



# NEEDHAM HIGH SCHOOL

TO THINK – TO RESPECT – TO COMMUNICATE

*Jonathan D. Pizzi, Ph.D.*  
*Principal*

June 14, 2013

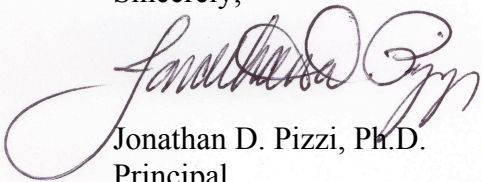
Janet D. Allison, Director  
Commission on Public Secondary Schools  
New England Association of Schools & Colleges  
209 Burlington Road  
Suite 201  
Bedford, MA 01730-1433

Dear Ms. Allison:

Attached please find the “Special Progress Report” for Needham High School as requested by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools in its memo regarding the Two Year Progress Report of Needham High School. You will find that the Follow-Up Committee and Leadership Team has provided the CPSS with detailed information regarding action taken to address the highlighted recommendations.

Thank you once again for your support and feedback throughout the decennial evaluation and follow-up processes. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Jonathan D. Pizzi, Ph.D.  
Principal

enc.

cc: Daniel Gutekanst, Ed.D., Superintendent

## Special Progress Report

Needham High School  
June 14, 2013

### Highlighted Recommendations from notification letter:

- 1. Ensure that students and parents are familiar with student learning expectations and the school-wide rubrics that measure them.**

Classification: *In Progress/Completed*

The Needham High School faculty and administration takes every opportunity throughout the school year to ensure that students and parents are familiar with student learning expectations for learning. For example, each major NHS publication, including the *Needham High School Student Handbook* and *Program of Studies* contains the NHS expectations for student learning. NHS school counselors familiarize parents with these expectations during the course selection period and at grade-level parent orientations and curriculum nights. Teachers' classroom expectations are tied to the school wide learning expectations, and teachers share these individual learning expectations with parents in one or more of the following ways: a letter at the beginning of the year, a presentation at "Back to School Night," and/or a posting on their website. Teachers communicate learning expectations to students and parents through detailed course syllabi provided at the beginning of each semester. Additionally, the vast majority of teachers share the lesson, unit, and school-wide learning expectations with students on a daily basis. Each academic department has uploaded their curricula - which includes the expectations for student learning - for each unit to the district ATLAS curriculum-mapping database.

NHS teachers use school-wide rubrics to communicate academic performance and mastery to students. Each academic department uses either the school-wide writing rubric or has developed and uses a common writing rubric based on the school-wide rubric. Additionally, several departments have developed or are in the process of developing and/or using other discipline specific rubrics based on the school-wide rubrics. For example, the History and Social Sciences Department has developed and utilizes a Source Analysis Skills Rubric. Teachers in this department use department rubrics for Research Skills, Historical Content and Knowledge, and Presentation Skills. In addition, the Science Department uses school-wide rubrics that address critical thinking, problem solving, and writing. In addition to mapping curriculum, resources, and instructional strategies to the Massachusetts Frameworks and the Common Core Standards, academic departments have included key common formative and summative assessments and projects within the ATLAS Database and have included the relevant school-wide rubrics by which student achievement is measured for that assessment.

Finally, all departments continue to work on formative assessments. Most departments are administering one common-formative assessment per term or per core unit and using a school-wide rubric to assess student performance levels. In addition, departments continue to work on grading protocols and rubrics to establish baselines for student performance.

## **2. Implement a process to regularly review and revise the mission and expectations for student learning**

Classification: *In Progress*

The NHS Mission Statement and Core Values are deeply ingrained in the culture of NHS. While the core values - To Think – To Respect – To Communicate - remain non-negotiable, the NHS community routinely seeks to identify and define specific behavior that reflects these values. For example, beginning in SY 2011–2012 the NPS administration engaged in professional development around Cultural Proficiency. The entire faculty and staff will begin to engage in professional development around this philosophy in 2013-2014. This work is a quintessential component of the NHS core value: “To Respect”. During SY 2013-2014, NHS plans to reconvene the Mission and Expectations Committee in order to assess the alignment of the Mission, Expectations, and Core Values with the 2011 NEASC standards.

### **Provide an update on the adequacy of staffing to support the curricular offerings.**

Classification: *In Progress*

This has remained a constant challenge for Needham High School and the district; however, over the past several fiscal years, the Needham School Committee has supported high school staffing increases at appropriate levels to support curricular offerings and reasonable class sizes. With an aggregate increase in student enrollment from 2009 - 2012 of over 200 students, the NHS administration requested an increase in teaching FTE in order to maintain class sizes at the 2009-2010 levels. With the support of the school committee and superintendent, NHS realized an overall increase in staffing of over 10 teaching FTE from FY 2009 through FY 2013. In his FY 2014 budget, the NHS principal requested and the School Committee has approved an additional assistant principal, two additional guidance counselors, one additional adjustment counselor, and one assistant athletic director to help meet the needs of a steadily increasing student population.

Despite the progress, there are still needs. For example, caseloads for special education professionals will remain high for SY 2013-2014. Special Education Liaisons will have between 20 and 25 students each while professionals in the Skills and Career Program numbers will remain low due to the high intensity of student needs. Consequently, the Special Education Department will need to add a new position for the 2014-2015 school year.

## **3. Increase interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction**

Classification: *In Progress*

Since the last decennial evaluation visit, the NHS community has made great strides in the areas of interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction. The History and Social Sciences and English Departments have continued to collaborate with the Special Education Department to develop and revise curriculum and plan lessons for integrated, co-taught classes. Also, the Guidance Department and Wellness Departments collaborate to teach career seminars to sophomores, to facilitate service learning courses such as “Senior to Senior” and “Sages and Seekers”, and to engage freshmen in the “Signs of Suicide” curriculum.

During most building-based professional development opportunities, staff members are assigned to one of several interdisciplinary teams. This allows for formal and informal opportunities for professionals to share best practices and to make cross-disciplinary content connections. This year,

for example, the staff worked in interdisciplinary teams to edit and revise the school's Grading Options Policy for students who have many absences and receive broken instruction due to significant medical or psychiatric issues. Additionally, the staff has and will continue to work in interdisciplinary teams to identify effective teaching practices, unpack the rubrics, and begin self-assessments for the New Teacher Evaluation System.

Another major area of progress with interdisciplinary learning has been the development and implementation of Freshman Academy. Last summer, a group of freshman teachers met to plan for co-taught classes and to develop common classroom and course expectations for their freshmen standard college prep level classes. Throughout the year, Freshmen Academy teachers have met on a monthly basis to discuss individual students and evaluate high-leverage instructional strategies. Though most of the teachers in the Academy do not work in a co-taught setting, teachers across content areas benefitted from sharing strategies and interventions for both individual and groups of students. The most readily observable results of this work are the marked decrease in freshmen disciplinary referrals (down 30% from SY 2012) and increases in student organization and confidence. Consequently, NHS will continue this program into sophomore year and beyond.

The Science Department has expanded their writing protocols for laboratory reports. Established rubrics in most courses for evaluating student lab reports. Additionally, several Science teachers have expressed interest in developing a new interdisciplinary course. Additionally, the History and Social Sciences Department has launched a new course entitled "African-American History and Contemporary Issues" that was co-planned and is co-taught by the History and METCO departments and draws on the curriculum and instruction from EMI (Encouraging Multicultural Initiatives).

Finally, with the funding and support of the NEF (Needham Education Foundation), three NHS teachers have developed a new interdisciplinary course entitled, "The Greater Boston Project." This course explores how individuals and groups have worked throughout history to effect change in Greater Boston. Students will look at different historical moments through a variety of different lenses - population, government, economy, education, and art & leisure - and consider how all of these moments have molded what we see in Greater Boston today. The course of study is expressly interdisciplinary, as skills from the disciplines of English, history, and mathematics are brought together to explore Greater Boston's history and present. The culmination of the course is a community action project that entails further exploration and involvement regarding one or more of the lenses studied throughout the year; the project allows students themselves to become agents of change - to take an active role in impacting their world. This course was developed during the 2011, 2012, and 2013 academic years, and will run as a full-year, 8 credit course in the fall of 2013. There are approximately 60 students enrolled in the course.

NHS has clearly made significant progress toward interdisciplinary learning at many levels and has plans to continue the work through the implementation of the ILT (Interdisciplinary Learning Team) at the high school. The ILT will be tasked with evaluating current courses and programs and selecting and aiding in the development of new course ideas.

#### **4. Provide common planning time dedicated to the discussion of instructional strategies and instructional planning.**

Classification: *Planned for the Future/In Progress*

During the 2012-2013 academic year, the administration has allotted increased amounts of professional development time to academic and student support departments for professional collaboration. The administration provided common planning time for special education and general

education teachers their teaching assistants. Teachers who co-teach have a common preparation period during the school day and there has been meeting time available for all Freshman Academy teachers during monthly early release time, delayed opening time, and during some scheduled faculty and department meeting times. Additionally, the NHS staff has had significant time this year during early release days and department meetings to work on instructional strategies and instructional planning, in particular around data analysis of common formative assessments. In addition, grade level teams will collaborate on summer curriculum projects to expand curriculum maps and to create professional development workshops for the year to come. Although significant progress has been made in this area, there remains a need to build common planning time into the school day. For this reason, the NPS has begun a district-wide discussion on extending the school day. At the high school, this would serve as a vehicle for implementing regular common planning time.

## **5. Report on the impact of student feedback on curriculum, instruction, and assessment**

Classification: *In Progress/Completed*

Based on student feedback, instruction and assessment, NHS all departments are constantly revising and redesigning all aspects of curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of students. It is common practice for NHS teachers and administrators to develop and administer mid and end-of-year student surveys inform reflection upon and revision of curricula and instructional practices. As a result of these surveys and continual dialogue among educators and students, and their families NHS has discerned the need for an additional senior year math class that will enable students to attain math proficiency. Additionally, these data and dialogue surfaced the need for a clinician in the Connections program for students with social/emotional disabilities. At the same time, it revealed that separate academic classes for students in the program were not needed, thus students will be integrated into general education classes.

Student feedback is also a critical part of the staffing process at NHS. Department chairs and program directors are required to gather student input after a demonstration lesson by a teacher candidate. Gathering and analyzing this student feedback is essential when considering the hiring of a new staff member.

Through its last program review conducted in 2011-2012, the NHS World Languages Department surveyed all students enrolled in world language classes on a variety of topics. The information received has informed professional conversations and various decisions within the department. For example, the department will be offering some new courses in SY 2014, including: adding an accelerated level Mandarin 2 class; offering a French 1 standard level class; and adding a standard level to Spanish 4.

During the 2012-2013 school year, the Wellness Department went through a very intensive program review process. This included gathering feedback from students in the areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment. At this time, the Wellness Department is still in the process of analyzing these data, which will inform future decisions within the department.

## **6. Establish and implement a process to use the school-wide rubrics at the individual student level and inform students and families**

Classification: *In Progress*

Most NHS teachers use school-wide rubrics at the individual student level to communicate with students about their academic performance; however, there is not a uniform process in place to

communicate this information to families. Nevertheless, each department either uses the school-wide writing rubric or has developed and uses a common writing rubric based on the school-wide rubric. Additionally, several departments have developed or are in the process of developing and/or using other discipline specific rubrics based on the school-wide rubrics. For example, the History and Social Sciences Department is using their Source Analysis Skills rubric and most teachers use the teacher-developed department rubrics on Research Skills, Historical Content and Knowledge and Presentation Skills. In addition the Science Department uses school-wide rubrics that address critical thinking, problem solving, and writing. Along with curriculum maps, lesson resources, and instructional strategies, academic departments have included teacher generated common formative and summative assessments and projects within the ATLAS Curriculum Mapping Database. Teachers have also included the relevant school-wide rubrics by which student achievement is measured for that assessment.

Finally, all departments continue to work on formative assessments. Most departments are administering one common-formative assessment per term per course using a school-wide rubric to assess student performance levels. Departments continue to work on standards-based grading protocols and rubrics to establish baselines for student performance.

**7. Provide an update on the ongoing efforts to include more minority students in Advanced Placement classes.**

Classification: *In Progress*

Over the past four years, NHS has made a concerted effort to prepare and include more students of color in Honors, Accelerated, and AP classes. For example, the History Department's Advanced Placement teachers have worked with the METCO coordinator and the Assistant Principals to advocate for minority students to take AP courses. In 2010-2011 a cohort of students of color enrolled and were successful in AP US Government. In the summer of 2012, NHS offered an AP US History Summer Bridge Institute in support of students needing skill reinforcement needed succeed in the course. Although there were only two students enrolled in the new AP Psychology course in SY 2013, there are nine students enrolled in the course for next year. NHS is far from reaching its goals in this area, however gains are steady and NHS will continue to engage in vertical course planning and to offer Summer Bridge and other academic supports to ensure the achievement of all NHS students.

**8. Increase the staffing level in the library media center to meet the level of student needs**

Classification: *Completed*

Through reorganization of duties and the elimination or reassignment of certain responsibilities to other departments, current staffing levels within the NHS library meet the level of student needs.