

THE NEEDHAM HIGH SCHOOL

School Improvement Plan 2007 - 2009



Approved by the Needham High School School Council (April 9, 2007):

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NEEDHAM HIGH SCHOOL

Mission and Expectations for Student Learning Document

DRAFT (this document will undergo revision)

MISSION STATEMENT

To Think; To Respect; To Communicate

Needham High School draws from the strengths of the community at-large to create partnerships between faculty and students, both on an individual level and in groups, in order to provide a high quality education.

The school offers students a variety of opportunities to excel and diversity of perspectives from which to learn in an environment that is both nurturing and challenging.

The well-rounded student is able to participate actively in school and society while determining his or her unique path to fulfillment.

EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

(Rubrics to measure individual student progress will accompany these expectations)

Students at Needham High School will:

- Write effectively
- Research effectively
- Read critically for comprehension
- Solve problems by applying knowledge
- Demonstrate non-written communication skills
- Demonstrate effective organizational skills
- Monitor and direct their learning using various feedback sources

SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

(Rubrics to measure school-wide progress will accompany these expectations)

Students at Needham High School will:

- Demonstrate integrity, character, and responsibility for one's actions
- Develop a healthy mind, body, and spirit
- Understand and respect diversity

CIVIC EXPECTATIONS

(Rubrics to measure school-wide progress will accompany these expectations)

Students at Needham High School will:

- Contribute positively to local, national and global communities

PREFACE

The School Improvement Plan for Needham High School has traditionally addressed three distinct agendas with a common purpose, that is, to improve Needham High School.

Section 53 of the Massachusetts' Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1993 requires each school to address needed improvements in specific areas including: Student Performance Standards; Impact of Class Size; Student to Teacher Ratios; Supportive Adult Resources; Staff Development; Enhancement of Parental Involvement; Extracurricular Activities; Safety and Discipline; Respect and Tolerance for All Groups; and Development of Means to Address Diverse Learning Needs of as Many Children as Possible.

The Needham School Committee has adopted a vision statement reflecting the work of a broad based committee:

NEEDHAM SCHOOL SYSTEM VISION

A community and school partnership that creates excited learners,
demands excellence, and fosters integrity

The committee expects that all aspects of the school improvement plan should embody, reflect, and be consistent with this vision. To this end, the Needham School Committee articulates goals for the school system. The goals are:

- Goal #1 Construct and implement an approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices that ensures that all students meet clearly defined high standards.
- Goal #2 Establish, implement, and assess community and school practices that respond to the wellness needs of Needham students and staff.

In addition, this plan reflects Superintendent Gutekanst's *Entry Plan Update* document and can answer some of his "Essential Questions."

The third agenda for school improvement is based on the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Standards for Accreditation. These Standards provide the means for determining the degree to which a school possesses the ingredients necessary to provide a quality education. Each standard is accompanied by a number of conditions or characteristics that are essential to assuring quality. These indicators guide the assessment of a particular standard and are useful in developing strategies for improvement. In 2009, Needham High School will host a committee from the NEASC, which will evaluate the school's adherence to these Standards, as well as the degree the school is "mission driven."

School Improvement Plan - Academic Years 2007-2009

There remains substantial overlap in all agendas for school improvement. In reviewing the data, the Needham High School School Council supported the following three goals or actions to be our focus for the academic years 07/09. The driving force of school improvement will remain the high school's Mission Statement and Expectations for Student Learning.

Goal/Action #1: Prepare for the NEASC decennial accreditation visit in 2009

Background Information:

A team from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges will visit Needham High School in 2009 (the school received a one-year postponement due to the construction project). Significant school improvement tasks will take place in preparation for the visit, including:

1. Implement the school's Mission and Expectations for Student Learning into the school's curriculum, instruction, assessment, and culture. Expectations for student learning should be known to the entire school community and be represented in classroom instruction and assessments. A committee will work to take what is on paper and infuse it into everyday practice. This effort will take a few years to institutionalize, but nevertheless, it is critical to move forward aggressively.
2. Conduct the Self Study in anticipation to the 2009 committee visit. This work will involve all staff members in assessing the degree the school achieves each indicator under the seven accreditation standards (<http://www.neasc.org/cpss/cpss.htm>). The work will begin during the 07/08 academic year.

Activities:

Create steering committees as needed. Involve entire NHS staff in Self Study.

Person(s) Responsible:

High School administration and staff

Evidence of Accomplishment:

- Statement on implementation efforts
- Self Study essays approved by faculty by December, 2008
- Plan of action document for visit in 2009 by Steering Committee

Goal/Action #2: Continue standards-based assessment & grade reporting initiative.

Background Information:

The school has made significant progress, particularly at the department-level (the NEASC work addresses school-wide assessments), to more effectively communicate to students what they *know and are able to do*, as referenced to specific standards of achievement. Each department has been developing these standards and accompanying rubrics (i.e. measures) for their courses, using a variety of approaches. Many of the department chairs will attend a workshop in late April to continue their own professional development around this topic; the high school Cabinet has studied Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* for its application to this work (i.e. that small actions involving relatively few people can "tip" a counter-cultural effort into one accepted by the majority of teachers). In addition, a number of individual teachers have piloted standards-based approaches to assessment and grading in their classrooms. These pilots will inform the school's later large-scale implementation of a standards-based report card.

This initiative is comprehensive and represents a new approach for high schools. Because it involves a significant shift in thinking, it will be a few more years before a grade reporting system can be piloted on a school-wide basis. Patience is requisite for this initiative. However, the payoff on student achievement is ongoing and should increase as more and more teachers incorporate standards-based methods into their pedagogy.

Activities:

- Continue Standards-based Steering Committee.
- Offer professional development opportunities to teachers via early release time and summer courses.
- Departments will continue with their work identifying standards and developing rubrics for each of these courses.
- Professional development will be ongoing for the Cabinet as well in order to train department chairs to lead the process of standard and rubric development in their own disciplines.

Person(s) Responsible:

High School administration and staff

Evidence of Accomplishment:

The school is currently compiling a report on its progress, which the superintendent will receive in July, 2007. It will produce a similar document annually, reporting on specific data regarding student achievement (e.g. student work), standards-based curriculum, lesson plans, and assessments from each of the eight departments, as well as pilot templates of how to report student achievement to the student and parents (i.e. report cards).

Special Note: This improvement plan does not include targets for each department. However, the July, 2007 document will include specific actions and expected evidence of accomplishment for each discipline. You can consider that document an addendum to the School Improvement Plan.

Goal/Action #3: Implement recommendations from the Stress Reduction Committee.

Background Information:

In the spring, 2007 a new committee formed under the direction of the Principal to systematically examine the student stress problem. The representative committee has several goals:

- 1) Provide students the skills and resources to allow them to better manage their stress and that of their peers.
- 2) Foster self-awareness and build other skills to cultivate resiliency.
- 3) Assist parents so they can better support their child's health, learning, and happiness.
- 4) Make recommendations to address school or district practices that contribute negatively to student stress.
- 5) Build awareness in the community and help tear down misperceptions that influence school-based stress.
- 6) Create an infrastructure to implement and institutionalize stress reduction strategies.

The overarching conceptual framework of the committee is to move students away from unhealthy stress-coping behaviors and toward healthy stress-management techniques by fostering students' self-awareness, building students' internal controls, and by reducing external stressors.

Activities:

The committee will meet twice monthly and make recommendations to the Principal on various issues germane to school-based student stress (e.g. homework, college admissions, sleep, parental overrides). It is expected that the committee will need at least the time period covered in this SIP due to the comprehensiveness and complexity of the stress issue.

Person(s) Responsible:

The entire high school community

Evidence of Accomplishment:

- "Guiding" documents and newsletter produced by the committee for the school community outlining key stress issues as well as providing research-based advice
- Programs added to the curriculum, including a contract with the Benson-Henry Institute of Mind/Body Medicine to work with students and teachers
- Changes in school policies or structures to reduce stressors without compromising the integrity of the high-expectation culture at the high school
- Survey and focus-group data on student stress attitudes and relevancy; the school will attempt to measure a reduction in perceived student stress as it implements the decisions of the committee
- An annual report in the late spring on progress toward each of the committee's six goals

Reference to Achievement Gap

Needham recognizes that there is an achievement gap. Efforts to close the gap at the high school have been varied:

- ❑ The leadership of METCO Director Willette Conroy and METCO Coordinator Shakur Abdal-Khallaq and the personal relationships they have developed with students of color are sure to pay dividends.
- ❑ The school is analyzing placement patterns for each department that groups students by levels.
- ❑ An anti-bias initiative is in its third year and is building momentum to change the culture in a positive way.
- ❑ Adult mentors were assigned to select students.
- ❑ “Career Day Plus”, now in its third year, was added to the 2005 Career Day to help students of color articulate and focus their future academic/career plans.
- ❑ Academic supports have been arranged for students who need the extra attention.
- ❑ Administrators and teachers communicate actively with parents to build school/home academic achievement partnerships.
- ❑ An achievement gap presentation is scheduled for a faculty meeting in May.
- ❑ Continue to explore the nature of the “gap” to see if it includes socioeconomic differences.

Reference to Social and Emotional Competencies

A void remains since the Freshmen Seminar program was discontinued in 2004. The Mentor Homeroom Initiative program has shown potential and offers positive outcomes despite some inconsistencies. A committee continues to work on strengthening the program.

Social and emotional competencies can be found in the PE/Health curriculum and are expected to be a primary focus of the Stress Reduction Committee’s work. It is the school’s expectation that social and emotional learning will increase in scope and integration into the academic program. The explicit mention of three social expectations for learning in the school’s new mission document is a positive step in this direction.

Additional Initiatives

The high school will continue to work on several smaller school-wide initiatives in an effort to continually improve our policies, practices, and student achievement:

- ❖ Anti bias initiative
- ❖ Senior year revision
- ❖ Mentor homeroom initiative
- ❖ Expanding TV/Communications course offerings and building technologies
- ❖ Developing a pre-engineering curriculum and courses
- ❖ Communication with parents via PowerSchool and teacher websites
- ❖ Lobby sculpture project
- ❖ Global Competence certification
- ❖ Shanghai exchange program
- ❖ Wind turbine project
- ❖ Habitat for Humanity Needham build
- ❖ School-wide “No” or “Reduced” Homework Calendar
- ❖ Summer Reading