

**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

**COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

***REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE***

**North Middlesex Regional High School  
Townsend, Massachusetts**

**March 16-19, 2003**

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**STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS**  
**THE DISTRIBUTION, USE, AND SCOPE OF THE**  
**VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this visiting committee report of North Middlesex Regional High School to be a privileged document submitted by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to the principal of the school and by the principal to the state department of education. Distribution of the report within the school community is the responsibility of the school principal. The final visiting committee report must be released in its entirety within sixty (60) days 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 North Middlesex Regional High School in terms of the school's stated mission and 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.

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## 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 five 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), and the Commission on Public Elementary Schools (CPES).

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 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 shows 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 North Middlesex High School, a committee of a representative from each curriculum and program with the principal serving in an *ex officio* capacity 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 the faculty members, the self-study committees included students, parents, central office professionals, school board representatives, and citizens.

The self-study of North Middlesex Regional High School extended over a period of 24 school months.

The visiting committee was pleased to note that students, citizens, parents, and school board members joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations.

Public schools evaluated by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's mission, learning expectations, and unique student population. In addition to using the Self-Study Guides developed by a representative group of New England educators and approved by the Commission, North Middlesex Regional High School also used questionnaires developed by the Office for Research and Education at the University of Maine 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 the entire professional staff had approved it.

## **The Process Used by the Visiting Committee**

A visiting committee of sixteen evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate the North Middlesex Regional High School in light of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The Committee members spent four days at the school reviewed the self-study documents, which had been prepared for their examination, and met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents to determine the degree to which the school meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented public schools, central office administrators, vocational institutions, and building level administrators, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of North Middlesex Regional High School.

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

- ◆ review of the school's self-study materials
- ◆ fifty hours of classroom observation
- ◆ numerous informal observations in and around the school
- ◆ tours of the facility
- ◆ shadowing of 16 students for a half-day each
- ◆ individual meetings with 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 its 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 North Middlesex Regional High School.

## Overview of Findings

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

North Middlesex Regional High School provides a diverse curriculum and program for its students. The self-assessment provided by NMRHS noted strengths and needs, and the visiting committee has presented many of those needs in recommendations and noted some of the strengths as commendations.

This report is intended to provide the school's faculty, staff, and administration another perspective to assist in accomplishing its missions and desired outcomes. Once the desired outcomes have been articulated, the school and community will collaboratively work toward attaining them to achieve school improvement.

The climate of the school reflects the values and beliefs of the mission statement. Respect between and among staff and students is apparent. Students are respectful of school property, including the many examples of student work that are in evidence throughout the facility.

Given that the core facility was opened in 1961, the maintenance of the building is exemplary. Some needs that should be addressed are inadequate air handling equipment in some areas and overcrowded conditions in other areas, notably the band/choir facility.

It is clear that the daily schedule is a subject of controversy and the school will need to address this issue in a manner consistent with the mission and expectations for students. As a concurrent issue, the process used for major decision-making within the school community should be examined.

It is clear that a variety of assessment strategies are common practice at NMRHS. Individual departments have begun the process of developing department academic expectations for learning within their curriculum.

The school needs to develop a formal separate document, or rubric, that defines the academic expectations for students in specific, measurable ways, describes specific levels of performance, and indicates which level is the indicator of successful accomplishment.

Effective teaching and learning are observed at NMRHS. Traditional instructional practices are in place, but individual student learning needs are given a high priority. Time for collegial discussion and planning between and across disciplines, including discussion of classroom assessment strategies, would benefit students and assist in curriculum implementation.



## School and Community Profile

North Middlesex Regional High School is located on the eastern border of Townsend, Massachusetts in the north/central region of the state. It serves the towns of Townsend, Pepperell, and Ashby. The communities are largely rural with some industry. Townsend is approximately 12 miles from Interstate 495, 2 miles from the New Hampshire border and about 40 miles from Boston. The three towns cover an area of approximately 80 square miles and are located near the cities of Fitchburg, Lowell, Worcester (all in Massachusetts) and Nashua, New Hampshire. Within a 2.5 mile radius of the school are many town services, including the local public library, police station, fire station, town hall, the elementary and middle schools and the town highway department.

North Middlesex Regional High School opened as a Junior/Senior High School in 1961 and graduated the first class in June 1962. Originally, only students from Townsend and Pepperell attended the high school. Ashby joined the district in 1971. Because of the increased student enrollment an addition opened that same year, still serving grades 7 through 12. In 1979 two middle schools opened, Varnum Brook in Pepperell and Hawthorne Brook in Townsend. At this time, the 7<sup>th</sup> grades went to the middle schools, leaving only five grades served by this school. Two years later, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade moved out, leaving North Middlesex Regional High School as a four-year high school. In the early 80's, kindergarten classes took over a portion of the Social Studies classrooms.

Since the previous accreditation of North Middlesex Regional High School, the socio-economic status of the region has risen above state and national averages, taking the district from lower middle class to the mid-range of the middle class. The population of the district is as follow: Townsend—9,198; Pepperell—11,189; Ashby—3,011 and total—23,398. There has been no significant increase in population over the past three years. The average per capita income for the three communities is approximately \$16,152, which is very close to the national average. The median household income is \$47,469, which is \$4,000 above the Massachusetts median household income and \$10,000 above the national figure. The estimated poverty rate for these communities is 3%. The estimated unemployment rate for these communities is 2.7%.

The towns in the district range from suburban to rural, with Pepperell more suburban and Ashby more rural. The majority of residents work in surrounding metro areas. There are a few industries within the towns employing several hundred people including Sterilite and New England Business Services (NEBS) in Townsend and the Pepperell Braiding and Pepperell Paper Company in Pepperell. There are numerous commercial and retail outlets within the towns; most residents shop in the neighboring metro areas as well as locally.

The total student population within the North Middlesex Regional School District as of October 2001 numbered 5,278. There are a total of eight public schools, six preschools, and two private schools within the district. The high school has two public feeder middle schools. 7.6% of the student population in the North Middlesex Regional School District attends non-public schools. North Middlesex Regional High School encompasses grades 9 through 12 and has 1,220 students enrolled for the school year 2001-2002. This represents an increase of 200 students from 1993, but enrollments for the last five years have been very stable. High school students in the district can apply to attend one of two regional vocational-technical schools. Ashby students may attend Montachusett Regional Vocations Technical High School in Fitchburg; Pepperell and Townsend students may attend Nashoba Valley Technical High School in Westford.

The school district's average per pupil expenditure is \$5,852 at North Middlesex Regional High School, compared to the state average of \$5,876. This is a significant improvement over ten years ago, when North Middlesex Regional High School was well below the state average. The town of Townsend allocated 52% of the local property tax to schools. Pepperell allocates 57% and Ashby 65%.

The ethnic configuration in the district during the past five years has had no significant changes. The ethnic/racial/cultural configuration for the North Middlesex Regional High School for 2001 mirrors the configuration for the district: Caucasian, 96%; Hispanic, 1.1%; Black, 1%; American Indian, 0.7%; and Asian or Pacific Islander, 1.1%.

The educational staff of 94 includes 76 classroom teachers (including 3 curriculum coordinators), 10 special education teachers, 2 librarians and 6 guidance counselors. Currently, North Middlesex Regional High School has a student/teacher ratio of 14 to 1. This figure is skewed due to two factors: very small class sizes in special education and teachers with a reduced course load of one to three classes. Teachers instruct an average of

86.2 students. The class size ranges from 1 to 50. There are 79 classes with 25 or more students.

Classes are organized using a modified block schedule, which consists of one long block, and one dropped class each day. Most blocks last 50 minutes, and the long block lasts 100 minutes. This modified block schedule runs on a seven-day cycle. School is in session for 6 hours and 30 minutes each day. Subtracting time for homeroom, passing between classes, and lunch allows for 5 hours and 41 minutes of daily instruction time.

North Middlesex is a comprehensive high school with five course levels: Level 1—Advanced Placement, Level 2—Honors, Level 3—College Prep (CP1), Level 4—Junior College or Technical (CP2), and Level 5/0—Unweighted. This varies by department—for example, there are five levels in mathematics but only three in English. For more information on leveling, see the School Profile. Approximately 25% of students take honor or advanced placement courses and 10% are in special education classes. Some courses lend themselves to homogenous grouping such as higher-level mathematics, science and world language courses and advanced placement and honors level in all subjects.

Another grouping occurs within the Special Education program with the basic and transitional English courses and the Math Skills course. There are other groupings such as Life Skills, Alternative Program, Tech Prep Pathways, Jobs for Bay State Graduates, School to Career and the Dual Enrollment Program. See the Program of Studies for more information. Tutorial services are provided for all students in the Academic Support Center. Other students take advantage of job shadowing and internship opportunities.

There are a variety of awards and award ceremonies at North Middlesex Regional High School. These recognize student excellence in both academic and non-academic fields. At the end of each of the first three quarters, there is a Student Recognition Breakfast to which School Committee members; prominent members of the community and parents are invited. The Senior Awards Ceremony takes place the week of graduation, and there is an Underclassmen Awards Assembly before the end of the school year. In addition to these, the athletic department, various sports teams and the band boosters hold their own separate award dinners.

Students at North Middlesex Regional High School are evaluated by several standardized tests, including the PSAT/NMSQT tests, SAT I Reasoning Test, SAT II Subject

Tests, ACT Tests, AP exams, ASVAB, MCAS, and the National Latin Exam. Over the last four years, North Middlesex student scores have exceeded both state and national averages. In addition, on the SAT I test, the North Middlesex scores have increased faster than the state and national averages. For 2001, the combined math and verbal score was 50 points above the national average and 45 points above the Massachusetts average.

On the AP exams, the percentage of students earning a score of 3 or higher ranges from 53% to 100% depending on the subject area. Spring of 2001 marked the first class for which the MCAS exam was a graduation requirement. In the initial testing, 87% of the sophomore class achieved a passing grade in math; 90% passed in English. After retesting in December 2001, more than 45% of the failing students have now obtained a passing grade in math, and more than 70% in English.

There are also several indicators of student performance that go beyond standardized tests. There are adjudicated music competitions for Central District, All State and All Eastern. Recognitions in art include Regional Exhibits, Art All State and Boston Globe Scholastics Art Awards. For math, there are the Elizabeth Haskins Math Exam, the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) Math Exam, and the New England Mathematics League. The Massachusetts Envirothon recognizes student achievement in science. Other venues for competition include Drama Guild, Debate Tournaments, Academic Decathlon, Jobs for Baystate, Junior Achievement, and the National Latin Exam and Destination Imagination.

The percentage of graduating seniors continuing to further their education was 89% for the class of 2001. The graduating class had 62% go on to attend a four-year college, 19% to a two-year college and 7% to a technical school. The remaining students went directly into the work force (8%) or into the military (4%).

North Middlesex Regional High School continually strives to modify and improve its overall learning environment. To this end, the school implemented the following initiatives:

- A more stringent attendance policy was established in September 2001, which provides for the possibility of loss of course credit if a student misses too many classes. The effectiveness of this initiative will be assessed at the conclusion of the school year. The student attendance rate for the 1999-2000 school year was 91.63%. The dropout rate for the 2000-2001 school year was 2.5%. The dropout rate for the 1999-2000 school year was 3.2%.

- North Middlesex Regional High School switched to a modified block schedule based on a seven-day cycle in September 2001. Each day one class meets for two periods and five classes meet for one period each, and one class is dropped. A new scheduling committee was organized to evaluate the current schedule and propose alternatives for the future.
- MCAS Remedial courses in English and math began in 2001. Based on the first retake of the English test in December, more than 70% of the students who failed have now obtained a passing score. For those who retook the math test, more than 45% passed.
- A Mentoring Program was started in September 2000 to give new teachers a support network of experienced colleagues during their first year at North Middlesex Regional High School. This includes monthly meetings focusing on various educational issues and provides the opportunity for new teachers to observe a myriad of teaching approaches. Overall, this initiative has created a more positive and comfortable atmosphere for new staff and increased their opportunities to get to know colleagues in other departments.
- Other initiatives include:
  - Cameras installed to increase security and reduce vandalism
  - Microsoft Officer User Specialist Accreditation Program (MOUS)
  - Plans for an Academy of Finance
  - Mathematics curriculum sequence changed to better fit MCAS and state frameworks
  - North Middlesex Regional High School Professional Development Committee
  - International Club (World Languages Department)
  - Revival of the Literary Magazine
  - Participation in the state Science Fair in March 2003
  - Daily police presence
  - New positions of Curriculum Coordinators in English, Mathematics, World Languages, and Library Media Services for grades 6-12. These Curriculum Coordinators work closely with both the middle school and high school staff to ensure the articulation of curriculum and assessment.

Upon reviewing the information gathered in the School and Community Profile, this committee has identified the following as the most critical challenges facing North Middlesex Regional High School at the present time.

Despite the establishment of a new attendance policy, the policy needs assessment, fine-tuning and consistent application. One concern is whether a missed long block should count as one or two absences. Another is how late a student must be before this counts as an

absence rather than a tardy. Record keeping by teachers, guidance counselors and administration would be greatly simplified with the use of appropriate computer software. The issue of chronic tardiness is not consistently addressed.

There is a lack of support and consensus among the teachers regarding the modified block schedule initiated in the fall of 2001. Teachers are concerned about the ability to maintain 100% attention for all students, but particularly for less motivated students. Another issue involves the length of time between classes when a drop is on Monday or Friday. Science teachers found sequencing and follow-up on labs more difficult. Scheduling tests for the same day for different sections of the same course requires speeding up or slowing down the sections beyond that which is comfortable for teacher and class. Many teachers felt that they were covering less material than with the previous schedule and believe this will lead to lower MCAS and other standardized test scores. The training for teaching in the long block has been inadequate.

Another topic for consideration is graduation requirements. A large number of seniors have multiple directed studies since they have already met most of their graduation requirements by the time they complete their junior year. The addition of a community service requirement may be beneficial to the community and the students. To fulfill our mission statement we need to reinstate a required course in government/citizenship.

The faculty proposes offering more courses for students not enrolled in upper-level academic classes. The school may want to consider adding more electives in the technology area and a varied curriculum to teach practical consumer skills, such as personal finance and consumer chemistry. These classes may appeal to students who may otherwise leave to attend technical schools that offer more non-college preparatory courses.

A final concern for all teachers at North Middlesex Regional High School is the increasing class sizes. Although the average class size is 14, this clouds the issue that certain departments have disproportionately large classes. Adding to this growing issue is the fact that not every attempt has been made to keep the class sizes below 25 per contract agreement. The subject of class sizes is a growing dilemma. The 2005 projected enrollment increases by 50 students each year. If not addressed, the school will be unable to adequately provide for its students.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARD

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# 1 MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

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

1. The school's mission statement shall represent the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning and the purpose of the school and be consistent with the district's mission statement.
2. The school shall have established expectations for student learning that:
  - reflect the school's mission statement;
  - identify high expectations for all students in academic, civic, and social areas;
  - specifically state what all students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate from the school taking into account the skills, competencies, concepts and understandings identified by district, state, and national standards and by professional organizations.
3. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall be developed by the school community, and approved and supported by the faculty, the school board, and any other school-wide governing organization.
4. The school shall utilize a variety of data to regularly review the mission statement and expectations for student learning to assure that they reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state standards.
5. There shall be a separate document developed by the faculty that defines the school's academic expectations for student learning in specific, measurable ways, describes specific levels of performance, and indicates which level is the indicator of successful accomplishment.
6. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and shall be evident in the culture of the school.

## **Mission and Expectations for Student Learning**

### **Conclusions**

The North Middlesex Regional High School Mission Statement articulates the school community's fundamental belief about student learning and the purpose of the school. The school's mission statement is consistent with the district's mission and expands into more specific standards relevant to the high school community. The mission statement is prominently displayed in classrooms, entranceways, cafeterias, academic support center, library, student handbook, teacher handbook, parent newsletters, and school web site. The mission statement reflects the beliefs and values about student learning of 89.1% of the parents polled. In addition, 66.8% of the students indicated that they understand the school's mission. Also, 54.2% of the teachers reported that the mission statement and learning expectations are evident in the school culture. (classroom observations, self-study, panel presentation)

Based upon the North Middlesex Regional High School Mission Statement, sixteen academic, social, and civic expectations focus on nurturing the growth of all students. These high expectations are anchored in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Additionally, all departments at North Middlesex Regional High School (NMRHS) have developed their own student expectations that align with the school's expectations. These expectations are beginning to drive instruction, curriculum, and assessment practices that are being articulated in each department and are reflected by the range of levels in course offerings. In addition to daily scheduled academic classes, students can participate in enrichment activities such as Academic Decathlon, Math Team, Latin Club, Debate Team, as well as several musical activities and other special interest clubs that support the diversity of the student population. (self-study, student handbook, students, parents)

NMRHS supports its civic and social expectations through its special program offerings such as Community Service/Career Experience, Peer Support, School-to-Career, and leadership course. In addition, students can participate in other after school activities such as Amnesty International, SADD, student and class councils, and Student Advisory Council. (self-study, student handbook, students, parents)



In support of the required skills, competencies, and concepts needed for graduation, NMRHS has established a committee to review the existing graduation requirements. (self-study, student handbook, students, parents)

The NMRHS mission statement is the result of a community effort that began at professional development days during the summers of 1997 and 1998. The tasks were to: develop a statement of purpose; discuss the process of change; build consensus about student learning and expectations; and define the school's core values. These discussions were continued during in-service days in October of both years. As a result of leadership changes in the school, these discussions were suspended until the fall of 2000-2001. At that time, a steering committee comprised of one faculty member from each academic area and an assistant principal undertook the task of directing the self-study in preparation for the on-site visit of the NEASC.

Their first task was to develop a mission statement. In June of 2001, a school committee member, a parent, and three students joined the steering committee to work with a facilitator to compile their findings with those from the 1997 and 1998 summer workshops and to develop the mission statement. During a series of meetings in June 2001, faculty members made suggestions for change and the faculty accepted the present version of the mission statement on June 22. The North Middlesex Regional School District School Committee approved and ratified it in September 2001. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers)

Historically, the school improvement council has served as the vehicle to assess the goals stated in the school improvement plan as well as to articulate the goals for the following year. It is a natural evolution for the school improvement council to serve as the vehicle to review the mission statement and the expectations for student learning to assure that they reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission and state standards. Years prior to the NEASC accreditation, the school improvement council had surveyed parents, students, staff, and community members and used that data to establish the goals for the succeeding year. As part of the NEASC self-study, a survey was distributed to students, parents, staff, and community members to gather data for the self-study process. The school improvement council used this data to continue the process of assessment and goal-setting. In an effort to serve as the vehicle to assess the mission and student

expectations, the school improvement council initiated the process to redesign previous surveys to reflect the necessary data to ensure that the mission and student expectations reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state standards. It is the intent of the school improvement council to distribute these surveys in the fall of 2003. NMRHS uses additional documents to ensure that the mission statement and student expectations are met. Some of these include state and district mandated testing, as well as state and national standards. Departmental expansion of student expectations has begun, and as appropriate evaluation rubrics are developed, those will be incorporated into the assessment. (self-study, teachers, school improvement council)

There are opportunities for the school community to gain information regarding the mission statement and student expectations, through parent newsletters and regularly scheduled informal parent coffees. However, there still remains a lack of participation and feedback from these efforts, especially from parents and students. (self-study, teachers, school improvement council)

A separate document which defines the school's academic expectations for student learning is in its formative stages. At this time, department members have adopted the format of the school's expectations for student learning and are working to incorporate it into their curriculum. They have prepared a cross-matrix grid showing which expectations are being addressed in each discipline. In addition, NMRHS has acknowledged that a school-wide rubric that measures the academic expectations is needed. (panel presentation, self-study, teachers)

North Middlesex Regional High School's mission statement and expectations for student learning guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and are evident in the school culture. This is reflected in the development of a peer mediation program that addresses strategies to resolve conflicts. As another example, an attendance policy was instituted to promote responsibility and ownership of academic excellence. (panel presentation, self-study, teachers, observations)

There are many opportunities for student participation in programs that promote and support the mission statement in academic, civic, and social areas. These include programs such as Academic Decathlon, New England League, National Honor Society, Academic Support Programs, and after school study groups. SADD, Alliance for Acceptance, Student

Advisory Committee, and Peer Mediation are further examples. In addition, the Guidance department offers classroom lessons and evening workshops to address topics of harassment, career planning, bullying, life skills, and resume writing. (self-study, teachers, observations)

The climate of the school reflects the beliefs and values of the mission statement. Respect between and among staff and students is apparent. Students are respectful of school property and demonstrate appropriate behavior during and between classes. Teachers and support staff are dedicated to the school's mission and committed to providing a positive and nurturing environment for academic excellence. (student shadowing, building tours, observations)

**Commendations:**

1. The diligence and efforts of faculty members to ensure that the school's mission statement is representative of the school community's beliefs
2. The well articulated and thoughtful student learning expectations developed by each department
3. The thorough procedure used to bring together the appropriate constituents to develop the mission statement and expectations of student learning
4. The administrative effort to communicate with and solicit input from the school community
5. The diversity of programs offered beyond traditional classroom experiences
6. The respect between and among staff and students
7. The commitment to academic excellence

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop an effective method to ensure that the school's mission and expectations become an integral part of the curriculum delivery
2. Establish graduation requirements that reflect what all students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate

3. Develop a well articulated and communicated periodic review process of the mission and expectations that gathers input from the appropriate school community members
4. Establish a well articulated dissemination of the periodic review to all stakeholders
5. Develop and implement school-wide rubric that measures and defines the school's academic expectations for student learning describing specific levels of performance that identify levels of success
6. Expand the types of assessment results being used to determine the extent to which students are achieving the school-wide academic expectations for student learning

## 2 CURRICULUM

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The curriculum, which includes coursework, co-curricular activities and other educational experiences as described in the program of studies, is the school's formal plan to fulfill its mission statement and expectations for student learning. The curriculum links what the school believes and expects students to learn to its instructional practices. The strength of that link is dependent upon staff commitment to and involvement in a dynamic process of review, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on the school's expectations for student learning.

1. From the document that defines the school's academic expectations, each curriculum area shall identify those expectations for student learning for which it is responsible and shall have clearly articulated learning standards in support of such expectations.
2. Written curriculum documents shall be aligned with the school's expectations for student learning and shall guide content, instruction, and assessment.
3. The curriculum plan shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of the school's academic expectations for student learning.
4. The content of the curriculum shall be intellectually rigorous and provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.
5. The curriculum shall be appropriately integrated and shall emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.
6. The school shall provide opportunities to extend student 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 to insure the expectations for student learning are being addressed.
8. Instructional materials, technology, equipment and supplies, and staffing shall be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum.
9. There shall be ongoing review and evaluation of the curriculum that takes into account the assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations for student learning.
10. The school shall commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the review and evaluation of curriculum.
11. The professional staff shall be actively involved in the development and revision of the curriculum.
12. Professional development activities shall support the development and implementation of the curriculum.

## Curriculum

### Conclusions

Each curricular area at North Middlesex Regional High School identifies those expectations for student learning for which it is responsible and has clearly articulated learning standards in support of such expectations. Each department spent professional development time identifying the relevant expectations for student learning. Results of a survey conducted in December 2001 indicated that 84.2% of teachers and 65.5 % of parents believe there is an established expectation of what students should know. (self-study, teachers, curriculum subgroup, survey information)

Written curriculum documents are aligned with the school's expectations for student learning and guide content, instruction, and assessment. Most departments have a document for each course that provides detailed information on materials, content, and learning standards. Math and world language departments require common year-end final exams. Common rubrics and projects are in the process of being developed. (self-study teachers, curriculum sub-committee, leadership team, panel presentation)

The curriculum plan ensures that all students have sufficient opportunities to practice and achieve each of the school's academic expectations for student learning. Expectations for student learning are well documented in most curriculum guides. The program of studies clearly outlines the offerings of courses. Teachers use a variety of motivational strategies. There is concern among members of the staff that projected class size may diminish the teachers' ability to use a variety of instructional strategies in order to meet the needs of all students. (self-study, program of studies, teachers, observation, curriculum subgroup, parents)

The content of curriculum is intellectually rigorous and provides opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills. In many cases, examples of student work reflect academic excellence and intellectual rigor. Advanced placement, pre AP and honors level courses make up one-third of the total course selections. The school has been recently nominated as a Commonwealth Compass School as a result of its increased MCAS scores. Students have won awards through participation in science fairs, National Latin Exam, New England Mathematics League competition, student newspaper efforts, and a number of other

areas. Faculty members express the opinion that continuation of the delivery of a rigorous curriculum may be compromised by parental ability to override placement decisions and course withdrawal requests. The school strives to provide authentic application of knowledge and skills for students within the academic spectrum. The special education students in the Life Skills class demonstrate an example of this application of knowledge. This group provides a service to the entire school by offering the “Coffee Stop” where the students bake muffins and serve these in a restaurant style fashion, utilizing social skills, job skills, and accounting skills. Authentic experiences are offered to students in a variety of courses such as those in the performing arts and within the technology/engineering department. (panel presentation, leadership team, curriculum subgroup, observation, self-study, teachers, school improvement council, student work samples)

The curriculum is moderately integrated and attempts to emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage. Depth of knowledge is emphasized through research, projects, and alternate assessment activities. Teachers have worked on their own time to develop interdisciplinary courses; there is no common planning time to encourage interdisciplinary thinking or coordination. Essential questions are not used to drive the curriculum throughout the school, however, some teachers report using themes and essential questions within individual courses. According to the December 2001 survey, only 33% of teachers agreed that there is curriculum coordination among and between the academic areas. (self-study, materials, student shadowing, student work, teachers, school improvement council, curriculum subcommittee)

NMRHS provides some opportunities to extend student learning beyond normal course offerings and the school campus. Through Jobs for Bay State Graduates and mentorship program students have opportunities throughout the school year to participate in internships and job shadowing programs. Students are also given opportunities to participate in academically based contests and tests. The New England Math League, the Northern Worcester Area Consortium Math Team, the Elizabeth Haskins Math Contest, and the AP calculus competitions at Worcester Polytechnic Institute are examples of academic competitions available. Students also have various clubs available to them at NMRHS. These opportunities include the International Club, Latin Club, Science Club, and French Club. Clubs are available for students interested in art, music, and drama. Numerous

opportunities are also available in non-academic areas; drama awards, the Boston Globe Art Awards, and instrumental and vocal awards. An annual science fair is open to all students who qualify. Summer debate competitions are offered for the Debate Team. Community service is offered in selected courses and extra-curricular activities. Despite these options for students there are many areas of concern at NMRHS that may impact extended learning. The school does not offer alternative paths to learning such as night classes, formal internships, and summer school for enrichment or remediation. The school offers limited school to career curriculum. Programs and curriculum in place appear to favor those who intend to follow a traditional four-year college path. Field trips have been limited to plays and museums within the local area or Boston area. School-sponsored field trips outside of the state or country have been discontinued. The present policy concerning field trips and extended learning opportunities may conflict with the school's desire within the mission statement to create lifelong learners. Recently, the school district has had to discontinue the late bus due to fiscal constraints, negatively impacting the accessibility of after school activities. (students, panel discussion, teachers, parents, self-study)

Results of the December 2001 survey indicate that less than 25% of parents are satisfied with the curricular coordination with sending schools. The leadership team has taken several proactive steps to address this dissatisfaction. Transition procedures have been improved. Job responsibilities for grades 6-12 curriculum coordinators have increased. These coordinators in math, language arts, and world language are working to ensure the seamless transition of the curriculum. In these areas, proposals have been made to implement a vertical curriculum with pre AP experiences for seventh and eighth grade students. The guidance counseling staff reports that numerous contacts are made with the middle school students and their parents as part of the transition to the high school. The special education department also provides transitional team meetings for the middle school students. The school district has offered professional development opportunities for teachers to improve instructional design, yet it appears that this was an underutilized service. (self-study, curriculum group, parent group, leadership group)

Instructional materials, technology, equipment and supplies, and staffing at the NMRHS are not sufficient to allow for full implementation of the curriculum. Computers are available in the media center and in two classroom computer labs and one double lab.



Students are allowed to sign up for computers at the beginning of the day while teachers need to schedule lab time. While specific software has been purchased to enhance learning, the availability of computer time does not match the demand of whole classroom instructional needs. In the classrooms, teachers have one computer that is accessible to students for word-processing and Internet access. Demonstration of mastery in world language is dependent upon taking oral examinations using a language lab. NMRHS does not have a language lab in which to practice oral language exercises and oral language exams to determine mastery levels. The art and music programs are lacking in space. The art program is also lacking in staff and materials. Second semester classes that require consumable supplies are unable to obtain adequate materials for instruction. In addition to equipment and supplies, there are staffing needs at NMRHS. The population of NMRHS has been steadily increasing without an increase in staff. Projected staffing for school year 2003-2004 is estimated to decrease while continued growth of the student population has been confirmed. While the school's class average is 14:1, this number is not a fair representation of class size because of inclusion of special education classes in this number (teacher to student ratio is significantly lower within special education programs) as well as the inclusion of those students in advanced placement classes. A minimum number of students are required to sustain some elective classes at the time of registration. This minimum requirement may impact class availability of courses at all levels. Class size is unstable as a result of parental overrides also. Students are allowed to add and drop classes outside of the designated time frame. (observations, self-study, teachers, parents)

There is ongoing review and evaluation of the curriculum that takes into account the assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations for student learning. Some time on "Extended Wednesdays" has been provided for ongoing review and evaluation of the curriculum. The survey study indicates that 87.5% of teacher grading is based on a range of assessment strategies. Curriculum review and evaluation in art and music lags behind other departments. Administrators and teachers have increasingly used data to inform decisions on curriculum and instruction. (teachers, self-study, teachers, leadership team)

The school commits some time, financial resources, and personnel to the review and evaluation of curriculum. The school provides time on "Extended Wednesdays" to support

the review of the curriculum. However, the purpose of these Wednesdays is not always clear to the staff. The district has set aside \$30,000 for teacher course reimbursement, and another \$30,000 is set aside for teacher workshops and conferences. In addition, the high school allots funds specifically for content area workshops. Despite this financial commitment, only one third of parents and teachers believe that the school commits sufficient time and money to review and evaluate the curriculum. Teachers and administrators would like to see more time available for teacher collaboration. (self-survey, school board, subcommittee, central office administration)

The professional staff is actively involved in the development and revision of the curriculum. A large number of teachers report that they are actively engaged in the improvement of curriculum. There is, however, very little curriculum revision or development across disciplines. District funds are used to pay teachers to develop, review, and evaluate the curriculum during the summer. Professional development opportunities were offered in the past to address interdisciplinary lessons and teaching in the long block. Teachers believe that better use of “Extended Wednesdays” could result in more collaborative curricular efforts. (self-study, teachers, curriculum subgroups)

Professional development activities support the development and implementation of the curriculum. The district provides courses and opportunities where teachers engage in professional development leading to curriculum improvement. A detailed district professional development plan contains results of a needs assessment survey as well as short and long-term professional development goals. However this document lists only one high school representative on the fourteen-member steering committee. A monthly professional development newsletter is issued to the staff. The staff reports a need for more content-based professional development opportunities. Communication concerning professional development opportunities is not predictable. (self-study, district professional development plan, associate superintendent, teachers)

**Commendations:**

1. The identification of clear expectations for student learning by all departments
2. The diversity of course offerings and co-curricular activities available to students in support of the school's mission and expectations
3. The curriculum content that is rigorous and provides a wide range of options for students
4. The student work that consistently shows evidence of academic excellence and intellectual rigor
5. The several positive steps have been taken to improve curricular transitional issues between the middle schools and high school
6. The increased use of data that informs decisions regarding curriculum
7. The detailed district curriculum development plan affords staff opportunities to collaborate on curricular issues

**Recommendations:**

1. Provide sufficient time within the schedule for to collaborate on student expectations both within disciplines and across departments
2. Ensure that each curricular area uses school-wide rubrics for which it has assumed responsibility
3. Review and modify the procedures used to add and drop classes
4. Expand the number of interdisciplinary course offerings
5. Foster more opportunities for students who are not college bound or who plan to attend local post-secondary institutions

6. Focus the program of “Extended Wednesdays” towards the intended purpose of curriculum development, revision, and assessment
7. Increase evaluation and revision of curriculum based on classroom assessment
8. Increase high school participation on the district professional development steering committee

### 3 INSTRUCTION

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The quality of instruction in a school is the single most important factor affecting the quality of student learning and is the link between curriculum, learning expectations, and student performance. Instructional practice 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. Consequently, teachers are expected to be reflective about their instructional practices and participate in professional dialogue with their colleagues about instruction and student learning.

1. Instructional strategies and practices shall be consistent with the school's stated mission and expectations for student learning.
2. Instructional strategies shall include practices that personalize instruction, make connections across disciplines, engage students as active self-directed learners, involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding, and provide opportunities to demonstrate the application of knowledge or learning.
3. Teachers shall provide formal and informal opportunities for students to assess their own learning.
4. Teachers shall use feedback from a variety of sources such as other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents as a means of improving instruction.
5. Teachers shall be knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches and reflective about their own practice.
6. Discussion of instructional strategies, practices, and student work shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.
7. Adequate time and financial resources shall be committed to ensuring the continuous improvement of instruction.
8. Technology shall be utilized to support instruction and to improve student learning.
9. The school's professional development programs shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional practices and be guided by identified instructional needs.
10. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes shall be used to improve instruction for the purpose of improving student learning.

## **Instruction**

### **Conclusions**

At North Middlesex Regional High School, the instructional strategies and practices are consistent with the school's stated mission and expectations for student learning. This is reflected in written course expectations developed by each department and provided to students at the beginning of the school year. Each department presents specific examples of how their particular discipline fulfills the desired outcomes of the mission statement. Teachers convey the school's stated mission through informal discussions and "teachable moments" during class time. The educational offerings provide rigor as evidenced by advanced placement classes in five disciplines, an articulations agreement with Mount Wachusett Community College, and a wide variety of elective courses. Real life application opportunities can be found in classes such as the Life Skills class, Jobs for Bay State Graduates, and the Early Childhood Development Program. Although the instructional strategies and practices are consistent with the mission statement and expectations for student learning, there is no formal tool to evaluate how effectively these goals are attained. (self-study, observations, teachers)

Teachers at NMRHS employ a variety of techniques and approaches designed to meet the diverse needs, learning styles and multiple intelligences of students. However, traditional teaching methods are still used extensively. Efforts to personalize instruction can be seen when teachers meet regularly with individuals or small groups of students after school for extra help, select appropriate instructional approaches to be used based in part upon the unique character of each class of students, engage in conversations with students outside of the classroom setting, and contact parents concerning students' individual needs. (observations, teachers, self-study)

Many teachers make efforts to connect learning across disciplines. This was shown formally in class discussions, assignments and student work in every department. Examples of formal interdisciplinary efforts exist in the tenth grade World Studies course and in courses taught between the English and Social Studies departments. Students are generally engaged as active self-directed learners when they are involved in independent research, cooperative groups and formal presentations in class. Specific departmental examples are:

writing portfolios in English and special education classes, service learning projects in the guidance department, peer teaching in science, independent work in the fine arts, and the “Coffee Stop” operated by the life skills class. The variety of course selections help to support depth of understanding. In general, the assignments provided by many teachers encourage students to analyze, synthesize and evaluate the material that they are studying. Many courses at NMRHS provide students with the opportunities to demonstrate the application of knowledge and learning. The graphics class has created tickets for events and covers for CDs produced by music students. Students in the music department have many opportunities to perform to a wide variety of audiences. The ecology class engaged in a paper-recycling program. The sociology class analyzed issues surrounding homelessness and provided an action plan to address some of the identified concerns. (student work, teacher assignments, program of studies, teachers)

The instructional process some practices of students assessing their own learning. Several departments, most notably world languages, English, and special education have made this a priority. This self-assessment includes but is not limited to self-correcting writing guides, writing portfolios, and preparedness checklists. Although there is no formal process for teachers to incorporate self-assessment, individual teachers throughout the school incorporate this practice in their classroom. (self-study, student work, teachers)

The formal processes in place for teachers to receive feedback are the teacher evaluation tool, the mentoring program, and scheduled department and faculty meetings. Although teachers generally appear satisfied with the evaluation process, they have noted that the mentoring program addresses only the needs of first year teachers. On an informal basis, teachers seek feedback in a variety of ways, including meeting with colleagues during non-class time, contacting parents via phone calls or notes, and group discussions with students. Teachers would like to see their “Extended Wednesdays” used for teacher collaboration and discussion within and across disciplines. (self-study, teachers, subcommittee)

Although North Middlesex Regional High School offers scheduled evening meetings including open house, parent conference nights, program of studies night, and monthly parent coffees, only 25.4% of parents surveyed felt that teachers sought their feedback regarding student learning. The staff acknowledges the need for a process to solicit feedback regularly

from parents and students as an important source of data for improving instruction. (self-study, teachers, University of Maine survey)

Through district professional development teachers have received specific training in effective instructional approaches, including the following workshops: Understanding by Design, Peak Performance and Learning Strategies, Brain Morphology and Physiology, Computerized Education Plans, Alternative Assessment and Using Multiple Intelligence Theory to Improve Student Performance. In addition, the library has a professional development section with resources ranging from educational journals to books that support current practices in instruction, research, and teaching strategies. Along with these opportunities, teachers express an interest in more courses or workshops that provide content specific instructional strategies. While there are opportunities for teacher reflection in study groups, all teachers do not take advantage of them. (teachers, facility tour, self-study, professional development plan)

Discussion of instructional practices and student work is only an informal part of the professional culture of North Middlesex Regional High School. Formal discussions occur in the new teachers mentoring program and as a component of the World Studies class. The teacher-teaming component of these two examples allows teachers to have common planning time to develop lessons together, to discuss student progress, and to reflect upon instructional practices. Informal discussions of instructional strategies and student work are teacher-driven and occur because of the professionalism of the staff. (self-study, teachers, observations)

Adequate time has been allocated for teachers to engage in necessary training and to meet regularly with one another in collaborative work groups; however, the commitment for this time to be used for improvement of instruction has been inconsistent. There is evidence that teachers are provided with opportunities to improve instruction by participating in workshops, courses, and curriculum development through offerings from the professional development committee. In spite of the many offerings from this committee, many teachers expressed the need to incorporate more content specific course work in the allocated time for instructional improvement. Although teachers may use up to \$500 per year towards professional development course work, this is not an unlimited resource, as there is a \$30,000



annual budget district-wide for professional development. Teachers have reported that this fund has never been depleted in any one school year, however. While teachers appear satisfied with the \$500 stipend, it may not remain sufficient to meet the growing costs of graduate coursework. (teachers, professional development plan, self-study)

Technology is frequently utilized to support instruction and improve student learning. Every teacher at NMRHS has a working computer and a TV in their classroom. Many classrooms also have the use of a VCR. There is a computer lab equipped with 40 computers that can be used for classroom instruction. The library has 20 computers that are used by the librarian as well as other teachers as instructional tools. Individual students can also use these computers. There are two classrooms equipped with smaller computer labs that are primarily used by specific departments. Teachers employ computers for teacher and student Internet research, PowerPoint presentations by teachers and students, graphic design projects, and word processing. Some examples of non-computer technology use are graphing calculators in math, video presentations across disciplines, and the use of a plotter and phaser. There are specific courses designed around the use and application of technology, including Introduction to Robotics, Word Processing, Programming in C++, the Plato program for MCAS preparation, and Photography and Graphic Design. Effective utilization of the various types of technology in the classroom as an instructional tool and as a method of improving student learning is largely dependent on an individual teacher's comfort level and ability to apply the different technologies types. Teachers see a need for more training in the use of technology to improve instruction. In addition to more training, teachers would also like to see more staff and resources allocated to technical support. (observations, student work, facility tour, teacher assignments, program of studies)

At the end of each school year, teachers are surveyed district-wide by the professional development committee regarding priorities for the coming school year, but the effectiveness of these surveys to assess teachers' true instructional needs has been questioned. The district attempts to provide adequate professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their instructional practices. Teachers are also provided with the opportunity to develop and present workshops that will help their colleagues develop more effective teaching strategies (e.g. PowerPoint instruction, Smart Board use, teaching the long block). Teachers expressed

frustration to be denied the opportunity to attend a national conference (NCTM, NCTE, NCSS, etc.) when it was held in the New England area. Although teachers are provided with 2 paid professional development days per year, it appears that the denials are the direct result of a stated district-wide philosophy that encourages teachers to be in their classroom for 180 teaching days. (teachers, subcommittee, central office administrators)

Department heads, curriculum coordinators, assistant principals, and the principal carry out teacher supervision and evaluation processes. It is not obvious that the formal process used is linked to the improvement of student learning. The school's Self-Study for Instruction report states that informal observations provide teachers with valuable information to improve instruction, while maintaining that there is no formal data to connect evaluation feedback to improved instruction or student learning. Not all supervisors/evaluators have been trained to use the particular evaluative tool incorporated by North Middlesex Regional School District.

(self-study, teachers, subcommittee)

**Commendations:**

1. The diverse instructional practices and strategies that support the school's mission and expectations for student learning
2. The numerous opportunities presented to students to demonstrate the application of knowledge and learning
3. The mentoring program for new teachers
4. The variety of opportunities for students to employ technology
5. The dedicated, committed, and knowledgeable faculty and support staff
6. The variety of opportunities students have to self-assess their work

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop a formal tool to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies and practices in relation to the school's mission statement and expectations for student learning
2. Develop a process to solicit feedback from parents and students as a source of improving instruction
3. Expand the mentoring program to include opportunities for peer coaching/mentoring beyond the first year
4. Provide content specific offerings as part of the professional development program
5. Use allocated professional time, including the established "Extended Wednesday", for departments to share instructional strategies and discuss student work
6. Provide training to develop instructional strategies to integrate technology in the curriculum
7. Clarify the extent to which the current supervision/evaluation process focuses on improved student learning
8. As budgets allow, provide additional technical support
9. Provide training for all building-wide evaluators who use the district's teacher evaluation tool

## 4 ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

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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 their instruction to better respond to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates the growth and competence of students to parents, school officials, and the public. The results of student learning must be continually discussed and used to develop short-term and long-term strategies for improving curriculum and instruction.

1. Teachers shall base their classroom assessment procedures on clearly stated expectations for student learning.
2. Specific learning criteria based on specific expectations for student learning shall be the basis for grading and reporting.
3. Teachers shall use a variety and range of classroom assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.
4. Teachers shall use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to evaluate and revise the curriculum.
5. Teachers shall use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to improve their instructional practices.
6. Teachers shall meet to discuss and share student work and the results of classroom assessment for the purpose of revising the curriculum and instructional strategies.
7. Teachers shall communicate to students and their families how student work and progress are being assessed.
8. The school's professional development programs shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop a broad range of assessment strategies for classroom use.
9. The administration and faculty shall use agreed upon levels of performance, indicators of successful accomplishment and other data to assess the progress of students in achieving the school's stated academic expectations for student learning and regularly report the findings to the public.
10. The administration and faculty shall use assessment data to determine student success in meeting the school's stated civic and social expectations and regularly report the findings to the public.

## Assessment of Student Learning

### Conclusions

Teachers at North Middlesex Regional High School base their classroom assessment procedures on clearly stated expectations for student learning. Teachers communicate general expectations, grading policies, etc. at the beginning of the course. Many teachers send these documents home for parents to view and sign. Each discipline has derived its own learning expectations from the school learning expectations. Some teachers share and review their department's learning expectations with students, but this practice is not universal. (self-study, teachers, assessment evidence box)

Specific learning criteria based on specific expectations for student learning are the basis for grading and reporting at NMRHS. According to the assessment self-study, approximately 90 percent of teachers report using specific learning criteria as the basis for grading and reporting. Further, teachers who use rubrics as an assessment tool indicate that the rubrics add clarity to the learning criteria and improve student learning. However, there is variance in the quality and detail of rubrics and other assessment tools. For example, scoring guides that allocate points to particular elements of an assignment, while useful, lack the descriptive detail that a fully developed rubric has for specifying levels of quality. Further, school-wide rubrics to assess school and department expectations have not been developed. This important process has begun (the English department is developing a school-wide composition rubric, for example) but has yet to be broadened to all disciplines. (student work, self-study, assessment evidence box, self-study survey, teachers, assessment committee)

Teachers at NMRHS use a variety and range of classroom assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time. Besides traditional tests, quizzes, and compositions, teachers collectively employ oral presentations, projects, portfolios, performance assessment, cooperative learning, and class participation for assessment. Provision to modify assessment for students with special needs is coordinated with the special education liaison. However, the NEASC survey results imply a discrepancy between faculty and student perceptions of the variety and range of assessment. Eighty-seven percent of faculty members versus 41 percent of students felt that

varied assessments are the basis for grading. Use of varied strategies to determine what students know and can do is crucial to engage students and to reach all learning styles. (observations, self-study, student work, teachers, assessment committee)

Teachers at NMRHS seldom use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to evaluate and revise the curriculum. Curricular evaluation and revision do take place, but they are driven by alignment to state curriculum frameworks and MCAS assessment results. To date, most curricula have been revised in this way. There is limited time for departments to collaborate on the classroom assessment results that might be used as the basis for curricular change. Using assessment data for evaluation and revision of curricula is essential for improved student learning and increased achievement of learning expectations. As a result of classroom results, individual staff members do adjust the curriculum as it is being taught and some departments and courses use some common final exams (math, social studies, foreign language) to provide a foundation for evaluating both curriculum and instruction. (self-study, teachers, assessment subcommittee)

Some teachers at NMRHS use the results of classroom assessment of student learning to improve their instructional practices. Eighty-six percent of the faculty reported on the assessment survey that they use classroom assessment results to improve their instruction to some extent. Teachers and students have reported that if large numbers of students do poorly on a test, teachers will often revise and re-administer the test and adjust the pace or method of instruction to meet student needs. Some teachers report that establishment of rubrics has helped clarify lesson/unit expectations, and similar attempts to specify learning expectations have suggested alternative methods to deliver instruction, such as open-ended questions, self-assessment, portfolios, and multi-task projects often involving group work and hands-on activities. (self-study, assessment faculty survey, teachers, student shadowing)

Teachers at NMRHS rarely meet to discuss and share student work and the results of classroom assessment for the purpose of revising the curriculum and instructional strategies. Teachers report that schedules do not provide common prep periods or formal opportunities for collaboration. However, nearly one-third of teachers reports that they frequently collaborate informally, and over one-third report that opportunities for informal collaboration occur only on a monthly or quarterly basis. Without opportunities for staff collaboration, individual teachers are isolated from their colleagues, parochial in their understanding of

student learning outside their classes, and possibly unaware of best practices taking place in their buildings. Finally, collaboration is the means for living documents like school and department learning expectations and curricula to be revised over time. (self-study, meetings with teachers, teacher interviews)

Teachers communicate to students and their families how student work and progress are being assessed. The NMRHS *Program of Studies* and *Student Handbook/Athletic Handbook* detail grading policies. Grade reports and progress reports are issued on a regular basis throughout the year. Also, teachers present grading policies in their course outlines at the beginning of the courses. Some teachers use rubrics and models or exemplars to provide students with a richer understanding of standards of excellence. Parents report that most teachers are responsive to their phone requests for information or conferences. Some parents cite the limited information on grade and progress reports as an area that could be improved. (self-study, students, teachers, examination of student work, school board, parents)

North Middlesex Regional High School's professional development programs provide opportunities for teachers to develop a broad range of assessment strategies for classroom use. Ongoing relationships exist with Fitchburg State College Professional Development Center, Nashoba Valley Professional Development Center, and Merrimack Educational Collaborative. Teachers have responded with enthusiasm to these opportunities. For example, a course offered within the past two years, "Assessment and Learning: What's the Connection?" by Linda Crewe, presented ideas from the well known *Understanding by Design* of McTighe and Wiggins. Fifty-five percent of those who have participated in district professional development opportunities felt that new approaches to assessment had resulted. In addition, "Extended Wednesdays" may be set aside by individual departments to work on assessment. Streamlined training of new teachers would also result. (self-study, assistant superintendent, teachers)

The administration and faculty of NMRHS have not established agreed upon levels of performance to assess the progress of students in achieving the school's stated academic expectations for student learning. The mission statement and learning expectations are relatively new documents, whose assessment components have not yet been developed. NMRHS has instead focused its efforts to determine the school's success with student

learning through standardized measures such as MCAS, SAT, and AP exams. These results are communicated to the public. (self-study, assessment subcommittee, teachers)

The administration and faculty of NMRHS do not have the assessment tools to determine success in meeting the school's stated civic and social expectations. Like the learning expectations, the civic and social expectations are newly articulated, and assessment mechanisms have not yet been developed. The staff acknowledges the need to develop an assessment tool to measure these expectations. (self-study, assessment subcommittee, teachers)

**Commendations:**

1. The clearly stated expectations for student learning that are the basis for classroom assessments
2. The learning criteria which is based on specific expectations for student learning are the basis for grading and reporting
3. The many teachers at NMRHS that use a variety and range of assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time
4. The curricular alignment with state frameworks and MCAS results that have been accomplished and are ongoing
5. The good communication with students and parents regarding assessment
6. The professional development programs that provide opportunities for teachers to develop a broad range of assessment strategies for classroom use
7. The above average achievement on MCAS, SAT, and AP exams

**Recommendations:**

1. Display and use school or department learning expectations in every classroom



2. Provide further training in rubric construction
3. Use assessment results in determining student success in achieving the school-wide academic expectations for student learning
4. Further expand the variety and range of assessment strategies
5. Develop formal reporting processes to apprise the public of the school's progress in meeting the school-wide academic, social, and civic expectations for student learning
6. Provide increased opportunities for staff members to share and discuss student work and classroom assessment for revising curriculum and instruction
7. Provide more school-wide professional development on assessment for staff
8. Create agreed upon levels of performance and assessments for the school's academic, civic, and social expectations

## SUPPORT STANDARD

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# 5

## LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

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The manner in which a school provides leadership, organizes itself, makes decisions and treats its members profoundly affects teaching and learning. Faculty and administration must be clear and reflective about and responsible for the decisions and practices they have implemented in organizing and structuring their programs and in creating a culture that supports learning for all students.

1. The principal shall provide leadership in the school community by building and maintaining a vision, direction, and focus for student learning.
2. Teachers shall provide leadership essential to the success of school improvement.
3. The school board and superintendent shall ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and authority to guide the school in its mission and in meeting the school's stated expectations for student learning.
4. The organization and structure of the educational program 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, and be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning as well as current educational research.
6. The schedule shall support the school's mission and expectations for student learning and should be designed to provide the most effective implementation of curriculum and instruction.
7. School leaders shall accord meaningful roles in the decision-making process to students, parents, and members of the staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
8. Each teacher shall have a student load that enables him/her to provide sufficient attention to the needs of individual students.
9. The school shall provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate within and across departments.
10. All school staff shall be involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.
11. Student success shall be regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed.
12. The climate of the school shall be positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.
13. The professional culture of the school shall be characterized by thoughtful, reflective and constructive discourse about student learning and well-being in both formal and informal settings.

## **Leadership and Organization**

### **Conclusions**

North Middlesex Regional High School is a disciplined and orderly school that has benefited from the consistent leadership of the current principal. The principal's attention is focused on current administrative details with an emphasis on attendance, discipline, and order. A new discipline code and attendance policy have established the foundation for a positive school climate that supports learning. The present administration clearly places a high value on an orderly school as integral to positive educational outcomes. The positive fruits of this climate can be seen in the rising MCAS scores of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students at North Middlesex. (school improvement committee, self-study, interviews with students, leadership team)

The teachers of NMRHS are willing to participate in leadership activities that are essential to school improvement. Teachers participate on many committees focused upon school improvement, and they willingly participate in professional development activities that support improvement. While the desire to serve has been evident in the past, equally apparent is a current attitude among many teachers that their opinions are neither "...appreciated, respected, nor listened to." (self-study, administrators, teachers)

The superintendent of schools is an influential whose presence is known both in the schools and as chief executive officer of the school committee. While some faculty report, in their view, that the superintendent exceeds his role as it relates to the principal's autonomy, interviews with the principal, superintendent and members of the school board do not support this view. The faculty attributes the perceived lack of autonomy of the principal to the frequency in change in leadership at the high school. Admittedly, the faculty has suffered the result of several changes in leadership; however, the current principal has been fully in charge of this high school for four years, and the selection of a new principal from within the administrative team should further address the continuity issue to which the self-study refers. (teachers, observations, central office personnel)

NMRHS seeks to promote educational excellence; its strong and committed department heads contribute to this end. Curriculum coordinators add to the administrative support for the teachers and support staff both in departmental organization and curriculum.

The relatively new “Extended Wednesday” in the school schedule is not effectively utilized. (self-study, panel discussion, teachers)

NMRHS offers classes with different degrees of rigor for the core academic areas. The school offers a number of course sections that are homogenously grouped. There appears to be little interest in changing this practice. Teachers, guidance counselors and parents assist students in the placement process. Moreover, the North Middlesex staff maintains flexibility in schedule placement by permitting students to move into more difficult classes as the need arises. Teacher recommendations, prior course grades, and other course requirements support the decision-making in the course selection process. However, the course selection system does not have consistent, department-wide processes with clear entry and exit requirements. (School Improvement Committee, Teacher Interviews, Special Services Meeting.)

While the self-study asserts that the current master schedule does not support the school’s mission, there is little evidence provided to define the disconnection between the master schedule and learning. Many teachers feel that their preferences were not considered by the administration in developing the present daily schedule. The master schedule controversy illustrates the fact that there are flawed decision-making processes in the building. Faculty members report that they voted negatively on the current master schedule but the administrators state that a vote was never taken. (administrators and teacher interviews, school leadership team, self-study)

Some faculty feels that the school improvement council, faculty, students and parents have few meaningful roles in decision-making. It appears that few opportunities exist within the realm of decision-making to promote an atmosphere of participation and ownership, but there does appear to exist a strong informal network that allows key constituents access to administrative decision-makers. In some cases, this access is directly to the superintendent of schools bypassing the school administration. The lack of clarity surrounding the decision making processes is having a negative impact on levels of communication, problem solving and teaching and learning which are commitments stated in the school’s mission and expectations. (self-study, leadership team, administrators)

Class sizes range from one to fifty. NMRHS has an average student-teacher ratio of 14:1. The average teacher load is 86:1, but there are significant inequities in teacher load that

ought to be corrected. Class size is inconsistent, changing by popularity of the courses; it is not driven by the mission statement or by student need. Though the size of typical non-elective classes average twenty-two students, although the class size of the special education department is an exception to this. The physical size of the classrooms dictate the need for smaller classes and allows more varied teaching methods. (self-study, administrators interview, school master schedule)

NMRHS provides “Extended Wednesdays” as opportunities for teachers to collaborate within and across departments. Department meetings and other administrative tasks have occupied this time in the past. Also, this in-service time was utilized extensively in preparing the self-study. Some faculty report a need to re-define this time with a priority given towards collaboration. The mentoring program provides school hours for the new teacher and the mentor to collaborate on curriculum and school policies without the added burden of school duties. Also, teachers collaborate informally within departments sharing lessons and assessment. (self-study, teachers, school improvement council)

NMRHS has a tradition of caring about the future of individual students. Nurturing and encouragement takes place in all departments and academic levels. Students thrive in the atmosphere of academic and personal enrichment. It is obvious that school personnel, including teachers, custodial staff, health staff, counselors and school secretaries practice this caring attitude. (guidance department, self-study, observations)

NMRHS, as a caring and nurturing institution, regularly acknowledges, celebrates, and displays student work. Teachers display student work in classrooms and hallways. The administration proudly displays trophies for athletics and academics. Class valedictorian and salutatorian names, pictures and school information are permanently displayed. National Honor Society, Student of the Quarter, recognition honor roll and awards ceremonies are conducted. (observations, self-study, administrators)

The attendance policy of NMRHS has promoted student responsibility and the new discipline policy promotes the well-being of students and staff. This discipline policy provides a safe and respectful atmosphere in the classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, and other areas of the school. It is clear that the student body at NMRHS acts in a manner that fosters a very positive school climate. However, the discipline policy and concern for safety have diminished the academic and socially enriching programs previously offered outside the

school environment such as certain field trips and building based activities. Furthermore, while the principal's promotion of professional decorum on the part of the teachers must be applauded, some members of the faculty perceive an inconsistent and inequitable application of administrative standards. (self-study, observations, parents, leadership and organization evidence box)

While the focus on matters of order and maintaining student discipline have limited the development and fostering of a thoughtful and reflective school culture, the professional staff should recognize the need to address this issue in a timely manner. Shared decision making with assumption for resolving issues by all parties will provide the foundation for the establishment of a professional culture at the school. The school environment appears to be marked by an unhealthy tendency to blame others for problems that should be mutually solved. The blueprint for improvement that this report provides, coupled with the appointment of a new principal, will establish the opportunity for the faculty to correct this deficiency. (self-study, parents, school leadership team)

**Commendations:**

1. The orderly and safe school environment
2. The respectful and responsible conduct of students within the school
3. The willingness of teachers to volunteer for school activities
4. The departmental leadership teams' commitment to the school and their programs
5. The Commitment of the entire school staff to promote the well-being of students within their learning environment
6. The frequent acknowledgement of student success

**Recommendations:**

1. Establish a more formal decision-making structure marked by a traditional chain of command

2. Provide the administrative leadership to enhance communication and consistency of policies and programs by implementing an inclusionary and shared decision-making process that is governed by clear rules
3. Formulate the implementation of consistent school-wide policies and practices with specific attention to student discipline, teacher reprimands, teacher observations and fund allocation
4. Provide the principal with the appropriate level of autonomy and authority to function as the educational leader of the school
5. Utilize the “Extended Wednesday” as a vehicle to collaborate on the pursuit of the school’s mission
6. Coordinate a consistent, data-driven system for application of the course placement policy for initial course selection in the middle school and continued course selection at the high school, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative measures.
7. Follow the protocols in place for course adds/drops
8. Develop and implement a plan to reduce large class sizes
9. Establish and follow a master schedule that meets the school’s vision of student learning
10. Provide the administrative and faculty leadership to study current academic programs, including leveling practices, and to implement a vision and direction for the future that focuses on student learning

## SUPPORT STANDARD

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# 6

## SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

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The school's student support services include guidance and health services, special education, personal career, and social counseling, and access to outside referrals along with library/information services. Student learning is 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 to support the school's mission and expectations.

1. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's stated academic expectations for student learning and to participate in the educational program.
2. The school shall allocate resources, programs and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve stated civic and social expectations.
3. Each student shall have an adult member of the school community who serves to personalize that student's education experience.
4. The school's student support services shall be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
5. Student support and library/information services personnel shall be knowledgeable about the curriculum and involved in its implementation, evaluation, and revision.
6. All school resources for learning shall be regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning.
7. Student support personnel shall enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff, and utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.

8. There shall be a system for effective and ongoing communications with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and about identified student needs.
9. The school shall provide and maintain library/information services program and materials that are fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program and are consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
10. The library/information services program shall foster independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty to utilize various school and community information resources and technologies.
11. A wide range of materials, technology, and other library/information resources shall be available to students and faculty in a variety of formats and utilized to improve teaching and learning and be reflective of the school's student population.
12. Library/information services shall include, but not be limited to, sufficient certified professional personnel.
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. Policies shall be in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet
15. Student records shall be maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law.



## **School Resources for Learning**

### **Conclusions**

North Middlesex Regional High School allocates various resources, programs, and services to enable students to achieve the school's stated academic expectations. The special education department works closely with regular classroom teachers to monitor and assist in the implementation of individual educational plans (IEPs) for students. The special education department provides small group and individual tutoring and academic support to those students who require it in their IEP. The academic support center (ASC) provides tutoring services for students in various subjects, utilizing two full-time teachers and peer tutors. The library/media center is available for the students before, during, and after school. Various services include computer programs, databases, electronic book catalogues, and other technology for student use. A portion of the library/media center has a career section where students can research career opportunities and colleges. Computers are available for student use in a computer lab, library/media center and in the ASC. Guidance counselors provide advice on course selection, career development, and post-graduate planning. Despite these many services, there is a lack of programs for students who are academically at-risk. (school support staff, facility tour, self-study)

Students at NMRHS are actively engaged in programs that support their achievement in the school's civic and social expectations. Peer mediation and peer tutoring support the students in becoming responsible and involved citizens. Extracurricular activities such as the Gay Straight Alliance, Amnesty International, and the Red Cross Blood Drive promote tolerance, service and respect for others. The Service Learning Project sponsored by the guidance department promotes self-directed learning. Students are encouraged to participate in athletics and to utilize the fitness center, promoting personal health and well-being. (school support staff, school leadership team, self-study)

Guidance counselors make several contacts with students beginning in the eighth grade. When students enter the ninth grade, they are assigned a guidance counselor who provides personalized services and mentoring. The nurse and the librarian also serve as mentors and advocates for students. Although support staff members work diligently to

provide each child with personalized care, their large caseloads and many responsibilities may prevent them from making sure that each child receives enough individual attention. The school does not currently provide a student-mentoring program to service the individual needs of students beyond those provided by guidance counselors. (support staff, teachers, students)

Guidance counselors provide classroom lessons and evening workshops on issues that are pertinent to student life and that support the ideals in the mission statement. The workshops topics include harassment, career planning, bullying, life skills, and resume writing. The guidance curriculum addresses many issues that are directly related to the mission statement. health services requires reinforcement and recognition. One full-time nurse is responsible for the health and well-being of more than 1200 students. Not surprisingly, there have been frequent turnovers in health service personnel. (school support staff, teachers, self-study)

Support services personnel and library/media services personnel are regularly involved in department meetings and administrative team meetings where they learn about curriculum. The librarian is a curriculum coordinator for grades K – 12 and is on the curriculum committee at the high school. The special education department head works closely with staff members from all academic areas to align curriculum. (support staff, teachers, self-study)

The librarian, guidance counselors, and special education staff members receive feedback informally from teachers, students and parents. They use the feedback to review and revise their programs. The school improvement council conducts surveys of students, parents, and staff annually to review and revise academic and support services. In the past, NMRHS recognized the value of an effective follow-up survey from graduates as a vehicle to gather feedback for support services, but the process has been discontinued. (self-study, support staff, teachers)

At NMRHS, the support personnel interact and work cooperatively with staff members within the building and with community organizations to address student learning. The librarian offers professional development to the staff on technology such as PowerPoint 2000 training and collaborates with colleagues from local public libraries as well as the middle and elementary schools in the district. The guidance department has produced a

community resource book for homeless families. Its members also work with community organizations such as the police, probation officers, therapists, and consultants. The special education department works closely with staff members in all academic areas in aligning curriculum, implementing IEPs and evaluating student progress. (support staff, teachers, self-study)

North Middlesex Regional High School maintains an effective system of communication with students and parents/guardians. The school produces and distributes parent newsletter, guidance newsletter, library newsletter, and the principal's newsletter. Progress reports and grade reports are given to students every term so that parents and students know their academic standing. The school website is accessible and updated on a weekly basis. The student handbook and program of studies are given to students annually. Each morning, students produce a television news program that is broadcast to all the classrooms. The principal invites parents and teachers to have an informal coffee and conversational session monthly. Phone calls to homes of absent students have been discontinued, however. (self-study, support staff, teachers)

The school provides a high quality library/media services center. It features materials that are fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional programs that support the mission and expectations of the school. All students have access to the facility through a pass system or as part of a class. The librarian provides instruction on research skills through reference books and computer databases. The librarian has developed an instructional packet for all freshmen on effective library and research skills. The librarian is involved in coordinating curriculum across grades K-12. Teachers are involved in recommending materials that best meet the needs of the students. (teachers, support staff, observations)

The library/media center has access to the Central Massachusetts Regional Library System via the Internet. They have access to databases such as newspapers, special publications, and other educational documents. The entire library is catalogued electronically through MARC records. Countless student reports are produced with materials from the library. The librarian has coordinated a program with Blockbusters where teachers can acquire videotapes for instruction at no cost. The teachers have access to the

library/media center and also borrow media equipment for their classroom instruction. (teachers, support staff, observations, self-study)

The library has a wide range of materials and equipment for school use. Besides 13,000 books and periodicals, the library contains collections of audio and videotapes. A section of the library is dedicated to career and college planning materials. The librarian also circulates and maintains all audio-visual equipment collection for the entire school. There are, however, only two photocopiers for the entire school and the school lacks technologies for a language lab where students can become fluent in world languages. Teachers have difficulty scheduling time to use computer labs with their classes. (teachers, support staff, observations)

The library/media center serves over 1200 students and 94 staff members before, during, and after school. There are only one full-time certified staff member and one part-time secretary who maintain the facility and provide services. There is one paraprofessional who provides technical support for the building. The technology person for the district cannot meet the needs of the NMRHS staff in a timely fashion. Teachers find it difficult to get supplies such as printer cartridges in a timely fashion. (teachers, support staff, observations, self-study)

The library is open to all students and staff members from 6:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. every school day except during standardized testing periods. The library/media center is available before, during, and after school hours. (self-study, support staff, teachers, observations)

NMRHS has a comprehensive policy on Internet, network, and homepage usage. The policy is included in the student handbook, which is distributed to each student each year. The selection policy (including the process by which material is added, weeded, or reconsidered) is under revision to address the new technologies that are not included in the previous version. The librarian is actively engaged in this process. (self-study, support staff, observations)

Files of transcripts, grade reports, and other records are securely and confidentially stored in the guidance area. The student records are maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal regulations. Special education records are locked and maintained with access restricted by federal and state law. Medical/health records are

securely maintained in the health services office and access is restricted to health services staff members. (support staff, observations, self-study)

**Commendations:**

1. The valuable services provided by support services, health services, and library/media services personnel for the students, teachers, parents and the community
2. The effective delivery of services by the special education, guidance, and library/media personnel
3. The effective communication with parents regarding support services, student performance, and student progress
4. The high quality of library/media services in terms of print collections, and computer resources, as well as the professional assistance provided by the librarian to the students and staff members
5. The active participation of guidance and library/media staff in the curriculum processes

**Recommendations :**

1. Develop a formal student assistance team that would be responsible for identifying interventions and services for at-risk students
2. Provide community service opportunities which would allow students to participate in activities that promote student achievement of the school's social and civic expectations
3. Establish a mentoring/advisory program that includes professional development for adult mentors, which would allow all students to feel personally connected to the learning environment
4. Create a formal process to survey graduates to evaluate programs and services

5. Provide additional staffing in health services to meet the needs of the current student population
6. Provide sufficient professional and support personnel to maximize library/media services available to all students, faculty members and support staff
7. Provide additional staff members for technology repair and support
8. Provide the technology that include a language lab function
9. Increase computer technology and photocopier capacity to meet the needs of the school

SUPPORT STANDARD

7

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

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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 students and their families as partners in the students' education as well as 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, plant, and equipment shall support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning.
4. The school site, plant and equipment shall be maintained to ensure an environment that is healthy and safe for all occupants.
5. There shall be a planned and adequately funded program of building and site management that ensures the maintenance and repair of facilities and equipment as well as the thorough and ongoing cleaning of the facility.
6. There shall be ongoing planning to address future program, staffing, facility and technology needs as well as capital improvements.
7. The physical plant and facilities shall meet all applicable federal and state laws and be in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
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.
10. Equipment shall be adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate.
11. School board decisions, policies, and procedures and district plans shall support the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

## **Community Resources for Learning Report**

### **Conclusions**

North Middlesex Regional High School engages parents and the community in their child's education. The school has a defined process for student course selection that includes direct input from teachers and parents. The school promotes extensive communication between parents and the school through various newsletters, parent support groups, and technology. Parents are invited to participate in programs such as parent-teacher conferences, and to support student productions in drama and music. The self-study survey reports that 50% of parents and students feels invited to participate in the school. The community is well informed on all aspects of student life at NMRHS as evident from the numerous methods of parent involvement including involvement in the school improvement council, superintendent's council and in various athletic booster organizations. The school's methods to inform the community encourage a significant amount of both community and parental support. (newsletters, parents, self-study)

Active partnerships between the school and area businesses have lapsed since 1997. Some articulation agreements with higher education have been lost. The articulation agreement with New England Institute of Technology has ceased because of the lack of enrollment and classes dropped by the Institute. The partnership program between area businesses and the school have diminished because of turnover in school leadership. The significant number of students working in the community has supported some partnerships on an individual basis as shown. There is continuous use of the facilities by the sending communities, especially by athletic teams. A school to career program has been initiated, but it is too early to measure the impact to students. The future of the Jobs For Bay State Graduates is uncertain and consequently may limit possible future employment opportunities for students. (administrators, faculty members, students)

The school site, plant, and equipment support and enhance many aspects of the educational program. There are specific areas (art, technology, science, and language) that need more resources. Needs include furniture, reliable equipment, and improved lab space. The academic support area is spacious and shared by both special education students and staff and regular education students who are receiving tutorial services. Support staff office



areas are adequate and provide a safe and secure area to meet with students. The band and chorus areas are significantly overcrowded, however, and in need of improved ventilation. The music programs are affected adversely by class size and limited equipment. (facility tour, students, teachers)

The school site, plant, and equipment are generally well maintained, and there have been major improvement projects over the past three years. A new roof 2 ½ years ago, the new windows last year on the south side, and the retiling of oldest section of the building are the major updates. New ceilings and renovated student lockers are installed in a different section of the building each summer. The two boilers are 45 and 35 years old with an efficiency rating of approximately 65%, however. Parts for the individual classroom heater units are no longer available due to the age of the heater units. The building is within state and local code regulations for a facility built in 1961, however, although room ventilation has been a major concern since the previous NEASC accreditation ten years ago. The upgraded security system shows that the safety of the students and staff is a main priority. There are still concerns for safety and surveillance in the parking areas. Chemicals that are inappropriately stored in a chemistry classroom present a potential hazard to students and staff, as does impaired access to the eye wash station. Students do not consistently wear eye protectors during chemistry labs. (facility tour, teachers, observations)

The five-year plan addresses needs for long-term capital improvements. The sending towns have done a good job funding the budgets presented to them over the years. The maintenance of a building of this age is foremost in the minds of staff and parents. Any required repair impacting safety receives immediate attention, while routine repairs are accomplished through a work order process. The custodial staff does a good job keeping the facility clean and in good repair, but it is understaffed. A few areas of the aging facility need constant attention. There are problems with lack of timely replacement of custodial staff members. (facility tour, support staff, teachers)

The school has several five-year plans at different levels to address capital improvements, facility maintenance, and technology needs. These plans drive the improvement of facilities and financial planning for these improvements. Each classroom now has a computer with Internet access and software for attendance and reports such as student progress and report cards. The district has shown insight in planning a number of

major improvements over a five-year period. These projects will maintain a high quality learning environment for students. (facility tour, administrators, students)

NMRHS has met all state and local codes and has all necessary documentation in place. During capital improvements such as floor tiling or replacing ceilings in the oldest section of the building, all necessary precautions and testing are being adhered because of the presence of asbestos. The proper treatment of hazardous material ensures the safety of students and staff members. The custodial staff, under the direction of the supervisor of buildings and grounds, attempts to make as many improvements as possible to save the district money. Its members recognize that there are times when they do need to bring in outside contractors, however. (facility tour, documentation on file, custodial staff)

The district has funded requested budgets for the past ten years. The administration has been conservative in requests to the towns. Over the last decade, the towns have supported \$100 million dollars in school building projects in the district. The budget has maintained programs, although there are times when the budget has been frozen and some supplies needed for second semester classes are unavailable. Maintaining the present staffing levels is the current financial concern. (administrators, students, teachers)

The teachers, department heads or curriculum coordinators, and administrators do not all share the same understanding of the budget process. There is a perception that some departments are looked are favored more than others and there is a lack of financial equity between and among departments. (teachers, students, self-study)

The adequacy of equipment varies by department. Some departments need to upgrade equipment as part of the district five-year plan. There is no articulated replacement plan for equipment. Several teachers have better equipment because they provide it themselves while others take the initiative to write grants to get equipment. All computer concerns are referred to the district director of information systems. Equipment is repaired on an as needed basis. There are on-going concerns over repairs and upgrade of technology. The supervisor of buildings and grounds has an inventory plan for the facility. (self-study, teachers, administrators)

The school board is visible and supportive of the school administration. The board plays an active role in policy decisions for the building especially as they pertain to the

school's mission statement. The principal, with assistance from the school improvement council, discusses and recommends policy for the NMRHS. This maintains a constant focus on the goals of the school and student learning. The procedures outlined by the Education Reform Act of 1993 are currently upheld. (leadership team, school improvement council, school board)

**Commendations:**

1. The school's efforts to communicate with parents and the community to maintain awareness of school programs
2. Extensive community use of the facility
3. A high level of effort to maintain an older facility with major capital improvements (roof, windows, floors, ceilings, cafeteria renovations) as well as a new fitness center
4. Enhanced security system and a comprehensive plan involving police and fire departments to provide student and staff safety
5. Financial support of the schools through bonds and annual budgets from the three towns

**Recommendations:**

1. Provide necessary equipment and supplies for courses in art, languages, and technology
2. Continue to improve and maintain the facility according to current five-year capital improvement plans
3. Provide additional funding for custodial services
4. Coordinate the five-year maintenance plans
5. Replace the boilers and older heating units
6. Resolve ventilation and other HVAC problems in the music instruction area

7. Clarify for all stakeholders the allocation procedures for developing and implementing the annual school budget
8. Rebuild business partnerships with the community
9. Provide a language laboratory
10. Improve student access to computers
11. Provide an in-house computer technician
12. Provide additional copy machines
13. Provide an adequate location for the band and chorus
14. Improve procedures for requisition of materials for second semester courses

## 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 North Middlesex Regional High School. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should also 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 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 that 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 North Middlesex Regional High School submit routine Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports documenting the current status of all evaluation report recommendations, with particular detail provided for any recommendation which may have been rejected or those items on which no action has been taken. In addition, responses must be detailed on all recommendations highlighted by the 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 that 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 that the change has had on the school's ability to meet CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report. Each member school is required to submit an Annual Report form 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 visiting committee report. An outline of the Follow-Up Program is available in the Commission's *Accreditation Handbook* that 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.

## Visiting Committee Roster

Richard F. Gremlitz, Chair	Principal, Portsmouth High School Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Susan M. Nicholson, Assistant Chair	Principal, North Andover High School North Andover, Massachusetts
Mary Emmons High Schools	OOD Coordinator, Acton-Boxborough Regional  Acton, Massachusetts
Charles E. Gobron	Director of Curriculum and Instruction; Northborough-Southborough Schools, Northborough, MA
Maynard Morin	Science Teacher, Hingham High School Hingham, Massachusetts
Barbara Kane Public Schools	Director of Instructional Technology, Natick  Natick, Massachusetts
Martha Rives	Art Teacher, Souhegan High School Amherst, New Hampshire
Debra A. Roy	Assistant Principal, Marlborough High School Marlborough, Massachusetts
Chris Kurhajetz	Social Studies Teacher, Winchester High School Winchester, Massachusetts
Thomas Pandiscio	Principal, Wachusett Regional High School Holden, Massachusetts
John J. Parrillo High School	Library-Media Director, Shepherd Hill Regional  Dudley, Massachusetts
Hae-Kyung Choi and Science	Guidance Counselor, O'Bryant School of Math  Roxbury, Massachusetts
Nancy A. Guyette High School	Foreign Language Department Chair, Keene  Keene, New Hampshire

Holly Dunlea

English Teacher, Pembroke Academy  
Pembroke, New Hampshire

Craigin Howland

English Teacher, Sutton Memorial High School  
Sutton, Massachusetts

## **SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY**

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

- available programs, including fine arts, practical arts and student activities
- available facilities, including upkeep and maintenance
- level of funding
- school day and/or school year
- administrative structure, including the number of administrators and supervisors
- number of teachers and/or guidance counselors
- number of support staff
- student services
- the use of distance educational programs or courses
- educational media services and personnel
- student enrollment
- grades served by the school



- the student population that causes program or staffing modification(s), e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency.
- identification by the state as an underperforming school
- takeover by the state