other stay balanced and focused.

Westford Academy has the capacity, support, and resources to make progress in the four Priority Areas identified during the Collaborative Conference Visit. The physical plant is safe, secure, well maintained, and equipped to handle the growing needs of the community. The school's current technology infrastructure is sound and has the ability to grow and adapt to the ever-changing needs of an educational institution. The technology staff, as well as the faculty as a whole, support and teach each other through virtual professional development and casual collaboration.

In addition to the physical structure, available technology, supported curriculum, and tradition of rigor and success, one tenet holds consistent - students find success because they are able to take risks. They take risks because Westford Academy provides a physically and socially emotionally safe learning environment.

Additional Information

Additional Information

Standard 1 Principle 3

School's rating in the Self-Reflection report: **Developing**

School's rating in the Summary Report: **Implementing**

Explanation from the School

The school community takes collective responsibility for the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional well-being of every student and can demonstrate how each student is known, valued, and connected to the school community. Westford Academy is in the developing phase of principle 1.3. Elements of the principle are firmly in place in the school, and systems have been formed to support and sustain these practices. The school community maintains and supports high expectations for all students by offering teacher expectation documents for each class. In addition, the Westford Academy Handbook contains numerous elements of these high expectations. Each student must provide a signature indicating they have read the Handbook yearly as a way of holding students accountable for the expectations. Westford Academy is also focused on providing a balance of academic, social, and civic opportunities to meet the needs of diverse learners. The following components are evidence to support this position: Westford Public Schools utilizes a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan for all students Westford Academy provides a comprehensive developmental guidance curriculum An advisory program Student social events Complete and varied Program of Studies with course offerings that provide appropriate tiering and recommendation systems 75 clubs and activities 35 varsity sports and 72 teams Capstone Program during the fourth quarter for seniors Page 29 of 37 The school community currently helps students develop the skills necessary to achieve a positive school/life balance through a school-wide initiative called Challenge Success. One of the goals of this program is to understand and reduce student stress. Westford Academy is currently evaluating midterm exams and assessments with a Mid Term Review Committee. Westford Academy has a plan and services in place to identify and support the social and emotional needs of students through counselor meetings with students, Instructional Support Teams(IST), the Bridge program, combined Administration/Counselor Meetings, Guidance Department Meetings, mandatory freshmen health class, and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. We are constantly adapting to our ever-changing social environment, with new and innovative methods to increase student-teacher interaction. As student interests change, new clubs are formed to correspond to those interests and needs. All classes have submitted course outlines to administration as given to students at the beginning of each semester or year in addition to the use of Google Classroom to streamline the communication process, to make readily available the requirements for both teacher and student. Our Bridge and Alternative Education programs offer students distinct ways in which to thrive and learn in an environment conducive to their needs. The IST(RTI) model is in place for students with immediate needs. The school ensures that each student is known by an adult mentor in the school, or through some other formal process, to assist him or her in achieving the school's mission. These relationships are developed through the advisory program where students have the same homeroom teacher for four years, through one-on-one guidance meetings with students, as well as through the wide variety of co-curricular activities staffed by school personnel. According to the CPS Student Survey, 93% of students feel that their well-being is somewhat to totally supported by adults, not just the ones they have as teachers. 90.5% of students felt that at least one caring adult knows them well. The school also has a broad commitment to all areas of learning outlined in the Expectations for Student Learning found in the student handbook. We are now in the Implementing Phase of this principle.

Updates since the Collaborative Conference:

Universal Screening: We are active members of the Massachusetts School Mental Health Consortium (MASMHC) and the Guidance Coordinator serves on the leadership team of that organization. During the 2019-2020 school year, as part of a town-wide assessment of mental health needs, all district leaders and counselors

completed the School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE), a research-based tool from the Page 31 of 38 National Center for School Mental Health. Involvement in MASMHC and results of the SHAPE assessment helped to guide the implementation of additional programs. In the 2019-2020 school year, we piloted a universal screening tool focusing on anxiety, the GAD -7, with our juniors. Counselors followed up with individual students and we added to our advisory curriculum to include mindfulness and gratitude lessons as a result. During the 2020-2021 year, we added the PHQ-9 which screens for depression to the GAD-7 and surveyed all students, grades 9 - 12. Counselors followed up with individual students and their families to ensure appropriate supports were in place as a result. Access to social-emotional support: Based on feedback from students and parents re: accessibility of counselors during the school day, two new programs were implemented. The Counselor on Call each day keeps their calendar open to respond to any emergent needs that arise should a student's assigned counselor be unavailable. If the Counselor on Call sees a student for support, they communicate with the student's counselor of record to ensure all parties are aware and the student's counselor can follow up as needed. The Guidance Peer Supports (GPS) program (on hiatus during COVID) was developed following a Challenge Success conference presentation of a prototype for this program. Students who are interested in learning more about the mental health needs of students and positive coping strategies apply and are interviewed for the program and 14 students are selected so that one student is available every block of the day in the Guidance area. Students receive training on confidentiality, signs, and symptoms of depression and anxiety, tools to help students find calm, and students who come to the office for assistance check-in with a GPS to determine whether they just need a break before returning to class or whether they need to see their counselor. The group meets monthly on Page 30 of 37 throughout the year to role-play, explore topics of interest, and advise the department on student needs. GPS students utilize a Google Form to check students in and out. This allows us to gather data on usage. A relay email is sent to the visiting student's counselor to ensure they are notified whenever one of their students is utilizing this support. These students, as well as the Challenge Success Student Advisory group, provided valuable feedback on the physical environment in our office area. As a result, we have removed/minimized the focus on college pennants and standardized testing and now our walls share positive messages and encouragement. Social-Emotional Classroom (room 125): Recognizing the growing population of students with significant social-emotional challenges, a social-emotional classroom was developed and opened in 2019-2020. The classroom includes a special education teacher and a full-time adjustment counselor. Students have access to individual and group counseling as well as support throughout the day when needed. This classroom supplements the supports provided through our Alternative Education program and our Bridge program. Response to COVID 19: The pandemic brought unique challenges to our goal of supporting our students' social-emotional learning, as well as their academic progress. From March 2020 - June 2020, our school engaged in remote learning. The Guidance Department, including school counselors and adjustment counselors, adjusted their practice and sought resources and training to continue to provide support to students. We developed protocols for safe and confidential communication. We created videos to deliver curriculum content and posted them to our google classrooms. We held drop-in times as well as student and family meetings remotely. Over the summer, the District-wide SEL reopening committee worked to gather and share out resources for students, families, and faculty, and staff including the creation of a district website and a full day of professional development for faculty prior to the start of school. Prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year, we sent a Welcome Form to all families K -12 assessing needs and gathering data to inform teachers and counselors on how to best support returning students. The district also agreed to partner with Panorama Education to assess and address emerging needs of students and families through their Distance Learning survey followed by a plan to assess SEL Skills and Competencies and use results to target areas for growth as we move through the school year. Teachers were given access to the Panorama Playbook - an extensive resource for classroom lesson plans and strategies designed to target specific SEL skills. District leadership participated in a full-day PD on how to analyze and utilize the results of the surveys and school-based data teams recommend areas of focus. The professional development and the Playbook have helped the faculty to understand their student's SEL needs as well as their own and given them the tools to engage in the work.

Standard 2 Principle 2

School's rating in the Self-Reflection report: **Developing**

School's rating in the Summary Report: **Implementing**

Explanation from the School

Westford Academy is developing a written curriculum in a consistent format at this point in time. While we have been working to create a consistent curriculum for the last few years (according to the NEASC CPS Faculty Survey, 77% - 90% of all teachers at WA consistently develop and execute a common curriculum for each subject and unit, while 70.7% of students found that they are learning the same materials as their peers, despite the fact that they have different teachers), we have not fully achieved that across all disciplines and classes. We understand that creating fully articulated curriculum documents will make for an easier transition for teachers who are new to the school; the conversations between teachers about curriculum also help to ensure a common understanding for staff in all departments. At this time, all classes in all departments have pacing guides. Teachers developing new courses understand that they must create a pacing guide (replacing Stage 1 of the standard UbD template) and UbD (see attached template) units for these courses. Currently, departments are at different stages of completion for Stages 2 and 3 within the UbD framework and are working to put everything in a consistent, universal format. This format contains essential questions, key concepts, performance tasks, learning activities, and skills.

Updates since the Collaborative Conference:

See PRIORITY AREA # 2.

Commendations

Commendation

The school's commitment to equity in the implementation of 1:1 devices

The regular collaboration among faculty and departments confirming the professional staff's commitment to implementing the school-wide curriculum

The varied course of studies and curricula that are purposefully designed to give students a comprehensive education

The UbD curriculum model providing fundamental listings of instructional strategies and assessments that employ essential questions and big ideas and emphasize higher order thinking

Commendation

The instruction across all curricular areas that is engaging, student-centered, and strives to incorporate higher order thinking skills

The students and teachers consistent use of feedback and assessment to further learning and deepen understanding

The teacher's design of highly engaging activities and assessments across all areas of the curriculum

Commendation

The numerous ways that collaboration time is provided to the faculty by the administrators

The creative, non-traditional assessments that allow students to display their understanding of material and concepts learned)

The safe, positive, and respectful culture of students and staff

The myriad resources for students to connect with the Westford community

The willingness of the administration to always try to say yes to both students and staff

The school counseling office's many services offered to the students

The school's tradition of high expectations and rigor

The faculty's commitment to assessing students' well-being during the pandemic

The adults and students' strong sense of community and pride in their school

The dynamic capstone project that has very strong buy-in from senior students

Commendation

The faculty's ability to adapt to multiple learning models during the pandemic while still striving for engagement among students

The school community's commitment to anti-bullying and the students understanding that bullying is not tolerated

The school community's embedding its core values in everything it does

The increasing of student voice and the student's feeling of ownership over different aspects of the school

Commendation

The teacher's efforts in knowing their students and showing genuine care for their well-being

The school's commitment to helping students find a balance between academics and social-emotional well-being

The school's clear commitment to keeping students safe both before and during the pandemic

The school's commitment to following and ensuring all pandemic safety measures are followed and implemented consistently

Commendation

The students' clear sense that the education they are receiving will set them up for success in college and careers

The school committees' support of the continued growth of the school, especially in regard to SEL and Equity/Diversity work

The central office team's implicit support of the school and the leadership teams' ability to act autonomously to make decisions for the school

The student's ability to access a wide range of activities and clubs, allowing them to pursue their interests and feel more deeply connected to the school

Additional Recommendations

Recommendation

Support, maintain, and ensure the growth of a commitment to social-emotional wellness and learning through the use of continued professional development and the support of all stakeholders

Recommendation

Further expand student voice and choice in students' experiences, while maintaining, and expanding if needed, the breadth of offerings and activities at the school

Recommendation

Evaluate, assess, and expand the high level of project-based learning established during the pandemic, especially those learning opportunities that empower student voice and choice

Recommendation

Expand and embed the school's commitment to diversity and equity work across the school community, connecting it to the school's culture focused on its core beliefs, future vision of the graduate work, and continual curriculum revision

FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES

This Initial/Decennial Accreditation Report of the Visiting Team reflects the findings of the school's Summary Report and those of the visiting team. It provides a blueprint for the faculty, administrators, and other officials to use to improve the quality of programs and services for the students in this school. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should be apprised by the building administrators yearly of progress made in aligning with the Standards for Accreditation.

A school's initial/continued Accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing the school's improvement/growth plan based on the Priority Areas validated by the visiting team and recommendations 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, the Commission requires that the principal submit a First Report of Progress and Planning and routine Three- and Six-Year Reports of Progress and Planning describing the school's progress implementing the Priority Areas as well as submitting an updated improvement/growth plan. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards or Priority Areas for Growth are not being met in a satisfactory manner, if additional information is needed on matters relating to the school's alignment with the Standards for Accreditation, or substantive changes occur in the school.

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Substantive Change Policy requiring that principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty days of occurrence any substantive change which impacts the school's alignment with the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The Report of Substantive Change must describe the change itself and detail the impacts the change has had on the school's ability to meet the Standards for Accreditation. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included on the next page. All other substantive changes should be included in the Reports on Progress and Planning and/or the Annual Information Report (AIR) which is required of each member school to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

The visiting team would like to express thanks to the community for the hospitality and welcome. The school community completed a Self-Reflection that clearly identified the school's strengths and areas of need, hosted a Collaborative Conference, developed an improvement/growth plan, and completed a Summary Report. The time and effort dedicated to the Accreditation process, school improvement/growth, the Summary Report, and the preparation for the visit ensured a successful Initial/Decennial Accreditation visit.

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES Commission on Public Schools

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty days of occurrence any substantive change in the school which has an impact on the school's ability to meet any of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The Report of Substantive Change must describe the change itself as well as detail the impact on the school's ability to meet the Standards. The following are potential areas where there might be negative substantive changes which must be reported:

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

Roster of Team Members

Chair(s)

Chair: Carl Johnson - Plainville High School

Team Members

Chris Green - The English High School

Ms. Lesley LaJoie - Leominster High School

Mr. Jonathan Merenda - Wilmington High School

Kathryn Murphy - Marlborough High School

Nicole O'Toole - Bedford High School

Sandi Ponte - Wareham Middle School