

New England Association of Schools and Colleges



Commission on Public Secondary Schools

Report of the Visiting Committee for Westford Academy

Westford, Massachusetts

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STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS

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

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges located in Bedford, Massachusetts considers this visiting committee report of Westford Academy to be a privileged document submitted by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to the principal of the school and by the principal to the state department of education. Distribution of the report within the school community is the responsibility of the school principal. The final visiting committee report must be released in its entirety within sixty days (60) of its completion to the superintendent, school board, public library or town office, and the appropriate news media.

The prime concern of the visiting committee has been to assess the quality of the educational program at Westford Academy in terms of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting team.

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

Teaching and Learning Standards

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

Support of Teaching and Learning Standards

Leadership and Organization
School Resources for Learning
Community Resources for Learning

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

Preparation for the Evaluation Visit - The School Self-Study

A steering committee of the professional staff was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Westford Academy, a committee of nine members, including the principal, supervised all aspects of the self-study. The steering committee assigned all teachers and administrators in the school to appropriate subcommittees to determine the quality of all programs, activities, and facilities available for young people. In addition to faculty members, the self-study committees included students and parents.

The self-study of Westford Academy extended over a period of eighteen school months from November 2007 to June 2009. Professional staff members, students, and parents were involved in the self-study deliberations.

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

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

The Process Used by the Visiting Committee

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

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

- review of the school's self-study materials
- 45 hours shadowing fifteen students for a half day
- a total of 30 hours of classroom observation (in addition to time shadowing students)
- numerous informal observations in and around the school
- tours of the facility
- individual meetings with 30 teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning
- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers
- the examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

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

This report of the findings of the visiting committee will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Secondary Schools which will make a decision on the accreditation of Westford Academy.

Overview of Findings

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

Teaching and Learning at Westford Academy

Westford, Massachusetts is a bedroom community where many of the parents of school-aged youth are working professionals. Many of the students come to Westford Academy with the requisite skills, work ethic, and habits-of-mind to be successful. As one would expect, the parents and the community on a whole have very high expectations of the school. The Westford Academy faculty consistently meets and exceeds these expectations by creating a student-centered climate that supports high standards and a rigorous curriculum. It is very clear that the faculty and staff are deeply committed to doing whatever it takes to meet students' academic, social, physical, and emotional needs. This exemplary culture is the essential reason why so many Westford Academy students achieve at the highest levels.

The Westford Academy community has carefully crafted and deliberated upon a new mission and expectations for student learning. The mission and expectations document clearly represents the community's fundamental values and beliefs about learning, and the culture strongly reflects the advancement of academic excellence. The school recently defined its academic expectations by creating seven school-wide rubrics. Each department was designated responsibility for providing learning opportunities for each academic expectation using the appropriate analytic rubric. While the staff should be commended for this ambitious pilot and subsequent data collection of student assessment on the school-wide rubrics, continuing work is needed. The school should revisit the academic learning expectations to ensure they are consistent with 21st century learning skills. Also, teachers should create high quality, performance-based assessments that are thoughtfully aligned with the expectations and rubrics rather than "force fitting" existing classroom assessments into apparent agreement with the rubrics. This difficult work is necessary if Westford Academy is to become fully mission-driven while ensuring that all students acquire the skills they need in an ever-changing global society.

Westford Academy offers a curriculum that engages all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking while providing numerous opportunities for authentic application of knowledge and skills. Most impressive is the diverse array of course offerings, including

eighteen different advanced placement courses, higher level math courses offered in conjunction with a local university, engaging electives such as Westford History, and online learning through the Virtual High School (VHS). Additionally, numerous extra- and co-curricular opportunities are well established so students may extend their learning beyond the traditional offerings. The curriculum appropriately emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage, and this fact has been bolstered in recent years by the district's commitment to implementing the Understanding by Design (UbD) curriculum design model. Using this model, the Westford Academy faculty has begun to develop UbD units that define essential questions and enduring understandings, and suggested instructional strategies and assessments. The faculty must press on with this work, developing a deeper understanding of the model so that the next phase of operation will be successful. In that phase, the essential questions will be made more explicit for students, and instruction and assessments will be implemented using the backwards planning model. The school should also make clear connections between each UbD unit and each of the academic learning expectations.

The faculty employs a variety of instructional practices that engage students as active learners, involve all in higher order thinking, provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills, effectively integrate technology, and are highly personalized. However, these practices are not consistent across and within all departments, and in some classrooms very traditional practices are the norm, where the instruction can be didactic, and students are not fully engaged in their learning. Professional development, particularly in the area of differentiated instruction, is necessary to address this issue. Many teachers cite the need for common planning time, stating that more time is needed to collaborate within their own and across departments. This is accurate, and there should be a thorough examination of the existing school schedule to try to find creative ways to build structures where more common planning time may be provided. Much of the expertise to improve instruction can be found in house, and through job-embedded professional development, practices can improve so that all students may consistently receive the instruction they deserve.

Westford Academy teachers use varied assessment strategies such as traditional quizzes and tests, essays, projects, performances, and multimedia presentations. Departments have also implemented common benchmark assessments in the form of common midterm and final exams to ensure that consistent content has been taught at a uniform pace. Parents are satisfied with the school's consistently strong efforts to communicate information on individual student progress. Teachers generate course and assignment-specific rubrics and scoring guides to bring greater clarity to their own expectations for student work, but these rubrics are not deliberately aligned with the school's academic learning expectations. Students would greatly benefit from the use of models or exemplars that clearly show the quality of work required to attain proficiency on each of the school-wide rubrics. Similarly, the staff must develop indicators of successful achievement of the school's civic and social expectations, as at present time, they are not clear or quantifiable for students, and the school must adopt a system to communicate individual and aggregate student achievement of the school's learning expectations to families and the community. In working with the UbD model, the faculty can bring the quality of their classroom assessments to a new level, one where common, performance-based assessments that use the school-wide rubrics are implemented across all departments. In doing so, the school's learning expectations will become even more tangible to all students.

Support of Teaching and Learning at Westford Academy

There is exemplary administrative and teacher leadership at Westford Academy, palpable in the outstanding school climate. There is a tremendous sense of pride, history, and school spirit throughout the building. The principal is a WA graduate who was formerly a teacher and assistant principal at the school and is highly regarded in the community as someone who is deeply committed to the school and its students. His focus on consistent application of school rules has succeeded in creating a respectful and orderly school environment. Teachers, students, and parents also have a voice and role in meaningful decision-making through such vehicles as the school council, faculty council, and the Parent Information Exchange (PIE). Parents also report full satisfaction with the school's efforts to communicate with them actively regarding their children's progress as well as ongoing school activities and programs.

Westford Academy currently employs a traditional, rotating seven-period school schedule where six of the periods meet daily. The schedule should be evaluated and possibly revised as in its present permutation, it does not permit the necessary time for teacher collaboration. Recently added to the schedule has been an "advisory block," which is essentially an activity period, not a formal advisory program where professional staff members use a formal curriculum to guide a small group of students. The school would benefit from such a program although students consistently state that their teachers know them well and work with them to personalize their educational experience. Dedicated staff members can be found working in additional roles as coaches, club advisors, tutors, and mentors. However, as teacher loads and class sizes have increased and preparation time has decreased the staff's ability to work with individual students to personalize educational experiences has been adversely affected. Thus, a formal program that ensures each student a positive relationship with an adult and guidance toward achievement of the school-wide expectations remains a need.

Westford students are served by a dedicated group of student support services staff members. All stakeholders praise the guidance department for the comprehensive curriculum delivered through individual and group meetings, personal, career and college counseling, and student course selection assistance. The health services department provides preventative and direct intervention services, referrals, mandated services, emergency responses, and ongoing student health assessments, often collaborating with health care providers in the region. These departments assist students to meet the school's civic and social expectations.

The library media center supports the WA curriculum by promoting reading, teaching information literacy skills, and facilitating the use of technology and audiovisual equipment. It is a hub of activity and is fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program. The library media specialists and instructional technology specialist are regarded as invaluable resources. With their support, some teachers are starting to use emerging technological tools such as wikis and blogs to enhance their instruction. The school must address the belief that one instructional technology specialist is not sufficient to effectively provide both technology maintenance and training needs of the staff. Additional support is needed if the school is going to continue the use of 21st century technologies to improve the curriculum and instruction.

Westford Academy engages parents and families by effectively communicating with students' families through parent newsletters, the principal's weekly e-mail, a school website, the

monthly Parent Information Exchange, the *Naviance Family Connection* web portal, and the mass calling system, *ConnectEd*. The technological means of communication reflect the value placed on technology. The school maintains an exemplary quality of technology, with both PC and Mac platforms, SMARTBoards, digital projectors, wireless Internet access, and an excellent student to computer ratio of 3.6 to 1. The school also fosters higher education, community, and business partnerships that support students in extending their learning beyond the campus. The larger community of Westford has provided consistent financial support for the school to maintain its high quality of programs and staffing. The school site and plant are spacious, aesthetically pleasing, and enhance all aspects of the educational program. The major building expansion and renovation project of 2000 created a state-of-the-art performing arts center and specialty areas that reflect community pride. The large facility is very clean, well maintained, and in good repair. However, there are concerns that there is not enough custodial staffing to maintain Westford Academy's high standards of cleanliness and maintenance, as some large areas (e.g., the performing arts center and band room) do not have custodians assigned on a daily basis and require custodians to work together before the end of the night shift to clean those areas.

Westford Academy is an outstanding school as a result of dedication and effort on the part of every stakeholder. It is a model educational community that can depend upon continuing efforts leading to continuing success.

Westford Academy School and Community Profile

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 1,580 students is expected to increase over the next several years, and reflects an increase of almost 700 students since the writing of the last School and Community Profile, prepared in 1997. 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 students receive through the Westford Public Schools. According to the 2000 Census, the total population of Westford was 20,754 but recent estimates put the town’s population at approximately 21,500.

The district population is 5,234 students. 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-three Westford students attend Nashoba Valley Vocational and Technical High School. At this time, six school choice (tuition) students attend Westford Academy from surrounding communities. Current grade enrollments in grades 9 through 12 range from 344 in the senior class to 404 in the freshman class. Many personnel are watching and planning for the current seventh grade class which has a projected grade enrollment of 430. Student daily attendance averaged approximately 96.1% during the 2006-07 school year.

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%; service occupations: 7.7%; sales and occupations: 20.1%; farming, fishing, and forestry occupations: 0.1%; construction and maintenance occupations: 5.2%; production, transportation, and material moving occupations: 6.6%. Also, according to the 2000 Census, the educational background of Westford residents (25 years of age or older) reflects the following breakdown: less than ninth grade: 1.6%; 9-12 but no high school diploma: 4.3%; high school diploma, including equivalency: 14.3%; some college, no degree: 14.4%; associate’s degree: 8.2%; bachelor’s degree: 31.9%; graduate or professional degree: 24.9%.

During the 2006-07 school year, two major technology initiatives were launched. One was the “First Class” email server which became the primary email tool for faculty. The other major technology initiative was a change in the student management system, from MacSchool to iPass. Essential information contained in MacSchool was converted into iPass and teachers were trained to navigate the program in order to submit grades, attendance, etc. In the 2007-08 school year, Westford Academy utilizes 141 FTEs (full-time equivalent positions) broken down as follows: administrative: 6; instructional: 110; office/clerical/administrative support: 8; instructional support/shared SPED support: 12. The average annual salary in the Westford School District in 2006 was \$55,558.

Approximately 50% of students earn honors or high honors status each quarter. Students' success (academic, athletic, co-curricular) are recognized through a variety of mediums including but not limited to the National Honor Society reception, Senior Awards Night, Underclassmen Awards Night, Renaissance Program (Caught You Being Good Awards), Athletic Awards Dinners, Student-of-the-Month Program, Principal's Friday Emails, and the Principal's Quarterly Newsletter. Students have over 60 clubs and organizations from which to choose extracurricular involvement, and approximately twelve clubs are in the proposal stage. Student voice is heard through the Dean's Council, Student Council, Student Handbook Committee, 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 reflects that of the adult population in Westford. According to the 2006-07 directory information contained on the Massachusetts Department of Education website, Westford Academy's student population consists of: White: 89.5%; African-American: 0.7%; Asian: 8.9%; Hispanic: 0.4%; Native American: 0.2%; Multi-Racial, Non-Hispanic: 0.3%. 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 was a diversity panel presentation during an advisory block in December, 2007. Students reported this presentation as being particularly meaningful. On another occasion, the faculty had a similar opportunity through a professional development workshop.

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores for all Westford Academy students taking this test have been consistently above the state and national averages. The average SAT score for the class of 2007 was: critical reading, 569; mathematics, 583; writing, 563 compared to the state average of critical reading, 513; mathematics, 522; and writing, 511. Westford Academy prides itself on a comprehensive college counseling program offered by eight guidance counselors, one of who also serves as the grade 6-12 guidance coordinator. College placement statistics for the class of 2007 indicate that 96% of students moved on to further formal education (82% continuing at four-year colleges and universities, and 14% continuing at two-year institutions), 3% went on to employment opportunities, while 1% entered the military or other opportunities.

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores continue to be above the state average for English and mathematics. The mean scaled score for the English/language arts test is 244 and the mean scaled score for math is 254. In Westford, 94% of 10th grade students scored in the advanced or proficient categories in English/language arts (state average was 71%) while 93% scored in the advanced/proficient range for mathematics (state average was 68%). Westford Academy was identified as a Commonwealth Compass School in 2007. This award is given to schools in Massachusetts that have demonstrated continuous improvement.

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 Council, Parent Information Exchange (P.I.E.) meetings, 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, and the *ConnectEd* telephone system which is used in times when a mass-delivery of information is needed.

Individual benefactors, businesses, private groups, and organizations annually contribute significant funds for scholarships as well as for special events sponsored through the school. 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 2007 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.

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, course offerings at regional colleges and universities including the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, Fitchburg State College, Merrimack College, and Middlesex Community College. Westford Academy has participated in a dual enrollment with UMass-Lowell and Middlesex Community College. Westford Academy is also expanding the senior internship program, allowing students to explore career possibilities before their graduation from high school. The "alt-ed" program at WA is designed to customize educational programs for students who need closer attention in a more structured yet relaxed learning atmosphere.

The average household income in Westford, according to the 2000 Census, was \$98,272. Families with incomes below the poverty level account for 1.3% of the population. In 2007 the average cost of an existing home in Westford was \$470,337. 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.

For fiscal year 2006, the integrated per pupil was \$8,923 compared to the state average of \$11,211. 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.

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 are continually offered despite the fact that the school population has almost doubled in the past ten years. The Academy has managed to maintain the feel of a small school environment despite this rapid growth.

Westford Academy Mission Statement

Westford Academy, in collaboration with home and community, provides a safe environment where high expectations advance academic excellence. We are committed to promoting integrity and critical thinking, while fostering tolerance and life-long learning in an ever-changing global society.

Expectations for Student Learning

Students at Westford Academy will:

Academic Expectations:

1. Access information
2. Read effectively for a variety of purposes
3. Think critically and analytically
4. Communicate effectively
 - a) Write
 - b) Speak
 - c) Listen
 - d) Perform/Create

Social Expectations:

- 1) Exhibit respect, honesty, and integrity in all aspects of school life, including curricular, co-curricular, and social activities
- 2) Take responsibility for personal actions and behaviors related to physical, mental and emotional development

Civic Expectations:

- 1) Participate actively in a variety of school and community programs, preparing them to exercise their civic rights, duties, and responsibilities within our global society

COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS
FOR STUDENT LEARNING

CURRICULUM

INSTRUCTION

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT
LEARNING

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

1

MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

The school's mission statement describes the essence of what the school as a community of

4. For each academic expectation in the mission the school shall have a targeted

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

1. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall be developed by the school community and approved and supported by the professional staff, the school board, and any other school-wide governing organization.
2. The school's mission statement shall represent the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning.
3. The school shall define school-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations that:
 - are measurable;
 - reflect the school's mission.

level of successful achievement identified in a rubric.

5. The school shall have indicators by which it assesses the school's progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations.
6. The mission statement and the school's expectations for student learning shall guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and shall be evident in the culture of the school.
7. The school shall review regularly the mission statement and expectations for student learning using a variety of data to ensure that they reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state and national standards.

Conclusions

The mission and expectations for student learning at Westford Academy were developed and approved by faculty members, administrators, students, and school committee members, and are supported by the community. The mission and expectations committee included a diverse range of faculty members, two parents, and one student, but no members of the greater community participated on this committee. Following review and feedback by the entire faculty, the mission was adopted unanimously, first by the staff and then by various constituents of the school and community at large in the spring of 2008. The mission statement is posted throughout the school, printed in official school publications, displayed on the morning announcement broadcasts, and printed on the school's website. The mission statement was communicated to the greater Westford community via local newspapers. Students and staff members easily recite the major tenets of the mission statement such as high expectations, tolerance, integrity, critical thinking, safe environment, and life-long learning. An easy to remember mnemonic, "It's a Ghost," was created to assist in helping the mission become a living document in the school. The Endicott Survey indicated that 92% of staff, 80% of parents, and 100% of the school committee are familiar with the mission statement. As a result of a collaborative process of development and diverse communication procedures, the mission statement and expectations for student learning has become a widely understood and supported document. (Endicott Survey, self-study, teachers)

The Westford Academy Mission Statement accurately represents the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning. Students are able to quote key phrases from the mission statement. They know they are able to take advantage of a wide range of learning opportunities both during and after school as a result of its principles. There is a genuine partnership between the community and the school. Strong parent involvement, attendance at school-wide events, citizens regularly passing budgets, a beautifully renovated facility, and business partnerships all demonstrate widespread support for the mission of Westford Academy. The school is clearly committed to providing rich and varied teaching and learning strategies that both involve and challenge students, support the mission statement, and confirm current practice. High academic standards, a respectful student body, diverse academic opportunities, a strong connection to other countries through trips and exchange programs, many community service opportunities, diverse choices of co-curricular activities, and the school's commitment to a safe and orderly environment are all examples of how the mission statement represents the core values and beliefs. As a result, Westford Academy can be considered a school that actively supports and lives its stated mission and expectations for student learning. (Endicott Survey, self-study, teachers)

Westford Academy has defined its academic, civic, and social expectations that are measurable, but the measurement instruments are not fully developed. The school does have school-wide rubrics that could measure student progress in achieving the academic expectations as defined in the mission statement, but these rubrics are in their early stages of use and are not universally accepted by the faculty nor understood by students. During the 2008-09 school year, each department was assigned responsibility for incorporating a rubric into an existing assignment. Many were common assessments, however, others were not and provided little informative school-wide data as to the student's proficiency relative to each learning expectation. Many teachers used these rubrics in addition to their own course-specific rubrics. The lack of direction and specificity on how to use these rubrics created confusion among faculty members

and students as to the purpose of the school-wide rubrics. Although the school has identified various data to measure the civic and social expectations, these are generally not widely known or understood by school staff and students. It is acknowledged that the school is in the very early stages of the development and implementation of the school-wide academic, civic, and social expectations, however the processes currently in place are not providing the school with any valuable data relative to the implementation of these expectations. (mission committee, observations, student work, teachers)

Westford Academy has developed a set of school-wide rubrics for each of its academic expectations for student learning and has designated “proficient” as the targeted level of successful achievement. However, teachers say that the 4-point analytic rubrics are too generic and do not provide the specificity necessary to provide useful feedback for students and teachers. Teachers report that their course-specific rubrics are much more useful; consequently, they are reluctant to embrace the potential value of school-wide rubrics. Many of the course-specific rubrics used by teachers act more as scoring guides than instructional tools. Surprisingly, the academic expectations or school-wide rubrics are not currently found in any written curriculum documents, although the school and district have been committing substantial time and resources to create new curricular units using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum design process. For the school to fully embrace the potential of school-wide rubrics as a measurement tool of the academic expectations, the rubrics will need to undergo a comprehensive review process and collaborative implementation schedule, possibly requiring professional development. (student work, teachers, observations)

Westford Academy has identified indicators by which it assesses the school’s progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations, but the school community does not fully understand how these expectations are measured or fulfilled. Currently, discipline data is used to measure compliance with the school’s social expectations. The civic expectations are measured through student participation in co-curricular activities and athletics, participation in a variety of programs, or meeting a community service goal. These indicators are insufficient to measure civic and social expectations because they are not required of the entire student body. If a student who does not participate in any of these voluntary activities avoids disciplinary action, the school has no mechanism to know if he/she is meeting the expectations. Likewise, the school has no process in place to collect and use data to measure these indicators. As a result, Westford Academy cannot accurately report the school’s adherence to the stated civic and social expectations nor can it effectively document student understanding of civic and social principles. (self-study, school leadership team, teachers)

The mission statement guides some of the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and is evident in the school’s culture. The high expectations established in the classroom, the respectful and orderly school climate, the culture of tolerance, and the positive professional culture among the faculty and staff are all indicators that Westford Academy is living its mission and expectations for student learning. The recent development of a school honor code is an example of how the mission statement has guided a school policy. The consideration of a community service graduation requirement is an indication that the school is beginning to consider the mission in decision-making and to recognize the need to make accomplishing expectations meaningful for students. The school admits it’s in the early stages of using the mission to guide policies, procedures and decision-making. As the school incorporates the mission as a regular component of school-wide decision-making, it will ensure that the mission

and expectations for student learning will become a prominent guiding force in the direction of Westford Academy. (teachers, student work, standard committee, student handbook, guidance department data)

There has been an initial attempt to review the mission statement using data. The rubrics that students measure meeting the academic expectations are not currently providing useful feedback as to how the school and students are meeting the expectations. The indicators of civic and social expectations do not apply to all students, as the system is now structured, and there is no process in place by which the school is able to compile, analyze, or communicate this data. The school must develop a regular and comprehensive process to review and revise the mission statement based on quantifiable data. Then Westford Academy will be able to understand if they are a mission-driven school. (teachers, standard committee, school leadership team)

Commendations

1. The development of a mission statement that represents the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning
2. The palpable way in which the culture of the school reflects the mission statement and expectations for student learning
3. The process used to communicate the mission statement and expectations for student learning to students and the community
4. The strong partnership established between the school and the home and community
5. The use of the mission statement as a guiding force behind the development of the honor code

Recommendations

1. Include more students, parents, and community members in a regular ongoing review of the mission and expectations for student learning
2. Undergo a comprehensive review process involving all stakeholders to ensure that the school-wide rubrics accurately measure how students are meeting the academic expectations for student learning
3. Provide professional development to faculty and staff members on the development and use of analytic rubrics
4. Incorporate the school's expectations for student learning and the revised school-wide rubrics into stage two of the *Understanding by Design* curriculum template for all courses
5. Review existing indicators that assess the school's progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations to ensure they apply to all students

6. Develop a process to analyze and communicate data on how the school and students are meeting the academic, civic, and social expectations

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

2

CURRICULUM

The curriculum, which includes coursework, co-curricular activities, and other school-approved educational experiences, is the school's formal plan to fulfill its mission statement and expectations for student learning. The curriculum links the school's beliefs, its expectations for student learning, and its instructional practices. The strength of that link is dependent upon the professional staff's commitment to and involvement in a comprehensive, ongoing review of the curriculum.

1. Each curriculum area shall identify those school-wide academic expectations for which it is responsible.
2. The curriculum shall be aligned with the school-wide academic expectations and shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations.
3. The written curriculum shall:
 - prescribe content;
 - integrate relevant school-wide learning expectations;
 - identify course-specific learning goals;
 - suggest instructional strategies;
 - suggest assessment techniques including the use of school-wide rubrics.
4. The curriculum shall engage all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.
5. The curriculum shall:
 - be appropriately integrated;
 - emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.

Conclusions

Westford Academy has recently revised its mission statement which includes school-wide academic expectations. All curriculum areas have identified those academic expectations for student learning for which each has responsibility; however, they are still in the process of including these academic expectations into their written curriculum. School faculty members have recently been creating *Understanding by Design* (UbD) unit plans, but there is no mention of

6. The school shall provide opportunities for all students to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings and the school campus.
7. There shall be effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district.
8. Instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, staffing levels, and the resources of the library/media center shall be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum.
9. The professional staff shall be actively involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations and course-specific learning goals.
10. The school shall commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum.
11. Professional development activities shall support the development and implementation of the curriculum.

the academic expectations nor school-wide rubrics in any of the unit templates. All teachers currently develop written expectations and goals that are shared with students and parents at the beginning of each course, and as reported in the Endicott Survey, 78.3% of teachers says that the curriculum they work with reflects school-wide learning goals and rubrics. All departments are now in the process of matching Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks-based curricula to the school-wide academic expectations and rubrics. As a result, the curriculum supports the values stated in the mission, but these practices need to be incorporated into the written curriculum. (self-study, program of studies, curriculum guides, Endicott Survey, self-study, teachers)

The taught curriculum at Westford Academy is aligned with the school-wide academic expectations, and it ensures that most students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations. The curriculum guides show connections between course content and appropriate state standards. Several curriculum areas offer learning experiences related to each of the school's academic expectations, and each department has created curriculum documents, but many departments have yet to identify and document the learning experiences required to meet these expectations. As a result, all students do not have equal opportunities to achieve the school's academic expectations. (self-study, program of studies, panel presentation, curriculum documents)

The written curriculum documents of Westford Academy successfully articulate course content, identify course-specific learning goals and expectations, and recommend instructional approaches and assessment techniques, however, they do not fully integrate school-wide learning expectations and list school-wide rubrics among assessment techniques in all courses. The curriculum guides have written learning goals for each course including essential questions as part of the UbD format. Although the school has begun the process of implementing school-wide learning expectations, there is insufficient understanding on the part of students and staff members of how these impact student learning. As a result, the written curriculum cannot be used as a guide for student achievement of the school's academic learning expectations. (self-study, curriculum templates, teachers, student work, Endicott Survey)

Westford Academy maintains high academic expectations and therefore offers curriculum that engages all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills and provides opportunities for authentic application of knowledge and skills. Students are engaged in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills in all courses. Examples are found in eighteen advanced placement courses and higher-level math classes offered in conjunction with a local university as well as interactive language labs and classroom dialogue in college preparatory classes. Opportunities for authentic application of knowledge include trips to foreign countries, foreign exchange, applied science labs, business and finance simulations, and the Westford History course which provides students the opportunity to work locally with the Westford Museum and longtime Westford residents. As a result, all students are given the opportunity for authentic application of knowledge. (self-study, panel presentation, parents, teachers, students, observations)

Westford Academy's curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage but is not yet appropriately integrated so students may make interdisciplinary connections. There are opportunities for project-based learning in most courses in many disciplines; in both science and social studies, students are expected to apply authentic knowledge through

performance-based assessments focused on student demonstrations, PowerPoint presentations, and the use of technology. Although the emphasis on depth of understanding is clear, most interdisciplinary studies are currently informal, as teachers must find their own time to collaborate. (self-study, teachers, standard committee, curriculum guides)

Westford Academy offers students numerous opportunities to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings. They can explore personal interests and develop their unique potentials through school-to-career opportunities which include senior internships, job shadowing, and the breakfast colloquium. There are numerous co-curricular activities and consist of orchestra, chorus, theater arts, peer leadership, peer counseling, Cirrus, DECA, Amnesty International, National Honor Society, student government, and student awareness programs. Numerous interscholastic athletic activities are available after school, and there are intramural activities for interested students. The curriculum is expanded through programs such as Virtual High School (VHS), Bridging International Gaps (BIG), dual enrollment at local colleges/universities, and independent study. Many students participate in community service activities throughout all four years. An active student exchange program brings students from different countries to spend a year or a semester at Westford Academy. Opportunities for travel to England, Germany, France, Spain, and Canada are frequent adventures for interested students. The results of the Endicott Survey show that both students and parents agree that Westford Academy successfully offers opportunities to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings and school campus. As a result, large numbers of students take great pride in the relevance of learning and continuing their education outside of the classroom. (self-study, teachers, students, Endicott Survey)

Westford Academy maintains curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district; however, work needs to continue in order to refine this vertical articulation for continuous improvement. Continued communication on the topic of curriculum expectations must continue between central office and district schools in order to provide a systematic connection with the taught curriculum and the school leaders' vision for the school. Curricular scope and sequence should continue to be a priority among the high school and the district schools. (self-study, school committee, standard committee)

The instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and resources of the library/media center are sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum. The library and its resources are adequate to support the curriculum; students use the library regularly as a part of class assignments and during after school hours. In addition to PC and Mac labs in the media center, there are fifteen laptops/presentation carts and forty-eight cross-platform laptops. The integrated technology specialist continually provides support for teachers in curriculum development and technical education. However, the growing demand for her support services suggests that there is a need for additional staffing within the instructional technology area. Teacher loads are currently advantageous, but average class size continues to grow as a result of increases in enrollment. The increase in class sizes at Westford Academy makes it more difficult for teachers to personalize instruction and meet the needs of the students. (self-study, school committee, teachers, observations)

The professional staff is involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on common benchmark assessments (CBAs) of student performance in

achieving the school's academic expectations and course-specific learning goals. Westford Academy effectively utilizes data derived from benchmarks and standardized test results to review and revise curriculum. Academic departments meet after midterm and final exam administration to review the results of each course's CBAs. Results from the Massachusetts Common Assessment System (MCAS) are carefully analyzed to identify areas of improvement and need; however, the school has not yet developed a formal process to use in assessing the student progress of achievement of school-wide academic expectations to produce its own data to use for improvement of curriculum and instruction. (self-study, standard committee, teachers)

Westford Academy is committed to developing, evaluating, and revising its curriculum. Time is allocated for analysis of CBAs, and teachers have opportunities to revise and improve their curriculum through summer curriculum writing workshops. Teachers are also offered courses through the University of Westford, an in-house professional development academy. In addition, paid speakers lead professional development days, and teachers are often given release time to attend one and two-day workshops. The school is in the process of aligning its curriculum through the UbD model, and the administration has committed professional development days for the teaching staff to craft UbD units. The implementation of UbD is an ongoing and, as of yet, incomplete process. As a result, teachers need more time, particularly with common department members, to develop and review curriculum for the full implementation of UbD. (self-study, curriculum documents, standard committee)

Professional development activities provide satisfactory support for the development and implementation of curriculum. Monthly department meetings, three full-day professional development days, four half-day meetings, and activity blocks are all regularly scheduled activities designed for discussion of curriculum. Multiple courses are offered through the University of Westford three times per year, free of charge to teachers. In addition, there are funds available for teachers who attend a course outside the district to be reimbursed for one course a year. There are also opportunities for paid summer curriculum work. A system-wide professional development committee is in place and regularly seeks feedback regarding professional development planning. As a result of these activities and structures, teachers are able to design curriculum that can maximize student learning experiences. (self-study, standard committee, teachers)

Commendations

1. The multiple and varied curricular opportunities for inquiry, problem-solving, higher order thinking, and authentic application of knowledge
2. The adoption of the *Understanding by Design* curriculum design model
3. The variety of curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular offerings that enable many students to extend their learning beyond the campus

4. The resources and support personnel available in the library/media center to enhance the curriculum

Recommendations

1. Continue to maintain time, funding, and support for faculty members to work on the UbD curriculum model
2. Increase the number of educational technology personnel so technology may be appropriately integrated into the curriculum
3. Develop and implement increased opportunities across all content areas for interdisciplinary learning
4. Include the appropriate school-wide academic expectations in all UbD curriculum documents
5. Increase the amount of common planning time for ongoing curriculum development in all departments
6. Improve the curricular coordination and articulation between Westford Academy and all sending schools

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

3

INSTRUCTION

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

1. Instructional strategies shall be consistent with the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning.
2. Instructional strategies shall:
 - personalize instruction;
 - make connections across disciplines;
 - engage students as active learners;
 - engage students as self-directed learners;
 - involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding;
 - provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge or skills;
 - promote student self-assessment and self-reflection.

3. Teachers shall use feedback from a variety of sources including other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents as a means of improving instruction.
4. Teachers shall be expert in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective about their own practices.
5. Discussion of instructional strategies shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.
6. Technology shall be integrated into and supportive of teaching and learning.
7. The school's professional development program shall be guided by identified instructional needs and shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies.
8. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes shall be used to improve instruction for the purposes of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs.

Conclusions:

Westford Academy has recently revised its mission statement and its academic, social, and civic expectations for student learning. The mission statement is posted on the walls in all classrooms, and students and faculty alike are readily able to define the main concepts within the "It's A Ghost!" mnemonic. Visual reminders of the mission statement are the hall of flags and the artwork prominent in the corridors of the school that proclaim the values of community, diversity, honesty, and tolerance. Teachers align their instructional strategies with the school's mission statement and student expectations. For example, in a health/wellness class, a health teacher and a guidance counselor collaborate in teaching various mental health issues and facilitate a discussion of appropriate academic, social, and civic issues. Observations in several other classes confirm that these classes have been taught following the principles of the mission statement and student expectations. (teachers, students, parents, student work,

In many courses and across a variety of subjects, teachers pursue strategies that personalize instruction, make connections across disciplines, and engage students as active learners. Connections across disciplines tend to be informal so that teachers would benefit from more time to share and create interdisciplinary opportunities for students. Several departments have begun to discuss collaboration which will foster interdisciplinary instruction, but this needs to be formalized. Many teachers demonstrate skill and imagination in making their classrooms creative learning environments. Dynamic teaching, open discussion, and healthy debate engage learners in many departments. In other classrooms, teaching is competent but traditional and, at times, not engaging. Teachers themselves recognize this and suggest that teaching can be improved by having more opportunities for collaboration. Further time allocated to inter-departmental and interdisciplinary collaboration is necessary. (teachers, students, parents, student work, observations, curriculum templates)

Teachers use feedback from a variety of sources to guide and improve instruction to a very limited degree. As reported in the Endicott Survey, almost 40% of students polled agrees or strongly agrees that teachers ask for their input to improve class instruction. Seventy-two percent of staff members agrees or strongly agrees that input from supervisors plays an important role in improving their instruction. By contrast, less than 24% of parents reports that teachers seek their input regarding their child's instruction. Westford Academy teachers frequently seek feedback on the value of assignments directly from students. Some teachers occasionally administer year-end course surveys with a view to improving the next year's instruction. Teachers informally share with their colleagues information about the effectiveness of various teaching strategies, but the school must establish a system whereby more time is dedicated to collaboration across disciplines as well as interdepartmentally. In addition, there must be more formal arrangements to solicit feedback from all stakeholders. (parents, teachers, observations, curriculum documents)

Westford Academy teachers are experts in their content areas and are informed about current research on effective instructional approaches, and they take time to reflect on their own practices. Almost 90% of teachers holds advanced degrees; several hold doctorates or are currently engaged in doctoral studies. They impress as serious, self-reflective professionals who strive to find effective strategies to improve both instruction and student learning. They avail themselves of opportunities for further professional development, for example, by taking courses through the University of Westford, delving into "Teachers as Scholars" offerings, and exploring the *Understanding by Design* model of instruction, reflection, and assessment. Teachers express a desire to have more content-based courses easily accessible to them. Teachers reflect on poll results from their students about the efficacy of their own instructional strategies. While this practice is promising, it is not widespread or formal. Additional opportunities for teachers to engage in reflection about their practice are needed. (self-study, teachers, students, standard committee)

At the present time, discussion of various instructional strategies does not play a significant role in the professional concerns of a majority of Westford Academy teachers. Moreover, the current school improvement plan is focused upon curriculum, student learning, and assessment. While these too are understandable, teachers report the need to improve the discourse on instructional strategies within the professional culture of the school. Westford Academy has a number of gifted teachers on its faculty; their creative talents could be used to move the discussion of

instructional strategies forward. By adopting the *Understanding by Design* curriculum design model, the faculty has the opportunity to explore varied instructional strategies but is not maximizing this vehicle. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team, panel presentation)

As befits a school located in a high-tech corridor, Westford Academy values technology and makes extensive use of it in the classroom. Teachers use a wide array of technology in their instruction including SMARTboards, digital cameras, photo editing equipment, digital overhead projectors, laptop computers, graphic calculators, and a language laboratory. Televisions and computers are found in every classroom. Individual faculty members are making use of wikis and podcasts to enhance their instruction. Many departments are currently utilizing software programs like iMovie, Final Cut Pro, and the Microsoft Office suite to enhance instruction. At the moment, there is only one instructional technology specialist in the high school to provide support for the acquisition and use of new technology in the classroom. This is inadequate to meet the instructional needs of a growing high school population. Teachers express a need for updated software and additional staffing to fulfill their requests for in-class use. The one specialist currently on staff cannot adequately support the needs of a faculty of 160. (teachers, students, observations, self-study)

The school's professional development program is guided by identified instructional needs as laid out in the school improvement plan. The school has made a commitment to refining common benchmark assessments, analyzing and using the data from such assessments to drive instruction. They also are making a commitment to adopt the *Understanding by Design* model to strengthen instructional approaches. Teachers express a need to have more content-specific professional development. Further opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies need to continue and be expanded, including more time allocated for collaboration and observation of colleagues. This time should be embedded within the school schedule, possibly through the provision of common planning time. (self-study, teachers, panel presentation, school leadership team)

The current system of supervision and evaluation in place is not adequately and appropriately used to improve instruction with the specific purpose of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs. The administration forthrightly concedes as much. The current evaluation system involves extensive scripting and focuses on teacher actions over student learning. There is currently a committee in place to review the teacher evaluation system so it may be improved. (school leadership team, teachers, administrators)

Commendations

1. Highly qualified and knowledgeable staff committed to a path of continuous improvement
2. Successful integration of technology into instructional practices
3. The adoption of the *Understanding by Design* model which will promote exploration of varied instructional strategies
4. The use of common benchmark assessment data to drive instruction

Recommendations

1. Establish regular and formal procedures for seeking feedback from students, parents, and peers as a means of improving instruction
2. Formalize collaboration among and within disciplines, so all teachers may use instructional strategies that make interdisciplinary connections
3. Develop a plan to ensure that instructional practices in all classes make connections across disciplines, engage students as active learners, engage students as self-directed learners, involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding, provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills, and promote student self-assessment and self-reflection
4. Design and implement a teacher supervision and evaluation system that improves student learning
5. Create formal structures embedded within the school schedule so discussion of instructional strategies becomes a significant part of the culture of the school

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

4

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Its purpose is to inform students regarding their learning progress and teachers regarding ways to adjust the curriculum and instruction to respond effectively to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates to the school community the progress of students in achieving the school's expectations for student learning and course-specific learning goals. Assessment results must be continually discussed to

6. Teachers shall meet collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessments for the purposes of revising the curriculum and improving instructional strategies.
7. The school's professional development program shall provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad

improve curriculum and instruction.

1. The school shall have a process to assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations in the mission based on school-wide rubrics.
2. The school's professional staff shall use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its civic and social expectations.
3. For each learning activity, teachers shall clarify to students the relevant school-wide academic expectations and course-specific learning goals that will be assessed.
4. Teachers shall base classroom assessment of student learning on school-wide and course-specific rubrics.
5. Teachers shall use varied assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.

range of student assessment strategies.

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

Conclusions:

Westford Academy has in place a process to assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving academic expectations expressed in the mission statement. School-wide rubrics designed to address academic expectations are a new part of the school culture. Seven school-wide analytic rubrics have recently been put into place to measure the success of student achievement of each of the academic learning expectations. Each department was given one of the seven rubrics to determine the level of student achievement for a specific expectation. Data collection, based on the pilot implementation of the school-wide rubrics, must be established to determine future direction of school-wide rubric use. Possibly, professional development for all teachers in the use of rubrics and their data and after due consideration, a revision of the rubrics, appears to be necessary to their implementation school-wide. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers)

Civic and social expectations are also addressed in the student expectations based on the mission statement. Westford Academy assesses the success of the school in achieving its civic expectations by encouraging students to complete a minimum of 40 hours of community service before graduation, but this is not a formal graduation requirement. Students are encouraged to complete community service forms and the guidance department will maintain forms in student individual folders in the guidance office. Several civic organizations (e.g. Amnesty

International, Westford Pride, the community service team, and student council) have a civic element as part of their goals. Westford Academy recognizes that a civic expectation such as community service is an integral part of student expectations, but there is currently no measure or indicator of how well all students are meeting the social and civic expectations. Although social expectations are part of the expectation for student learning, there is no established way of measuring achievement of meeting these expectations. Thus students have no clear indication of what they must do or the level of achievement they must attain in order to meet the school's civic and social expectations. (students, teachers, self-study)

School-wide academic expectations and course-specific learning goals are communicated to the students. Course expectations sheets, syllabi, and class assessment measurements are given to students at the beginning of the course. Teacher-made rubrics and numerical grading scales are also distributed to students in relation to specific assignments. Through the use of teacher-created rubrics, assessments clearly indicate to the student the level of performance needed to succeed. Assessment-specific learning goals are not always in alignment with the school-wide academic expectations, however, the faculty needs to develop a process by which classroom assessments are deliberately aligned with the school-wide academic expectations by collegial discussion on an interdepartmental scale. (teachers, students, self-study survey)

Both school-wide and course-specific rubrics are used for major assignments (e.g. midterm and final exams, practicum assignments, research papers, essays, and projects). Most teachers have created individual rubrics that they perceive as reflective of the expectations for student learning; however, many of these are merely checklists or numerical grading scales and do not contain specific criteria and illustrative indicators of performance. Westford Academy uses midterm and final exams as common benchmark assessments, as considerable work has been done in this in recent years. Unit templates to reach common benchmarks are in the beginning stages of creation through the district-wide initiative of using the *Understanding by Design* curriculum design model. This is a promising first step in improving the implementation of the school-wide rubrics that measure student progress in achieving the school's academic expectations. There is very little use of student work as exemplars to delineate the different levels of performance in the school-wide rubrics. The faculty and administrators need to work to refine common benchmarks and relate them to the school-wide expectations and rubrics. (self-study, standard committee, teachers, student work)

Westford Academy employs a diversity of assignments to measure the academic success of students. Academic success is measured by traditional forms (pen and paper assignments, tests, and research projects), creative forms (posters, collages, and theatrical performances), and technology-based forms (graphic communications, videos, and visual presentations). Teachers are providing critical analysis and higher-level thinking skills through the use of journals, musical compositions, design challenges, and scientific analyses. Through these varied means, teachers are effectively measuring student competency and growth over time. (teachers, students, parents, student work)

Student work is shared among colleagues for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional strategies. This is not common practice throughout the school and often happens informally. Even though there are formal monthly department meetings, faculty members often find themselves planning, assessing, analyzing, and revamping curriculum outside of school hours. Informal discussions take place between classes, after school, during advisory

blocks, during personal time, and through e-mail, to discuss content, teaching strategies, and assessments of learning. The school has been able to schedule a small group of teachers with similar planning times. This limited structured time does not provide sufficient opportunity for teachers to work together as a cohesive unit. (teachers, self-study, school leadership team)

Westford Academy has provided only minimal professional training in the area of assessment. Professional development on the *Understanding by Design* model has focused on what teachers see as the underlying goal of student learning and how to effectively assess this knowledge, but UbD unit implementation is in the infancy stage. Westford Academy has in place three professional days, two previous to school's start and one midyear. The school also has four half-day professional development days throughout the school year. According to the Endicott Survey, only 49% of faculty members agrees that the current professional development program provides opportunities to collaborate with other teachers in developing a broad range of student assessments. Furthermore, the current professional development plan does not detail how teachers may have additional time to collaborate to improve their assessments. Thus, more time is needed for teachers to align high quality assessments with the school-wide learning expectations and rubrics. (teachers, self-study, school leadership team)

Westford Academy has collected data on the school-wide academic expectations (e.g., school-wide rubric report, average SAT scores for graduating classes, MCAS scores in English language arts, mathematics, and science/technology), negative social expectations activities (in-school vs. out-of-school suspension and discipline trends), and civic expectations (involvement in co-curricular activities and athletics, participation in senior internship programs, job shadow program, breakfast colloquium, and community service). Although data has been collected, the school's professional staff has not developed and implemented a system to effectively assess and communicate individual progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to students and their families and the school's progress achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community. This process must be developed and implemented as soon as possible. (parents, teachers, self-study)

Commendations

1. The variety of assessment strategies used to measure student achievement
2. The development and implementation of midterm and final exams as common benchmark assessments

Recommendations

1. Develop and implement course-specific rubrics that are in alignment with the school-wide academic rubrics
2. Develop a process based on data from the identified indicators to assess the school in achieving its social and social student expectations
3. Develop models/ exemplars of student work to assist student understanding of the four indicators of performance as contained each of the school-wide rubrics

4. Provide ample departmental time for faculty members to develop common assessments that use the school-wide rubrics
5. Develop and implement a system to effectively communicate individual progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to students and their families and the school's progress achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community

SUPPORT STANDARDS

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

SUPPORT STANDARD

5

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

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

1. The school board and superintendent shall ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning.
2. The principal shall provide leadership in the school community by creating and maintaining a shared vision, direction, and focus for student learning.
3. Teachers as well as administrators other than the principal shall provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school.
7. Meaningful roles in the decision-making process shall be accorded to students, parents, and all members of the school staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
8. Each teacher shall have a student load that enables the teacher to meet the learning needs of individual students.
9. There shall be a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning.
10. The professional staff shall collaborate within and across departments in support of learning for all students.

4. The organization of the school and its educational programs shall promote the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
5. Student grouping patterns shall reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
6. The schedule shall be driven by the school's mission and expectations for student learning and shall support the effective implementation of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
11. All school staff shall be involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.
12. Student success shall be regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed.
13. The climate of the school shall be safe, positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.
14. The school board shall support the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

Conclusions

The principal of Westford Academy has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning. The school committee clearly understands its role and is committed to providing full support for the principal as the primary decision-maker of the school. The superintendent, as well as other district-wide personnel, express confidence in the principal's ability to lead the school and provide a vision for the school community that allows it to achieve its mission and expectations for student learning. The principal, working in concert with the school leadership team and the school council, is given the freedom to construct a budget and school improvement plan based on identified needs. Each year the principal and school council present an improvement plan to the school committee that is consistent with the Massachusetts Education Reform Act as well as district and school goals. The school committee may provide some feedback on the plan but does not attempt to interfere with identified school needs and routinely votes to accept the plan. The principal also has the authority to request funding from the Westford Academy Board of Trustees. A new sound system for the performing arts center and the purchase of mobile computer presentation carts were funded by the trustees in recent years. As a result of being provided ample authority in decision-making by the school committee and superintendent, the principal is able to provide leadership for Westford Academy that enables the school to strive towards achieving its mission and expectations for learning. (central office administrators, school committee, self-study, parents)

The principal provides exemplary leadership by creating and maintaining a shared vision, direction, and focus on student learning. The current principal is a Westford Academy graduate and former teacher and assistant principal. He is regarded by the school community as someone who cares deeply for the school and its students. His visibility and approachable style allow students easy access when needed. His focus on the consistent application of school rules has helped create a respectful and orderly learning environment. He regularly shares his short-term goals for the school at the start of the academic year. A longer range vision, titled *Where Do I See Westford Academy Five Years From Now*, has been shared with the faculty and staff and includes several school improvement initiatives such as collaboration between disciplines,

an improved schedule, community service, internships, school-to-career programming, higher test scores, continued athletic success, a fine arts graduation requirement, expanded co-curricular options increasing student participation, continued successful performing arts programs, expanded college options for graduates, expanded summer offerings, and programs designed to improve student decision-making. The inclusion of 21st century skills and a greater focus on student learning will also strengthen this vision. The principal effectively communicates his vision through a variety of methods, including weekly e-mails and quarterly newsletters. He develops a shared vision through the administrative advisory council (AAC), a building-based leadership team consisting of building administrators and curriculum coordinators. This provides a vehicle to consistently implement district and school initiatives. The Parent Informational Exchange (PIE) allows an opportunity for the principal and parents to share concerns and questions. As a result of the principal's accessibility, collaborative leadership style, and communication procedures, he has created a shared vision for Westford Academy that is well known by others and will serve to help the school fulfill its mission and set the stage for continuous school improvement in the next five years. (standard committee, students, parents, self-study)

Teachers and administrators other than the principal provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school, but additional collaboration is needed among the sending schools and the high school to move toward continuous improvement. The assistant principal, a relatively new position, and two deans work with the principal and faculty in providing an excellent learning environment at Westford Academy. The school explicitly defines the specific roles of each of the administrators, but it is clear they work collaboratively. Their visibility and accessibility throughout the building is both noted and appreciated by staff. Teachers and other staff members contribute to the positive school culture through their leadership in the classroom, their dedication to their students, and their overall focus on high academic expectations. Grade 6-12 curriculum coordinators serve as a vital link between school and district administration and the teachers, however, some flaws exist. School leaders (principals, curriculum coordinators, and the central office administration) need to work cohesively in order to provide system-wide improvements. Improving collaboration will allow school leaders to implement substantive school improvement initiatives. The curriculum leadership structure needs to encourage and support a shared community of practice. The combination of fine arts and physical education into one leadership position, a recent addition to the school, gives neither department the representation and status deserved when compared to other departments. Consideration should be given to the creation of two positions in order to provide the appropriate support for the two departments. Because instruction in this school is noted for its inconsistency between and within departments, a comprehensive review of this curriculum leadership structure is needed. Although Westford Academy does present a shared leadership model and certainly can point to school improvement initiatives that have resulted from this, real school improvement with a focus on a shared understanding of good curriculum and instructional practice must be studied and implemented and necessary changes made. (students, sending school personnel, central office administrators, student work, observations)

The organization of the school and its educational programs attempt to promote the schools mission and expectations for student learning. Although the school has a medium to large size student population, the school and its staff go to great lengths to personalize the educational experience for students. Students feel physically and emotionally safe as well as connected to adults in this school. The one critical area of attention remains the curriculum leadership

structure. For the school to fully achieve its mission and expectations for student learning “in an ever-changing global society”, there must be a universally shared understanding of how to promote academic excellence in the 21st century, as well as an acceptance of the assessment tools that measure student achievement of the mission and expectations for student learning. Although Westford Academy will likely continue to be a very high performing school in the future, failure to address these organizational issues may cause the school to fall short of its promise as an exceptional model of 21st century educational practice. (panel presentation, facility tour, students, parents)

Although student grouping patterns reflect the limited diversity of the student body, it is not clear that they have fostered heterogeneity. Except for some elective courses and the unlevleed grade 9 social studies, Westford Academy maintains four levels of ability grouping; advanced placement, honors, college prep I, and college prep II. The last two levels have been combined to form a level for students with a wide degree of motivation and learning needs. The combination of these two levels appears to have grown out of a need to manage students with unacceptable behaviors by separating them out and also to eliminate costly small classes. Although the school is quick to point out they do not track and that movement of students within levels is both allowed and encouraged, there is a system of student placement criteria for the purpose of ability grouping. A course recommendation override process is in place and is successfully used by students and parents, but even though this may serve to allow student access to higher level courses, it may also serve as a hindrance to some who simply may not want to bother with the process. Although there is an inclusion policy and inclusion of special education students does take place, there is only one course where there is co-teaching between regular educators and special educators. Formal intervention strategies for regular education students are in the early planning stages but are not likely to have any significant impact in the next few years. Despite grouping patterns that are grounded more in a belief system than in educational research, Westford Academy can rightly and proudly point to exceptional results on test scores for its school and students. If Westford Academy is committed to fulfilling its mission of high expectations and academic excellence for all students, however, a comprehensive review of these traditional grouping patterns and focused professional development in differentiated instruction may serve to bring the school more in line with current educational research and best practices and may equitably serve more students. (students, teachers, standard committee, central office administrators)

The schedule inconsistently supports the implementation of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. A new schedule was instituted five years ago, when an eight-period schedule was reduced to a seven-period rotating schedule, with one period dropped per day. This allowed for one 74-minute extended block to meet the stated purpose of lab time, computer usage, differentiated instruction, and additional time on learning. Teachers, however, report that the primary reason for this change was to add a 4th lunch to accommodate a growing population and avoid fire code violations in the cafeteria. Although there is reported value to the new extended block and rotation, teachers find the new schedule to be more fast paced than the old one, to offer fewer preparation periods, to reduce science lab time, and to restrict time for inter and intra departmental common planning time. An advisory block was recently added for the expressed purpose of helping to “slow the day down” and be able to meet a variety of needs. This is not an advisory block in the true sense of the word as there is no formal advisory program at Westford Academy. Rather, scheduled once per month, this time operates as an activity block and accommodates targeted assemblies and class meetings, opportunities for

students to access teachers and guidance counselors, and flexibility to meet other school needs. Some departments are also able to carve out meeting time. Because the schedule does not currently incorporate formal common planning time, the school is not able to fully implement its curriculum, instruction and assessment in a consistent manner within and across departments. (self-study, students, teachers, school administrators, standard committee)

Meaningful roles in decision-making are afforded to students, parents, and all members of the school staff promoting an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership. Students and parents are afforded formal roles in decision-making through the school council. The administration is visible and approachable, allowing ready access for students to voice concerns. Students also report the guidance department as a means to raise issues. Parents are kept connected to the school through the principals' weekly e-mail and quarterly newsletter, the school's website, *Naviance*, *PIE*, and parent-teacher conferences. Parents report easy access to teachers through the use of e-mail. Teachers and other staff members believe their input is valued. The Endicott Survey indicates that 69% of teachers feels they have input into school decision-making. A faculty council works with the administration on issues of interest to the faculty. The development of a school honor code is an example of a school initiative that began at the faculty level. Although teachers generally feel their opinion is welcomed, there has been concern raised over lack of input to district-wide initiatives such as common assessments, UbD, and professional development. This may attest to some reluctance to openly accept these valuable school improvement initiatives. As a result of good communication procedures in place, as well as administrations' open-door policy, students, parents, and all members of the school staff are afforded opportunities to voice opinions and concerns, creating a feeling of collective ownership at Westford Academy. (self-study, Endicott Survey, parents, students, standard committee)

Some of the teaching staff reports that their teaching load enables them to provide attention to the needs of individual students. The results of the Endicott Survey reveal that 46% of the staff feels they have sufficient time to address individual student needs in all of their classes. There is concern, especially on the part of foreign language and some elective teachers, that class size is growing as a result of budget constraints and an increase in student enrollment. While the average class size is 23 students, some classes are presently in the range of 27-28 students. The administration works with the dean's council, the school committee, and the curriculum coordinators to make informed decisions concerning the equity of teacher load and class size. These advisory committees seek teacher preference and thereby represent the voice of the staff. It is the perception of the teachers that complete equity is difficult. Teachers agree to take on more than two different class preparations through conversations with curriculum coordinators regarding course offerings and instruction preference. The administrator in charge of duties facilitates the equity of these responsibilities as well as release when possible. The IPASS attendance system provides teachers an efficient tool to communicate the needs of students to administrators. Inclusion classes with students on education plans are taught with the collaboration of a special education liaison who facilitates accommodations to instruction and assessment. A task committee is being formed to review the current schedule and research other models. As a result of the newly modified seven-period schedule, teachers of courses with large class sizes report they have less time to do all the things necessary and are spending more time teaching and less time preparing and communicating to parents. (teachers, students, observations, school leadership team, self-study, panel presentation)

Students state that the teachers know them well, work with them to personalize their educational experience, and assist them in understanding the school-wide expectations for student learning. Teachers are consistently available before and after school for mentoring and tutoring. This relationship extends beyond graduation as alumni come back seeking post-secondary college and career advice. Many of the staff members are involved as advisors in the various sports teams, co-curricular activities, and clubs the school community has established. The school's advisory block is advisory in name only and is mostly used as an activity period. Teachers are assigned a homeroom of students for this block of time. Teacher load, class size, and shortened preparation time have negatively impacted the teachers' ability to work with individual students to personalize educational experiences. There is a lack of focus and structure to the advisory block so that this is a missed opportunity for every student to benefit from a one-on-one relationship with an adult other than the counselor to ensure achievement of school-wide expectations. (students, alumni, parents, teachers, school leadership)

A professional culture does exist in support of student learning, but the professional staff is afforded minimal opportunity to formally collaborate within and across departments. Direct collaboration among staff members is limited to work done in support of the inclusion classes, the professional development of the UbD initiative, and the on-going work of the re-accreditation process. Special education and content teachers meet to plan and adapt lessons. A pilot course of adapted biology was created over this past summer by a science teacher and a special education teacher. This course is being taught using a true co-teaching model. It is the goal of the school to adopt this model for other inclusion courses as well. Through the work of the leadership team, department and faculty meetings have shifted to a seminar model to provide opportunity for collaboration and communication about student learning and well-being. A formal collaborative time period within the school schedule would provide the faculty with the opportunity to plan interdisciplinary units as well as to adequately consider student and school needs. (teachers, school leadership team, self-study)

All faculty and staff members are genuinely concerned with the well-being and learning of students. Teachers, support staff members, administrators, and custodians and cafeteria staff members present a dedication to their roles in support of the students. The guidance counselors have implemented a program, the *Guidance Speaker*, that teaches character and decision-making skills acquisition. This work is done in the advisory block as well as through student work with the health education courses. Both crisis response and student assistance teams are in operation to serve the need of the students for safety and support. The administrative assistants act in the capacity of mentors and support for individual students. Students are allowed to visit the cafeteria between classes during the morning to get breakfast. The multitude of co-curricular and sports activities offered are fundamental to their sustained well-being. Accordingly, these allow opportunities for students to participate in a number of social, academic, and physical pursuits. As a result of the school staff's commitment to student well-being, Westford Academy has a warm and welcoming environment where students feel safe and supported. (students, parents, teachers, support staff, school leadership team, counselors, self-study)

Student success is regularly celebrated, acknowledged, and proudly displayed within and around the school community. Visual displays of outstanding art work created by the students adorn the hallways. In addition, there are photographic displays of students performing in sporting events, performing arts, academic challenges, and competitions. Students of the month in four different categories (academic, co-curricular, athletic, and special recognition) are posted

proudly. The cable access channel, the school's internal TV station, the Westford Academy website, the *Ghost Writer* (school newspaper), and the *Westford Eagle* regularly showcase and celebrate athletics, the theater arts, and the choir, band and orchestral programs. Appendix A of the *Town Report* summarizes and highlights accomplishments from Westford Academy including the National Merit Scholars as well as athletic, music, fine arts, and theater arts achievements. Coursework accomplishments are displayed within classrooms and utilized as exemplars and models, and other academic achievements are recognized by the school leaders in addition to through the student of the month program. These recognition conduits arouse an obvious sense of pride for success and achievement. (observations, facility tour, students, teachers, parents, self-study, school newspaper, *Westford Eagle*)

Westford Academy is a welcoming and safe school environment characterized by a culture of tolerance and respect. The students gain from open and supportive relationships with their peers, support staff, teachers, counselors, and administrators. They report feeling safe to ask for help and offer ideas in class as well as during co-curricular activities and athletic programs. Students and staff members regularly celebrate and praise each others' work and accomplishments. Students are encouraged and, as a consequence, do actively participate in leadership, responsibility, citizenship and community service activities through clubs and organizations such as class officers, the dean's council, National Honor Society, the Gay Straight Alliance, Amnesty International, and S.A.D.D. (Students Against Destructive Decisions). The rules of conduct are described by the students as fair and applied with equity and consistency. Students report the rarity with which their peers break rules or have conflict. Peer mediation is an established practice and is conducted through the guidance staff and the school social worker. The Westford Academy Code of Conduct is structured around the concepts of respect, responsibility, communication, and involvement. This positive and supportive climate results in a feeling of comfort and safety as well as a sense of ownership and pride among the students, staff members, and parents. (students, teachers, school leadership team, parents, student handbook)

The school committee supports the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning. Results of the Endicott Survey report that 100% of the board members is aware of and feel they had input in the school's mission. The vision and core values of the district, which are approved and supported by the committee, reflect the key components of the school's philosophy. The promotion of academic excellence, responsible citizenship, and mutual respect are common threads of the district and the academy. Programs developed to support the academic, social, and civic expectations of students are presented to and supported by the board. Approval of the budget, field trips, and the handbook, each of which is aligned with the mission and expectations, are functions of the board. The decisions and directives of the school committee, therefore, advance positive working relationships among the school leadership, the district, and the board. (school committee, school administrators, self-study, Endicott Survey)

Commendations

1. The school committee and superintendent's support for the principal's leadership in guiding the school toward its stated mission and expectations for student learning

2. The principal's dedicated leadership in creating an exemplary teaching and learning environment for students and staff members
3. The principal's clearly articulated vision statement that provides a five-year blueprint for the continued improvement of Westford Academy as a high performing school
4. The faculty and staff for their efforts to create a personalized learning environment for students
5. The successful use of strategies to include all stakeholders in a shared ownership of school-wide decisions
6. The extensive involvement of the staff members on committees and in the role of advisors and coaches
7. The positive, supportive, safe, and respectful culture of the school community
8. The tremendous sense of history, pride, and school spirit celebrated and showcased

Recommendations

1. Develop a shared vision with an emphasis on student learning and the inclusion of 21st century skills into the curriculum to meet the goal of "life-long learning in an ever-changing global society"
2. Examine the current model of curriculum leadership in order to provide continuous improvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment within the high school and the two sending schools
3. Assess student grouping practices in light of educational research to ensure all students have access to challenging and rigorous coursework
4. Increase the current co-teaching model so that more special education students have access to fully supported inclusive classes
5. Evaluate the current schedule to ensure all impediments to common planning are removed and address the inequity in teacher load and class size
6. Evaluate the purpose of the advisory block and initiate a plan for utilizing the time for more meaningful relationship building and mentoring between staff and students
7. Create formal structures so that professional staff members may collaborate within and across departments in support of learning of all students

SUPPORT STANDARD

6

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

Student learning and well-being are dependent upon adequate and appropriate support programs and services. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of integrated resources to enhance and improve student learning and well-being and to support the school's mission and expectations.

All Student Support Services

1. The school's student support services shall be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
2. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.
3. Student support personnel shall enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and by utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.
4. All student support services shall be regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning.
5. There shall be a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel,

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

Guidance Services

8. The school shall provide a full range of comprehensive guidance services, including:
 - individual and group meetings with counseling personnel;
 - personal, career, and college counseling;
 - student course selection assistance;
 - collaborative outreach to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers;
 - appropriate support in the delivery of special education services for students.

Health Services

9. The school's health services shall provide:
 - preventive health services and direct intervention services;
 - appropriate referrals;
 - mandated services;
 - emergency response mechanisms;

designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and identified student needs.

- ongoing student health assessments.

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

SUPPORT STANDARD

6

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

Library Information Services

10. The library/information services program and materials shall be fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program.
11. Library/information services personnel shall be knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation.
12. A wide range of materials, technologies, and other library/information services that are responsive to the school's student population shall be available to students and faculty and utilized to improve teaching and learning.
13. Students, faculty, and support staff shall have regular and frequent access to library/information services, facilities, and programs as an integral part of their educational experience before, during, and after the school day.
14. The library/information services program shall foster independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty to use various school and community information resources and technologies.
15. Policies shall be in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of

technologies and the Internet.

Special Education Services

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

Conclusions

Westford Academy's support services are provided through the efforts of a dedicated staff that is guided by the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning. The guidance department recommends a comprehensive course of study enabling all students to meet expectations for reading, thinking, and communication and has a curriculum in place that is executed during the advisory blocks and health classes. However, the guidance staff feels additional time is needed. The library media department has grade 9-12 benchmarks for information skills as well as technology skills. The information technology specialist is a dedicated professional who embeds the district's grade 9-12 technology benchmarks through project-based collaboration with teachers. The nurses communicate to staff members the special concerns of individual students. Special education teachers ensure that students they serve are able to work to their full potential in all expectations for student learning. Through these varied structures and practices, the Westford Academy support staff is guided by the school mission and expectations. (self-study, students, parents, teachers, administrators)

Westford Academy allocates resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for student learning. Westford Academy offers a wide range of course offerings for various academic levels and interests. During freshman year, all students are enrolled in a health education class that encourages healthy habits and positive decision-making skills. During senior year, students may opt to do a senior project or take part in an internship during their final term at Westford Academy. Students needing extra help can utilize the academic development center with a referral from guidance. A dual enrollment program is in place so students are able to take courses through the University of Massachusetts-Lowell or Middlesex Community College. There is an alternative education program to provide services to at risk students. With over 20,000 books and non-print items, the library provides sufficient materials for academic success. There are a several clubs and sports for students to participate in before or after school. Through a variety of resources, programs, and services available at the school, Westford Academy provides ample opportunities for students to achieve the school's learning expectations. (students, teachers, parents, self-study)

Westford Academy's personnel enhance student learning by working cooperatively with professional and other staff members and utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students. The school has a close relationship with town departments such as the police, fire, library, and town offices. The town provides CPR and AED training to Westford Academy staff members. Students, staff, and the community come together during events like the breakfast colloquium and through the Westford Academy Volunteers for the Elderly (WAVE). Support staff members reach out to all departments through various programs. The guidance department arranges many of the

advisory block activities. The school nurses also utilize the advisory periods to conduct health instruction and mandated screenings. Instruction to staff members on such topics such as Epipen administration takes place during staff meetings. Westford Academy's support staff works cooperatively with all faculty members and the community and succeeds at meeting this expectation. (administrators, teachers, library media specialists, instructional technology specialist, guidance, self-study)

Westford Academy's support services are regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning. The guidance staff meets weekly with the guidance coordinator to discuss programs and student issues. They also gather feedback from students, staff, and parents on various programs and have used some to shape the presentations offered during advisory days. Policies and procedures related to the health services have been reviewed by the school physician and school committee. The library media department has an updated five-year plan on file with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, as well as a technology plan on file with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Every three years, the special education department is audited by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Through these evaluation procedures, the school's support services are consistently reviewed and revised to best meet student needs. (guidance, library media specialist, instructional technology specialist)

Westford Academy has a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available support services and identified student needs. Guidance counselors play a key role to ensure that students and parents are aware of all available support services both within the school and outside the community. Particularly noteworthy is the utilization of the *Naviance Family Connection*, a web-based portal that allows counselors to effectively communicate with students and their parents about upcoming deadlines and notices of guidance activities and the college application process. Technology also contributes to the ongoing communication through the principal's e-mails and newsletters, teacher webpages, and the mass-calling system, *ConnectEd*. Within the school, there is constant exchange and communication of information regarding individual student needs among support staff, faculty members, and administrators. (self-study, parents, school support staff, students)

At Westford Academy, all student records including health and immunization records are maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state laws. Students' permanent records are maintained within the guidance suite where they are in locked file cabinets. A system is in place where an administrative assistant monitors all records when they are removed from cabinets for meetings and consultation. Health records are maintained in locked files within the nurse's office. The two school nurses are responsible to ensure that these are kept in accordance with state and federal regulations. Special education records are housed in the locked file cabinets of the student's liaison. These records are stored electronically using the program ESPED, which is a web-based portal that stores individual education plans (IEPs). All electronic files are password protected. (self-study, school support staff, teachers)

At Westford Academy there are sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff members who provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library/media services, although the position of district-wide director of educational technology and

information services was eliminated at the start of the 2009-10 school year. The school's student to counselor ratio is 210:1 while student to librarian ratio is 811:1, and the nursing ratio is 811:1. The one instructional technology specialist provides technology service to the 1,621 students and 150 staff members. Numerous stakeholders feel that another instructional technology specialist is needed to assist with technology integration. Westford Academy employs a full-time social worker and a .6 FTE adjustment counselor who is also utilized in a .4 FTE teaching role in the alternative education program. (panel presentation, self-study, school support staff)

The Westford Academy Guidance Department provides a full range of comprehensive guidance services including individual and group meetings, personal, career, and college counseling, and student course selection assistance. The department is professionally staffed by seven guidance counselors, a grade 6-12 guidance coordinator, a school social worker, and a part-time adjustment counselor. Staff members meet with students in large group, classroom, and individual settings, delivering a comprehensive developmental guidance curriculum based upon the Massachusetts School Counselors Association (MASCA) model. The topics vary from year to year but all address students' academic, career/college, and personal/social development. Collaborative outreach to community and area mental health and social service providers as well as appropriate support in the delivery of special education services is also provided to students. As a result of this programming, the students are provided assistance in meeting the school's social and civic expectations. (self-study, parents, students, teachers)

The school's health services department provides preventive health services and direct intervention services, appropriate referrals, mandated services, emergency response mechanisms, and on-going student health assessments. A full-time athletic trainer serves the school's athletes. The school nurses collaborate with the Hadassah Organization and local physicians to offer the "Check It Out Program", a health awareness program for teens that promotes breast and testicular self-examination and also healthy life choices and self-esteem. This program is a highlight of Westford Academy's proactive approach to best serve the students' mental and physical health needs. (self-study, students, school support staff)

Westford Academy's library/information services program and materials are fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program. The library's collection of materials, available technology, and instructional programs are instrumental in helping students achieve academically. The library media specialists function as a cohesive department and use the consultative model to integrate information skills and technology into all curricular areas. They plan, teach, and assess with subject area teachers. There is a system in place where teachers can sign up to bring their classes to the library to take advantage of the two computer labs, television production studio, or library resources. Last school year, over 1,200 classes utilized the library and another 400 took advantage of the technology services. As a result of a well-rounded library collection and available technology, the library media center succeeds in meeting the academic needs of students. (library media specialist, self-study, instructional technology specialist, teachers)

Library/information services at Westford Academy are provided through personnel who are knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation. The library media specialists and the technology staff offer professional development to staff members. They are always ready to assist students and staff during the school day, as well as before and after school and beyond the school day through e-mail and information available on the website.

The library is part of the Metrowest Regional Library System which provides additional databases to the school as well as professional development opportunities for the library media specialists. The library media specialists are members of professional organizations and take part in conferences. Students and staff are able to make suggestions for library materials through a suggestion link on the library website. The Endicott Survey indicates that 97.4 % of the staff feels that the library/information personnel are knowledgeable and help to support the implementation of the curriculum. (self-study, teachers, self-study survey, parents)

Westford Academy provides a wide range of materials, technologies, and other library/information services that are responsive to the school's student population and are readily available to students and faculty members to improve teaching and learning. The library offers a core collection of diverse, age-appropriate materials that are aligned with the state frameworks and Westford Academy's Program of Studies. In addition, the library collection has an exemplary reference section and a collection of materials that support a variety of learning styles. By serving on the district-based curriculum task committees and the administrative advisory council, the library/information staff is consistently aware of new course offerings and changes in the curriculum. (self-study, instructional technology specialist, library media specialist)

Students, faculty, and support staff have regular and frequent access to library/information services, facilities, and programs before, during, and after the school day. The Wright Library at Westford Academy is located central to core academic areas. The process for signing up for library and/or computer labs is clear. With a pass from a teacher, students may visit the library before and after school and during the school day for independent research. The library offers extended after school hours Monday-Thursday until 4:00 pm. While the library media specialist is full-time, the library aide who supervises the extended hours is only a part-time stipend position. Consequently, there are times while the library media specialist is teaching information literacy skills to students there is no coverage at the library media center desk. Thus, student and teacher inquiries go unanswered, materials cannot be checked out, and problems cannot be addressed. This staffing gap should be addressed so there is consistent coverage. In the Endicott Survey, 85.9% of the students reports that the school library is available to them before and after school, thus indicating that regular access to the library media center is the norm. (students, parents, teachers, library/information staff, Endicott Survey)

The library/information services program fosters independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty members to use various school and community information resources and technologies. The library/information staff offers several guides explaining how to use a variety of library/information services, from accessing the database from home to using the web portal for work submission, *Turnitin.com*. Freshmen take part in a freshmen orientation program that provides them with an overview of the library/information services. Students are able to come to the library during their directed learning time in order to utilize library resources and to complete projects. Students can also sign up to use the television production studio. This variety of resources provided by the library/information services at Westford Academy helps to foster independent inquiry. (self-study, teachers, students, parents, library media specialists)

Policies are in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet. There is an up-to-date selection and weeding policy that has

been approved by the school committee and is used by the library media specialist for the purchase of new materials. A district-wide acceptable use policy is in place, and each year, all students sign off on a statement that states they will abide by the policy. To ensure student safety, the school has established firewalls on the network, filtering selected Internet access. (self-study, library media specialists, instructional technology specialist)

Westford Academy provides special education services related to the identification, monitoring, and referral of students in accordance with local, state, and federal laws. The school personnel are involved in the identification and referral process for students who may require special education services. Special education services offered at WA include academic support provided in a resource room setting and specialized small group instruction in the areas of English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Specialized staff members work with students with more significant social, emotional, and behavioral needs. The students' progress is monitored, and the school utilizes early intervention processes for students who do not meet the expectations for student learning. (self-study, teachers, student support staff)

Commendations

1. Highly qualified personnel who deliver and provide effective guidance, special education, library, and health services that reflect and reinforce the school's mission and expectations
2. A wide variety of support services that allow students equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for learning
3. The ongoing communication and collaboration among the staff and administration with the library media center, guidance department, nurse's clinic, and the special education department
4. Proactive library and information technology staff that are knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation
5. The guidance department's effective use of *Naviance Family Connection* for communication with all students and parents

Recommendations

1. Add an instructional technology specialist to help implement the district's grade 9-12 technology benchmarks and to meet the growing needs of technology integration
2. Increase the hours of the paraprofessional library staff to assist with the daily functioning of a busy library media center so the library media specialists may collaborate more with teachers

SUPPORT STANDARD

7

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

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

1. The school shall engage parents and families as partners in each student's education and shall encourage their participation in school programs and parent support groups.
2. The school shall foster productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning.
3. The school site and plant shall support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning.
4. The physical plant and facilities shall meet all applicable federal and state laws and shall be in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
5. Equipment shall be adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate.
6. A planned and adequately funded program of building and site management shall ensure the appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school plant.

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

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

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

Conclusions

Westford Academy engages many parents as partners in their students' education and encourages parental participation and support through several school programs. Parents have a variety of opportunities to access their student's school experience through teacher e-mail, quarterly principal's newsletters, the school newspaper, the principal's weekly e-mail, web postings of the daily announcements, and various informational assemblies. In addition, some teachers make use of web pages to convey information to parents. Parents are encouraged to voice concerns to the administration through the monthly Parent Information Exchange (PIE). The guidance department communicates weekly with the parents of juniors and seniors regarding the post-secondary education process and makes information available through the web-based portal, *Naviance Family Connection*. Parents are also afforded opportunities to participate in a variety of school organizations such as the school council, the Westford Academy Theater Arts program, a district-wide special education parent advisory council, Friends Advancing Music Education (FAME), and the Westford Academy Athletic Boosters. As a result, frequent communication and involvement opportunities connect many parents to the school. However, the staff recognizes that not all parents take advantage of these opportunities and continues to explore ways to increase parent involvement in school programs and support groups. (parents, self-study, panel presentation, school board, teachers, school leadership team)

Westford Academy fosters many community partnerships and some higher education and business partnerships that support student learning. Students at WA take part in a variety of school-to-career programs involving members of the community, such as the breakfast colloquium, an annual job fair, the junior job shadow program, and the senior internship program. The school also enjoys the support of the Westford Academy Board of Trustees which awards \$20,000 each year to support student programs and in excess of \$80,000 in scholarships to graduating seniors. In addition, Westford Academy partners with UMass-Lowell and Middlesex Community College through a dual enrollment program that allows students to complete college coursework during their senior year. Teachers also benefit from the school's relationships with local colleges and universities through the Teachers as Scholars program, which offers faculty members content-based professional development opportunities. (self-study, teachers, parents)

The school site and plant support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning. The building was expanded and renovated in 2000, significantly increasing the size of the school. Westford Academy's hallways, cafeteria, and gymnasiums are spacious and aesthetically pleasing. A state-of-the-art performing arts center and specialized areas for a number of departments were added along with a newly renovated library. However, due to increased enrollment, there is no longer an adequate amount of lab space for all science classes, the amount of room available in the weight room is limited, and existing storage space for custodial equipment and other materials is no longer sufficient. (self-study, facility tour, school support staff, teachers)

Westford Academy's physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations. The building is inspected routinely by the fire department, and recommendations from the fire safety report are addressed in a timely fashion. The board of health inspects the school's kitchen twice each year, and all kitchen equipment is inspected and maintained by a licensed technician annually. The

school's Project Adventure program is inspected and licensed annually by a private organization, and the Westford Building Department conducts an annual building review to ensure that all facilities, including outdoor structures, meet safety regulations. (facility tour, school support staff, standard committee, self-study)

Westford Academy's equipment is adequate and properly maintained. Classroom fixtures are repaired or replaced when necessary, and each department maintains and catalogues its own materials, including textbook and lab supplies inventories. While custodial and landscaping equipment is generally replaced when appropriate, there is no formal written replacement plan nor is there a formal policy for the replacement of textbooks. The school's technology was upgraded significantly during the recent building project which included the addition of wireless Internet access, seven computer labs, a language lab, and some classroom SMARTBoards and digital projectors. No computer equipment in the building is more than five years old, and the school's student-to-computer ratio is 3.6 to 1. However, not all classrooms enjoy the same level of technology. (school support staff, facilities tour, teachers, students, self-study)

The existing program of building and site management adequately ensures the appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school plant. The building is bright, clean, and free of any vandalism or graffiti. The common areas, especially the front foyer, the cafeteria, and the performing arts center are very attractive and are sources of community pride. A large majority of the faculty, students, and parents agrees that the school building is well maintained, attractive, and in good repair. In addition, the faculty agrees that custodians are responsive to their needs. However, concerns exist regarding the recent reduction in the custodial staff and the subsequent effect on its ability to properly maintain the facility in the future. There are no custodians assigned on a daily basis to clean the performing arts center, the band room, the fine arts technology lab, the weight room, or either gymnasium. Therefore, there are concerns among some that there is not enough custodial staffing to maintain Westford Academy's high standards of cleanliness and maintenance. (school support staff, standard committee, teachers, self-study)

Based upon the Westford School District Strategic Plan which is updated every two years, Westford Academy has developed a school improvement plan that addresses future programs, enrollment changes, staffing, facility, and technology needs. A space-capacity report, which details enrollment projections for each grade level and for student/teacher ratios, is used to determine future staffing needs. A long-range technology plan, which extends through the 2012-2013 school year, identifies scheduled improvements to connectivity, software, and hardware in the building. In addition, a five-year capital improvement plan, which outlines prioritized areas of need in the district, is used to address Westford Academy's capital needs. (self-study, school leadership team, standard committee, school support staff)

The community and the district's governing body have worked to ensure that adequate and dependable sources of revenue exist to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, personnel, services, facilities, equipment, technological support materials, and supplies for student learning. The Westford community has demonstrated its financial support for the district by approving annual school budgets and recent building projects. However, because the most recent budgets have been level-funded, Westford Academy has seen a reduction in custodial services, maintenance services, and technological support services. Supplies for

student learning have been reduced by 7.5%, resulting in delays in needed textbook replacements for some departments. In addition, the school relies on numerous fees charged to students for transportation and extra-curricular activities, which may negatively impact student participation. (self-study, school committee, school leadership team, standard committee)

The faculty and administration of Westford Academy are actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget. Faculty members identify critical needs during department meetings and submit requests to their curriculum coordinators who, in turn, make recommendations to the building administration. The leadership team collaboratively determines budget priorities and submits a budget proposal to the superintendent of schools. (self-study, teachers, school leadership team)

Commendations

1. The numerous ongoing partnerships with the community that support student learning
2. Frequent communication between teachers and parents
3. The spacious and aesthetically pleasing facility that supports and enhances student learning
4. The clean and well maintained facility
5. The community's significant commitment to improve technology as evidenced by the addition of wireless Internet access, seven upgraded computer labs, a language lab, and classroom SMARTBoards and digital projectors
6. The school and district's proactive planning to address future programs, enrollment changes, staffing, facility, and technology needs

Recommendations

1. Increase parent and community awareness of partnership programs in place and opportunities available for collaboration
2. Reduce reliance on student fees as a source of revenue
3. Address potential space/storage needs due to increasing enrollment
4. Ensure custodial staffing which is commensurate with the school's high standards of cleanliness and maintenance

FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES

This comprehensive evaluation report reflects the findings of the school's self-study and those

of the visiting committee. It provides a blueprint for the faculty, administration, and other officials to use to improve the quality of programs and services for the students in Westford Academy. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should be apprised by the building administration yearly of progress made addressing visiting committee recommendations.

Since it is in the best interest of the students that the citizens of the district become aware of the strengths and limitations of the school and suggested recommendations for improvement, the Commission requires that the evaluation report be made public in accordance with the Commission's Policy on Distribution, Use, and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report.

A school's initial/continued accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing valid recommendations of the visiting committee and others identified by the Commission as it monitors the school's progress and changes which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle. To monitor the school's progress in the Follow-Up Program, the Commission requires that the principal of Westford Academy submit routine Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports documenting the current status of all evaluation report recommendations, with particular detail provided for any recommendation which may have been rejected or those items on which no action has been taken. In addition, responses must be detailed on all recommendations highlighted by the Commission in its notification letters to the school. School officials are expected to have completed or be in the final stages of completion of all valid visiting committee recommendations by the time the Five-Year Progress Report is submitted. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards are not being met in a satisfactory manner or if additional information is needed on matters relating to evaluation report recommendations or substantive changes in the school.

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact which the change has had on the school's ability to meet CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix on page 103. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report which is required of each member school to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

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

As a final note, the visiting committee would like to express its most sincere gratitude to the entire Westford Academy community. The gracious hospitality offered to the team was greatly appreciated. Likewise, the candor and professionalism demonstrated during the on-site visit spoke volumes about the staff's commitment to this process as well as its desire to improve teaching and learning at Westford Academy.

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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

Commission on Public Secondary Schools

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

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

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