

# **New England Association of Schools and Colleges**



Commission on Public Secondary Schools

## **Report of the Visiting Committee for Dracut Senior High School**

**Dracut, Massachusetts**

September 25-28, 2011

Paul R. Mangelinkx, CHAIR

Dr. Ruth Gilbert-Whitner, ASSISTANT CHAIR

Richard Manley, PRINCIPAL

New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.  
209 Burlington Road, Suite 201, Bedford, MA 01730-1433

TEL. 781-271-0022  
FAX 781-271-0950

[www.neasc.org](http://www.neasc.org)

## **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 Dracut Senior 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 Dracut Senior High School in terms of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting committee.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>Statement On Limitations</b>	
Introduction .....	1
Overview of Findings .....	3
Quality of the Self-Study	
Discussion of Significant Findings regarding	
Teaching and Learning and the Support of	
Teaching and Learning	
School and Community Summary.....	6
 <b>Dracut High School’s Statement of Mission and Expectations for Student Learning</b>	
Teaching and Learning Standards .....	14
Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations .....	15
Curriculum.....	19
Instruction.....	26
Assessment of and for Student Learning.....	31
Support of Teaching and Learning Standards .....	39
School Culture and Leadership.....	40
School Resources for Learning.....	48
Community Resources for Learning .....	57
Follow-Up Responsibilities .....	63

## APPENDICES

- A. Roster of Visiting Committee Members
- B. Commission Policy on Substantive Change

## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

- Teaching and Learning Standards
  - Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations
  - Curriculum
  - Instruction
  - Assessment of and for Student Learning

- Support Teaching and Learning Standards
  - School Culture and Leadership
  - School Resources for Learning
  - Community Resources for Learning

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

### **Preparation for the Evaluation Visit - The School Self-Study**

A steering committee of the professional staff was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Dracut Senior High School, a committee of 11 members, including the principal, supervised all aspects of the self-study. The steering committee assigned all teachers and administrators in the school to appropriate subcommittees to determine the quality of all programs, activities, and facilities available for young people. In addition to faculty members, the self-study committees included administrators, school district and building support staff members, parents, and students.

The self-study of Dracut Senior High School extended over a period of 19 school months from September 2009 to June 2011. The visiting committee was pleased to note that students, parents, and community 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, Dracut Senior High School also used questionnaires developed by The Research Center at Endicott College to reflect the concepts contained in the Standards for Accreditation. These materials provided discussion items for a comprehensive assessment of the school by the professional staff during the self-study.

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

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

A visiting committee of 16 evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Dracut Senior High School. The Committee members spent four days in Dracut, reviewed the self-study documents which had been prepared for their examination, met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents, shadowed students, visited classes, and interviewed teachers to determine the degree to which the school meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented public schools, building and central office administrators, and educators representing a wide range of curricular areas, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Dracut Senior High School.

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

- review of the school's self-study materials
- 40 hours shadowing 16 students for a half day
- a total of 26 hours of classroom observation (in addition to time shadowing students)
- numerous informal observations in and around the school
- tours of the facility
- individual meetings with 32 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 visiting committee consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting committee appear in parenthesis in the Standards sections of the report. The seven Standards for Accreditation reports include commendations and recommendations that in the visiting committee's judgment will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and to better meet Commission Standards.

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

## **Teaching and Learning at Dracut Senior High School**

In its self-assessment, Dracut Senior High School has identified both its areas of strength and its areas of need; the visiting committee has endorsed many, but not all of the strengths and weaknesses contained in the self- assessment document. The visiting committee's report is an accurate and honest portrayal of Dracut Senior High School that will provide direction to the school as it seeks to meet the evolving needs of its students. The school and community must make an additional commitment of effort to meet the prescribed actions embedded in the visiting committee's recommendations. All stakeholders – parents, teachers, administrators, and students – must work collaboratively towards these ends.

The Dracut Senior High School community agreed on a core value, beliefs, and learning expectations document after a collaborative process informed by current, research-based practices. The school's academic and social learning expectations are defined by school-wide analytical rubrics although not all faculty members have yet incorporated the rubrics into their classrooms. The administration currently expects every teacher to use a school-wide rubric to assess at least two assignments a year. However, at this time, there is no process in place to report student progress in achieving learning expectations to parents and to report to the community in general the school's progress in fulfilling its goals. The DSHS Curriculum Management Team and the DSHS Core Values Review Committee will work together in the future to further ensure that curriculum, instruction, assessment as well as policies, procedures, decisions, and resource allocations reflect the core values, beliefs, and learning expectations document.

Dracut High School offers its students opportunities for authentic learning both in and out of school. Much of the curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding and application. The majority of curriculum documents are written in a format that includes essential questions, concepts, skills, and assessments. There is vertical articulation in some departments, and it is a work in progress in others. Though faced with building and budgetary constraints and large class sizes, the faculty remains

positive and dedicated to delivering the curriculum in the most effective way possible. Dracut faculty members need additional time dedicated to writing and revising the curriculum in order to ensure student achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

A small number of teachers' instructional strategies are continuously examined to ensure consistency with the core values, beliefs, and expectations. Teachers must increase the use of personalization strategies and fully integrate technology into all instruction to improve student learning and achievement. Teachers adjust their instructional practices daily using formative assessment to meet the needs of individual students. Many departments are using results from common assessments to improve future instruction and student outcomes. Teachers are committed to being life-long learners in order to stay current in content areas and content-specific instructional methods.

The teachers at Dracut Senior High School use a wide variety of formative and summative assessments. They have begun to use school-wide rubrics based on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, but these expectations are not generally communicated to parents, nor are they consistently made available to students before the summative assessment, and these explanations of expectations do not always reflect all that is included in the assignment. Furthermore, there is no process in place to report to students and their families the student's progress in achieving the school's learning expectations. In order to integrate these new learning expectations, teachers will need common planning time so that they can create lessons and assessments, disaggregate test results, and analyze the data they get from both summative and formative assessments in order to use the information from such data to improve teaching and learning.

### **Support of Teaching and Learning at Dracut Senior High School**

Dracut Senior High School provides a safe, positive, respectful learning environment allowing equal learning opportunities for most students. The school demonstrates a sincere desire to provide personalized, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning to all. It is readily apparent that the superintendent, the school leaders, and the faculty members want to generate high quality, mutually agreed upon methods of 21<sup>st</sup> century instruction and assessment. Despite many recent changes at the district and school level and challenging fiscal conditions, the administration, faculty, and staff at DSHS are committed to improving teaching and learning.

The school has added a director of guidance, one part-time and four full time counselors, and an additional administrative assistant in the guidance department to improve students' access to guidance services. A second full-time nurse has also improved student access to health services; however, the size of the nursing suite is inadequate to support two nurses and ensure student privacy. The dedication of the members of the special education department does much to support learning for all students, but these efforts would be significantly enhanced by increased paraprofessional support for identified learners. Overall, library media services adequately support the needs of the school community, but the lack of clerical support in that facility negatively impacts the delivery of library/media services.

The achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations requires an active community, governing board, and parent advocacy. Through consistent, dependable, and adequate funding, the community provides the personnel, resources, and facilities to support the delivery of curriculum, instruction, programs, and services. The Dracut community has not provided sufficient dependable funding for the Dracut Senior High School operational budget. In spite of creative cost saving to maintain the building, the aging facility and equipment are in need of updating and or replacement. The faculty needs to be provided more active involvement in the development and implementation of the budget. Overall, the professional staff engages parents including those who have been less connected with the school, and the school has developed many community, business, and educational partnerships that support student learning. The recently passed override to fund an addition and renovation of the existing facility shows that the Dracut community and Dracut Senior High School have taken a commendable step to improve teaching and learning and to increase student achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning objectives.

## **School and Community Profile**

### **The Community**

Dracut Senior High School, located in Dracut, Massachusetts, is situated 27 miles north of Boston in the Merrimack, on the periphery of Lowell and Southern New Hampshire. In 1653, the town was settled as part of the Wamesit Praying Town, which was a Pennacook Indian preserve set aside by the colonists. Dracut was incorporated as a town in 1701 and served as a major site of American industrial development in the nineteenth century. Its early economy relied on fishing and lumbering yielding to the later industries of paper making and cotton textile manufacturing. Dracut is now an expanding residential suburban community as a result of its close proximity to the high technology and business regions of Routes 93, 495, and 95. Additionally, the town has maintained some of its rural character, coexisting with a variety of commercial establishments. The town has a population of approximately 30,000 people.

Important town features include a Town Manager and Board of Selectmen form of government, with an Open Town Meeting format. Dracut has a new public library, new state-of-the-art police station, and three fire stations. The town has designated numerous Open Space areas and is working to preserve its historical landmarks. Dracut's distinguished past is a source of pride, as evidenced by numerous memorials established at the Veterans' Memorial Park, honoring those who have served in the armed forces. Dracut is very proud of the part it played in the American Revolution. Dracut Senior High School has adopted the namesake Midshipmen, or "Middies," a reference to Dracut's part in manufacturing both navy ships and navy uniforms during the nineteenth century.

The parents of Dracut are best described as tradesmen, government employees, or service-related employees. The median household income in 2008 was \$74,158. In 2009, the unemployment rate was 8.5 percent with 14.2 percent of the district identified by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as low income and participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch program. At the high school, 11.8 percent of the student population qualifies for this Free Lunch program, while 11.7 percent are low income.

Students in the town of Dracut are served by a number of public and private schools. Dracut Senior High School (DSHS) has a population of 1,149 students as of October 1, 2009. In addition to the high school, the Dracut School District includes four elementary schools, one intermediate school, and one junior high school. (See Appendix A for additional details.) The school district serves the educational

needs of approximately 4,214 students, comprising 97 percent of the eligible schoolchildren in town. Students not attending the public schools may attend the Greater Lowell Technical High School, Murdoch Charter School, Bishop Guertin, Lowell Catholic, Central Catholic, Innovation Academy, Notre Dame Academy, Presentation of Mary Academy School, or St. Louis School. The elementary through junior high alternative schools include St Margaret's School, Franco-American, St. Jeanne D'Arc School, and St. Michael's School, all located in nearby communities.

In fiscal year 2009, the district expended \$9603.33 per pupil, compared to the state average of \$13,055.32. This represents a 4.0 percent increase from the fiscal year 2008, in which the per pupil expenditure was \$9231.00. The school funding was reduced by \$1,172,000.00 from FY 2009 to FY 2010. Dracut ranks fifth from the bottom out of 350 communities in per pupil spending.

### **The School and Its Students**

Student population has remained relatively stable in the last several years. The town expects the high school population to remain the same or increase slightly in the future. For the year 2009-2010 population is 575 males and 574 females for a total enrollment of 1,149 students. The projected enrollment for 2010-2011 is 1,234 students.

The school uses seven categories to identify its ethnic, racial, and cultural composition. With 2.7 percent African American, 5.0 percent Asian, 5.1 percent Hispanic, 0.1 percent Native American, 85.5 percent White, 0.0 percent Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and 1.7 percent Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic. There have not been any significant changes in the ethnic and racial composition of the student body in recent years. While English is the primary language for 97 percent of the students, 2.4 percent of the students are categorized as First Language not English and 0.3 percent are classified as Limited English Proficient.

DSHS operates on a five day, modified block rotating schedule. Blocks range in length from 50 minutes to 90 minutes. In January 2009, the high school implemented a homeroom period to establish the groundwork for a future formalized advisory period. All one credit academic classes meet three single blocks and one double block each week for a full year, and the half credit courses maintain the same schedule for one semester. This includes laboratory-based classes and Advanced Placement classes. Few teachers teaching the same course have common planning time due to intricacies of the current schedule. Teachers are assigned up to five duties per week. For teachers, common planning time must be arranged, informally, during their preparation periods.

Dracut Senior High School students' performance varies on standardized assessments. The 2009 Adequate Yearly Progress Data summarizes the English Language Arts program as a "Very High" performance rating and designates the Mathematics program as "Very High." The school pays for all sophomores to take the PSAT in school, while juniors have an option to pay and take the exam at the same time. The Junior PSAT scores are in keeping with the national average. Two hundred sixty two juniors took the exam in 2009-2010 and scored an average of 49 in Math and an average of 45.4 in Writing, while the 163 sophomores scored an average of 46.6 in Math and an average of 45.9 in Writing. In 2008-2009, 170 students took the SAT, earning average scores of 501 in Critical Reading, 510 in Math, and 481 in Writing. These scores have been consistent in the past three years and compare closely with the national scores of the past three years. Increasing numbers of Dracut Senior High School students take the Advanced Placement tests in 8 AP courses. In the 2008-2009 school year, 106 students were enrolled in the AP courses in Science, Math, History, and English, whereas enrollment in those three areas has increased to 174 in the 2009-2010 school year.

Every DSHS student takes the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. DSHS students have improved in terms of MCAS student Growth and Student Achievement in 2009 compared to 2008 scores for MCAS Math and English. In 2009, the testing requirements for MCAS Science were changed. All grade nine students were formerly required to take the MCAS Science exam, and only those who did not achieve the minimum passing score took the MCAS science exam in grade ten. The passing rate had exceeded the state passing rate. In 2008-2009 school years, a new policy was implemented by the Central Office. It was determined that grade nine students will not participate in any Science MCAS exam; and that, all grade ten students must now take the Biology exam.

Dracut Senior High School is a four year comprehensive public high school enrolling approximately 1200 students with 294 comprising the class of 2010. There are 92 faculty members. Dracut promotes and prides itself in the number of students participating in co-curricular activities; over 75percent of the student body is involved in at least one activity at school.

During the 2008-2009 school year, Dracut Senior High School experienced a dropout rate of 2.4 percent. This is a .5 percent decrease from 2007-2008 (2.9 percent), with a two-year average of 2.65 percent. In both years, the DSHS dropout rate was lower than the state average, which was 2.9 percent and 3.4 percent, respectively. During the 2008-2009 school year, the high school recorded an average student

attendance rate of 93.92 percent. In 2009-2010, the average attendance for Dracut Senior High School faculty, excluding professional days, was 95.2 percent.

Dracut Senior High School students attend a variety of post-secondary educational institutions, enlist in military training, or enter directly into the work force upon graduation. Of those students who graduated in 2009, 30.38 percent enrolled at four-year public colleges and an additional 21.15 percent matriculated at four-year private colleges, for a combined percentage of 51.53 percent of seniors attending a four-year college. A significant percentage of students (33.85 percent) chose to attend two-year public institutions, while an additional .77 percent opted to attend a two-year private college. Of students graduating with the Class of 2009, 4.62 percent sought additional training at other post-secondary institutions, including trade schools. A small percentage of our students (1.15 percent) enlisted in the armed services, including the Army, National Guard, and Marine Corps. Finally, 7.31 percent of the senior class entered directly into the work force, and .77 percent listed their post high school plans as "other-travel, family."

There are multiple educational opportunities available to Dracut Senior High School students. For those students in need of academic support, remediation or credit recovery, nearby Methuen and Salem high schools offer alternate learning environments in one of their many night school programs. For students interested in enrichment opportunities, Dracut Senior High School offers dual enrollment with the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, and Middlesex Community College. There are also opportunities to participate in SAT preparation through the Princeton Review and/or Kaplan. Students are afforded opportunities to enroll in MCAS preparation courses, which are offered in the afternoon, on weekends, and throughout the summer months. A large percentage of students also attend the University of Massachusetts, Lowell; Middlesex Community College, or Northern Essex Community College upon graduation. Students who enroll at Northern Essex Community College and have completed drafting courses at Dracut Senior High School may have their Drafting I requirements waived. Northern Essex Community College also collaborates with Dracut Senior High School through the administration of the ACCUPLACER exam, which places students in appropriate college-level Mathematics, Reading, and Writing courses. Students seeking educational opportunities closer to home may opt to attend Merrimack College, Rivier College, or Daniel Webster College. There are also continuing education opportunities offered through the Merrimack Education Center (MEC) and community education programs, such as Chelmsford Continuing Education. During summer months, students from Dracut Senior High School perform with the New England Youth Wind Symphony and

Summer Band Program at University of Massachusetts, Lowell. Additional students study throughout the year in the New England Conservatory Preparatory Division. Finally, the Special Education Department works collaboratively with the Massachusetts Department of Rehabilitation in order to assist special education students in continuing on to local and state colleges and various training programs.

Students at Dracut Senior High School are provided limited access to experiential learning opportunities both on campus and throughout the community. Some businesses have partnered with the Dracut Public Schools in order to provide students with internships, community service opportunities, and other learning experiences. Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union maintains a satellite branch at the high school, allowing students and community members to conduct transactions during the school day. In addition, the branch manager hosts a number of student interns who, upon completion of requisite banking courses, are invited to work at the school branch as banking interns. Additionally, Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union student representatives are invited to participate in the Mass School Bank Association Spring Conference, which is an interscholastic banking competition held at the Federal Reserve in Boston, MA. The credit union has also commissioned guest lecturers from their home office to conduct workshops regarding personal finance. Dracut Access Television (DATV) provides a limited number of students interested in pursuing careers in all aspects of television production with internship opportunities at their newly renovated studio. This partnership also provides the school system with valuable public relations opportunities, as events filmed on location at Dracut Senior High School can be viewed by a wider community-based audience. The community also works to provide experiential learning opportunities to all students in the Dracut Public Schools. For example, students serviced by the Life Skills program have formed a partnership with the Boott Cotton Mills Museum in Lowell, Massachusetts, a subsidiary of the Lowell National Historic Park. Through this program, Life Skills students assemble informational packets that are distributed to visitors at the museum.

Dracut Senior High School has established several student-based initiatives whose purpose is to spread awareness regarding issues faced by the school and community. During the 2009-2010 school year, select student representatives attended bullying workshops, sponsored by Bridgewater State University. In addition, the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) sponsors a "Day of Silence" to promote awareness regarding the social stigma associated with homosexuality, while the Leo Club, a subsidiary of the Lions Club, sponsors the Sun Santa Volleyball Tournament, which raises money for families in need during the holiday season. The Dracut Senior High School Peer Mentors organize a program that

specifically targets the senior class. This program, known as "Make a Date with Life," coordinates volunteers from the Dracut Police Department, Dracut Fire Department, The Lowell Sun, Med Flight, the Dracut Funeral Home, and Patriot Ambulance in order to create a powerful presentation concerning the widespread, devastating, and lasting effects of drinking and driving. Additionally, during the 2009-2010 school year, students in grades 10-12 were invited to view a performance of "The Yellow Dress." This program, which centers on dating and relationship violence, was followed up with information and discussions that took place during an extended homeroom period as well as select classes. Student Council has also implemented a program designed to "Raise Student Voice and Participation" (RSVP). This program provides students with an opportunity to discuss issues and challenges at the school, local, and global levels, brainstorm ways in which these areas can be improved, and implement those improvements. Finally, the entire school community has been exposed to and involved with the Rachel's Challenge initiative. This program, established by the family of Rachel Joy Scott, the first student killed during the 1999 Columbine High School massacre, promotes kindness, tolerance, and respects both in and out of the school setting.

The Dracut Scholarship Foundation coordinates multiple local organizations, which also donate time and services throughout the school year. This non-profit organization hosts three major fundraising events each year. The Foundation hosts a "Dollars for Scholars" fall walkathon and a fall craft fair. They also host a four day telethon, which is broadcast on Dracut Access Television. These events are the result of numerous community volunteers and business partnerships. The Dracut Scholarship Foundation's goal is to provide graduating seniors with scholarship funds, ranging from \$500 to \$3,500.

Dracut Senior High School also maintains a partnership with the Massachusetts Biotech Council. In conjunction with Boston University, Massachusetts Biotech Council provides training for three high school teachers in the biotechnology discipline. Dracut Senior High School also receives educational hardware and resources to support this training program. Additionally, H & R Block has provided Dracut Senior High School, through grant funding, with a Virtual Business/Personal Finance software package. This technology is used by students in the Business Department and Alternative Program, with plans to expand usage into Special Education classes. Each year, Lowell General Hospital partners with Dracut Senior High School through its "Shadow a Nurse" program. Members of the Dracut Senior High School Social Studies Department are recipients of the "Teaching American History" grant. This program, which includes professional development and graduate credit opportunities, is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education.

Dracut Senior High School sophomores are invited to participate in the Rotary Club's Rotarian Youth Leadership Conference. Several students are invited to attend a weekend leadership conference each June, in which they are given the opportunity to work with members of the Rotary Club, as well as participants from other high schools.

In addition to the above-mentioned programs, Dracut Senior High School maintains partnerships with local colleges and universities. The Dracut Senior High School Science Department partners with the Francis College of Engineering at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. This two-part, snapshot program is comprised of guest speakers and hands-on laboratory experiments which allow students to explore possible careers in engineering. Additionally, the Science Department is pursuing a partnership with the College of Health and Environment. Slated to commence during the 2010-2011 school year, this partnership will allow students to explore possible careers relating to health and environment. Finally, Dracut Senior High School has developed a partnership with the School of Health and Environment-Department of Nursing at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. Through this partnership, nursing students visit the high school to offer information sessions to students on health and wellness topics such as skin cancer and heart disease. Additionally, these students participate in experiential learning opportunities by assisting the school nurse in conducting mandatory assessments, such as BMI screening.

Dracut Senior High School recognizes student achievement in a variety of ways. All students are recognized through the Renaissance program, which sponsors quarterly recognition for those who have achieved honor roll status or have demonstrated perfect attendance for one marking period. Names of honor roll students are also published quarterly in the Lowell Sun newspaper and the Renaissance program sponsors a "Student of the Month" initiative, in which teachers may nominate students for exemplary behavior, work ethic, community service. Student athletes are recognized for outstanding performance during daily morning announcements and at seasonal awards banquets. Additionally, the Dracut Senior High School Football Team recognizes a scholar-athlete each year through the Matthew Thomas Award. Seniors are recognized for their cumulative academic performance at Pride Night, the senior academic awards evening. Members of the Junior Class are recognized with various awards, including the Wellesley Book Award, the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Medal, and the Bausch and Lomb Award. The work of art students is showcased at the Boston Globe Scholastic Art Show. Literary students are featured in the Marble Collection, a Massachusetts literary magazine. Budding artists and authors are featured in *The Siren*, the Dracut Senior High School

literary magazine. Students in grades 9-12 participate in the Wordmaster Challenge, a nationwide competition measuring reading and analytic skills. All students are invited to participate in “Poetry in the Courtyard”, a quarterly “open mic” event for poets, musicians, and other forms of performance art. Students are also recognized through a variety of honor societies, including the Francis K. Nielon chapter of the National Honor Society, the Sancho Panza chapter of the Spanish National Honor Society, and the Jeanne D’Arc chapter of the French National Honor Society as well. Finally, academically proficient students from the graduating class are recognized for their academic achievements during the Top Twenty Breakfast.

## **Dracut Senior High School Core Values and Beliefs**

The Dracut High School community is committed to challenging all students with a rigorous curriculum within a safe, healthy, and positive environment. Our primary goal is for students to become lifelong learners in a changing world. We believe in promoting personal responsibility, self-respect, tolerance, and integrity while preparing all students for 21<sup>st</sup> century success. We embrace and value diversity. We advocate environmental and global awareness. We offer various opportunities for all students to thrive and succeed in and beyond the classroom, so that they may become informed, productive citizens. We encourage our students to take pride in their identity and the Dracut community as they strive toward maximum personal growth.

## **21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner Expectations**

The Dracut High School student will be able to perform the following skills:

- Speak effectively;
- Write effectively;
- Read, view and interpret a variety of media effectively;
- Demonstrate financial/business literacy;
- Utilize an array of methods to research, analyze, and problem solve;
- Use technology effectively and responsibly;
- Demonstrate cultural literacy;
- Promote civic responsibility regarding issues facing our community and the world today;
- Practice personal wellness and social responsibility.

The Dracut High School graduate will have a working plan for post-high school life.

**COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**  
**STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION**

**TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS**

CORE VALUES, BELIEFS, AND LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

---

CURRICULUM

---

INSTRUCTION

---

ASSESSMENT OF AND FOR STUDENT LEARNING

# 1

## Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations

*Effective schools identify core values and beliefs about learning that function as explicit foundational commitments to students and the community. Decision-making remains focused on and aligned with these critical commitments. Core values and beliefs manifest themselves in research-based, school-wide 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Every component of the school is driven by the core values and beliefs and supports all students' achievement of the school's learning expectations.*

1. The school community engages in a dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process informed by current research-based best practices to identify and commit to its core values and beliefs about learning.
2. The school has challenging and measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for all students which address academic, social, and civic competencies, and are defined by school-wide analytic rubrics that identify targeted high levels of achievement.
3. The school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are actively reflected in the culture of the school, drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment in every classroom, and guide the school's policies, procedures, decisions, and resource allocations.
4. The school regularly reviews and revises its core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, as well as district and school community priorities.

## Conclusions

The school community engaged in a dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process informed by current research-based practices to identify and commit to its core values and beliefs about learning. A committee of ten teachers regularly sought input from their constituencies as the DSHS Core Values document evolved. The 2001 DSHS Mission Statement was used as a baseline of revision to include 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The committee members reviewed, discussed, and edited desired changes to the proposed document. Subsequently, with their respective stakeholders, they reviewed and agreed to adopt the current DSHS Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations document. On November 2, 2009, the revised DSHS Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations document was formally endorsed and adopted by the Dracut School Committee. The Dracut Senior High School community has begun to incorporate the document into discussions on effective teaching and learning. The adoption of a collaborative, inclusive process for identifying the school's core values ensures the school has identified core values and beliefs about learning that truly represent the school community. (self-study, teachers, panel presentation)

The school has formally developed challenging and measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for all students, which address the school's academic and social competencies and are defined by school-wide analytical rubrics that identify targeted levels of achievement; however, not all faculty members have incorporated the school-wide rubrics into their classrooms. Furthermore, a school-wide rubric for the civic expectation has yet to be developed. Until the school-wide rubrics are complete and are fully implemented, adherence to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations cannot be effectively assessed and documented for analysis. The majority of teachers at Dracut Senior High School use personalized, course-specific rubrics, and some employ the primary rubric for the learning expectation assigned to their department. Each school-wide rubric has clearly identified levels of achievement (exemplary, proficient, developing, and beginning) so students will be aware of the various levels of achievement for each of the 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations. The administration expects that every department will use an appropriate school-wide rubric to assess two assignments a year in order to gather data and to promote analysis of student achievement as well as to report results to parents and the Dracut community. Learning expectations are consistent with the school's core beliefs about learning. These learning expectations prepare students to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The continued review, development, and assessment of challenging and measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations will enable students to achieve at the highest possible level. (school leadership, panel presentation, and central office personnel)

Dracut Senior High School's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are beginning to be reflected in the culture of the school, to drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment in most classrooms. A newly formed curriculum management team will use data collected by the DSHS Core Values Review Committee to drive curricular revision in the future. The majority of teachers are making a concerted effort to use the core values, beliefs and learning expectations and to strive to consistently reference the school-wide rubrics and assist students in developing an awareness of the connection. A thorough understanding of the learning expectations is still being embedded throughout all levels of teaching and across disciplines, and only when that process is complete, will the DSHS community benefit from the stated learning expectations. (students, teachers, parents, classroom observations, panel discussion)

Although there is a DSHS Core Values Review Committee, the school currently does not regularly review and revise its core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, and district and school community priorities. The DSHS Core Values Committee has yet to meet and review the adopted learning expectations to analyze testing results and assessments of student achievement. Until a consistent review cycle is created and implemented to review the current DSHS Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations document, it cannot be considered a living document reflected in Dracut Senior High School's curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (panel discussion, teacher interviews, department leaders)

### **Commendations**

1. The development of DSHS Core Values, Beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Expectations through a dynamic, inclusive process which was based on current research and best practices
2. The creation of learning expectations that are consistent with the school's beliefs about learning
3. The development of analytic rubrics, with identified levels of achievement, to measure student progress in meeting learning expectations
4. The creation of a Core Values Review Committee

### **Recommendations**

1. Develop and implement a plan to ensure the DSHS Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations are used to drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment in every classroom

2. Develop and implement a process to ensure the DSHS Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations are used as a vehicle to drive decision-making regarding policies, procedures, and the allocation of resources
3. Create and implement a school-wide rubric for the Dracut Senior High School civic responsibility learning expectation
4. Develop and implement a plan to formally and regularly review and revise the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, as well as district and school community priorities

**2****Curriculum**

*The written and taught curriculum is designed to result in all students achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations for student learning. The written curriculum is the framework within which a school aligns and personalizes the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The curriculum includes a purposefully designed set of course offerings, co-curricular programs, and other learning opportunities. The curriculum reflects the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. The curriculum is collaboratively developed, implemented, reviewed, and revised based on analysis of student performance and current research.*

1. The curriculum is purposefully designed to ensure that all students practice and achieve each of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
2. The curriculum is written in a common format that includes:
  - units of study with essential questions, concepts, content, and skills
  - the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
  - instructional strategies
  - assessment practices that include the use of school-wide analytic and course-specific rubrics.
3. The curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through:
  - inquiry and problem-solving
  - higher order thinking
  - cross-disciplinary learning
  - authentic learning opportunities both in and out of school
  - informed and ethical use of technology.
4. There is clear alignment between the written and taught curriculum.
5. Effective curricular coordination and vertical articulation exist between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district.
6. Staffing levels, instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and the resources of the library/media center are sufficient to fully implement the curriculum, including the co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities.
7. The district provides the school's professional staff with sufficient personnel, time, and financial resources for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum using assessment results and current research.

## Conclusions

The Dracut Senior High School curriculum design related to the Understanding by Design format allows all students to practice and achieve each of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations but not yet by purposeful design. Although the school adopted the core beliefs document in 2009, the curriculum committee to oversee curricular issues was not formed until the 2010-2011 school year. Thus the school's current curriculum does not have a method in place to ensure students achieve the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations identified by the school and outlined in the school's core values and expectations. DSHS has developed a document which identifies departmental primary responsibilities for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, but the school has not yet formally implemented a method for collecting and reviewing data regarding these expectations. The curriculum guides identify specific responsibilities for expectations by grade level and by course, but, as yet, there is no clear connection between content and expectation in many curriculum documents. School-wide rubrics have been created which are designed to allow faculty members to assess whether or not students are meeting expectations, and, according to teachers and students, these rubrics are used by teachers of specific departments to assess student learning although they are not used widely by all teachers in all subjects. When the curricula of all subjects include specific references to the school's expectations and all teachers use the school-wide rubrics consistently, interpretation of assessment data will be an effective measure of student achievement of the expectations and the teachers will be able to revise the curricula effectively so that students will be able to successfully practice and achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (teachers, students, administrators, self-study)

The school has identified a process for writing curriculum in a common format, and several departments have adopted an Understanding by Design (*UbD*) template for curriculum development. Although the use of the *UbD*-based template is recommended and many teachers are using this template, not all documents are written in this format at this time. These revised documents are written in a format that includes essential questions, concepts, content, skills, and suggested assessments. All core subject curricula have a commonly formatted curriculum guide while revised, commonly formatted guides for electives have not yet been created. Teachers are beginning to consult these guides when planning lessons and considering course expectations. Although assessment practices that include the use of school-wide analytic and course-specific rubrics are included in the completed curriculum guides, they are not included in the elective subject curriculum guides. Specific 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are identified with each course offering in the program of studies. Complete curriculum documents written in a common format for all courses is necessary to offer consistent

opportunities for improved instruction and achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for all students in all courses. (teachers, self-study, curriculum management team)

Many curricula emphasize depth of understanding and application. The recent creation of the DSHS Curriculum Management Team (CMT) has provided a means for ensuring that all curriculum documents emphasize depth of understanding and application of knowledge. Although the use of the *UbD*-based template is suggested and many teachers are using this template, not all documents are written in this format at this time. Some teachers are using alternative models which they believe ensure depth of understanding and application of knowledge. Evidence of higher-order thinking is observable in many classes, most notably in advanced placement (AP) classes. In the Endicott Survey, it was reported that 71 percent of students, 82.9 percent of staff members, and 76.6 percent of parents feel that DSHS courses challenge students to think critically and solve problems. Students are exposed to depth of understanding and application through the curriculum offered in higher level courses, but there is no consistent formal evidence in courses in other levels of application of knowledge through inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking. These elements are very important to include in the curriculum so that all students are ensured of such challenge and opportunity. It may be necessary to provide professional development in creating such challenging curricula for all students. (teachers, self-study, Endicott Survey)

Curriculum-driven, cross-disciplinary learning is very limited at this time at DSHS. Although some teachers are incorporating cross-disciplinary learning into their own courses, there is no formal structure in place for commonly planned lessons by teachers across disciplines. According to the Endicott Survey, 50% of faculty members feel that there is ongoing cross-disciplinary learning and instruction in their classroom but that there are no formal programs in place. There is no planning time formally set aside for the development of these types of units. DSHS does offer its students opportunities for authentic learning both in and out of school. According to the Endicott Survey, 73% of faculty members believe the curriculum contains real-world applications. These opportunities exist through partnerships with community organizations such as the Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union, Boott Cotton Mills Museum, and Lowell General Hospital. In contrast to this faculty opinion, only 39.85 percent of students feel that they have off-campus learning opportunities. No curriculum at DSHS specifically emphasizes the informed and ethical use of technology, though a few courses such as digital citizenship and computer literacy do address ethical and safe use of technology. Thus, with the additional use of technology that comes as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century expectations, with teacher use of the

technology in classrooms as part of instruction strategies, there must also be a consistent level of information and practice of ethical principles and safe processes for students in the curriculum of all subjects and particular applications in the curricula that cover research and use of all available information resources (teachers, self-study, students, parents, Endicott Survey)

There is not a clear alignment between written and taught curriculum. Most significantly, the curriculum guides outline the use of school-wide rubrics to assess student achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, but these rubrics are not widely used by teachers. The few available samples of student work do not clearly show that the taught curriculum coincides with the written curriculum although there are systems in place to ensure delivery of the written curriculum. Department supervisors collect and review teacher lesson plans weekly, and teachers teaching common courses engage in informal conversations regarding best practices and pacing. However, the school does not have a formal plan in place for ensuring that the newly written curriculum guides are consistently consulted in lesson planning and instruction. A mandated closer alignment between written and taught curriculum as well as a vehicle or school-wide process for monitoring delivery of the written curriculum would ensure that all teachers, both present and future, consistently deliver a curriculum based on the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (teachers, self-study, department leaders, administrators)

A moderate level of effective curricular coordination and vertical articulation exists between and among academic areas within DSHS as well as with sending schools in the district. The school has recently planned a five to seven year curriculum review process that will be used to identify gaps in vertical alignment and to oversee and guide all curriculum matters regarding content, professional development, and assessment; however, no data regarding the effectiveness of curricular coordination and vertical articulation currently exists, as the process has just recently been created. Vertical articulation is evident in some departments such as English, mathematics, and foreign language but is a work in progress in others. Some core departments meet regularly and work closely with sending schools to ensure vertical alignment of curriculum from 7-12 and, in some cases, K-12 although there are no current K-12 curriculum guides. Closer horizontal and vertical articulation in all departments would ensure better student transition among schools and better student achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (DSHS Curriculum Management Team, self-study, department leaders, teachers, parents, central office personnel)

Staffing levels, instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and the resources of the library/media center are insufficient to fully implement the curriculum, including the co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities. Staffing is inadequate to support a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning curriculum resulting in class sizes which are not at optimal levels to promote the learning and practicing of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Students have access to technology only on a limited basis. Teachers have limited technology to employ in their classrooms as tools to support instruction. Overall, faculty members feel that all areas mentioned in the standard, staffing, instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, the facility, and library/media center resources, are insufficiently funded to ensure effective delivery of the curriculum. Less than 27% of faculty and staff members report that these components are adequate, and parents report the biggest need to be addressed is that of technology resources. The addition of adequate technology would better support teacher delivery of curriculum. The technology budget for FY10 was \$12,000 while FY11 saw a decrease to \$6,000. In addition, the support staff needed to maintain technology has been underfunded. Federal stimulus money in FY10 increased funds for instructional technology to \$59,821. Textbook and support materials will be reviewed on the five to seven year cycle along with curriculum review. Textbook review requests and ordering have been centralized in the 2011-2012 school year to ensure better curricular and fiscal alignment. At the present time, some departmental text resources have been identified as outdated while awaiting review. The funding of instructional materials and supplies has seen a small increase in FY10 to \$123,000, up from \$112,000 in FY09. The library/media print and non-print resources, including online databases, are sufficient to support most of the current curriculum, but library technology resources are insufficient to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum demands. The facility needs renovation and updating in order to support delivery of a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum. Science labs, art rooms, music, and athletic spaces are deficient in space and updated resources to meet student curricular needs. Co-curricular programs and leadership opportunities have been diminished because of lack of available funding, and the space for a student-run television station now remains unused, diminishing student opportunity to acquire technical skills. Improving staffing levels to maintain manageable class size, and updating equipment, supplies, and facilities are necessary to ensure full implementation of the curriculum, including co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities. (teachers, self-study, students, parents, panel presentation, facility tour, department leaders, district budget reports, Endicott Survey)

Professional development time, personnel, and financial resources provided by the district for professional staff members are inadequate for the purpose of ongoing collaborative development,

evaluation, and revision of the curriculum. In the 2010-2011 school year, Dracut Senior High School implemented the DSHS Curriculum Management Team (CMT), which consists of department chairs, supervisors, parents, administrators, teachers, and union representatives among other major stakeholders. This team meets monthly to troubleshoot issues regarding curriculum. Dracut faculty members need additional time specifically dedicated to the writing and revision of curriculum. Only 50% of faculty members report that they are directly involved in curriculum evaluation, review, and revision work. Some teachers feel they have an active voice in curriculum development and that progress is being made although time provided for this endeavor is inconsistent. Only 19.7% of faculty and staff members agree that they have sufficient time to engage in formal curriculum review and revision work. The current schedule, which has been in place for the past fifteen years, does not support the implementation of effective instructional strategies, and there is no formal time set aside for teachers to collaborate. While teachers' individual time and dedication to the task of professional development is increasing with many of them pursuing master's degree programs and courses for PDPs, departments report that further time is needed to create and update curriculum that reflects 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Beginning in 2010, department heads received four days of professional development in school-wide research-based supervision, and teachers will be offered eight half days for professional development that serves to improve teaching and learning. In the areas of professional development and technology support, the district has provided approximately \$18,000 for FY10, and there was \$9,000 in FY10 for funding to pay for substitute teachers for professional development opportunities for faculty members. However, funds for curriculum improvement were decreased by 74 percent from \$8,700 in FY09 to \$2,300 in FY10. Stipend positions for writing and revising curriculum are infrequently offered. Some departments report review of MCAS data as well as course benchmark assessments as catalysts for curriculum revision, but there is no formal system in place to facilitate this review. Students' 21<sup>st</sup> century learning needs are not being met because the school's curriculum is not a consistently evolving and living framework. (teachers, department leaders, DSHS Curriculum Management Team, Endicott Survey)

### **Commendations**

1. The doubling of allocated professional development time from the previous school year
2. The creation of a curriculum management team to lead curriculum improvement
3. The extensive effort to vertically align curriculum in core departments

## **Recommendations**

1. Provide teachers with sufficient time, resources, and training for the ongoing and collaborative development and revision of curriculum
2. Use assessment data gathered from the regular use of school-wide rubrics to revise curriculum and ensure student achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
3. Create curriculum guides for every course in a uniformly applied and adopted common format that include the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
4. Provide professional development opportunities to assist teachers in expanding the inclusion of inquiry-based learning, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills in all levels of the curriculum
5. Include in the curriculum and consistently use school-wide and course-specific rubrics in the assessment of student performance
6. Increase staffing levels and funding of educational resources to ensure the effective delivery of curriculum
7. Create and employ a formal vehicle to monitor the alignment between the written and taught curriculum

# 3

## Instruction

*The quality of instruction is the single most important factor in students' achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Instruction is responsive to student needs, deliberate in its design and delivery, and grounded in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. Instruction is supported by research in best practices. Teachers are reflective and collaborative about their instructional strategies and collaborative with their colleagues to improve student learning.*

1. Teachers' instructional practices are continuously examined to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
2. Teachers' instructional practices support the achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations by:
  - personalizing instruction
  - engaging students in cross-disciplinary learning
  - engaging students as active and self-directed learners
  - emphasizing inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking
  - applying knowledge and skills to authentic tasks
  - engaging students in self-assessment and reflection
  - integrating technology.
3. Teachers adjust their instructional practices to meet the needs of each student by:
  - using formative assessment, especially during instructional time
  - strategically differentiating
  - purposefully organizing group learning activities
  - providing additional support and alternative strategies within the regular classroom.
4. Teachers, individually and collaboratively, improve their instructional practices by:
  - using student achievement data from a variety of formative and summative assessments
  - examining student work
  - using feedback from a variety of sources, including students, other teachers, supervisors, and parents
  - examining current research
  - engaging in professional discourse focused on instructional practice.
5. Teachers, as adult learners and reflective practitioners, maintain expertise in their content area and in content-specific instructional practices.

## Conclusions

At Dracut Senior High School, not all teachers' instructional practices are continuously examined to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The self-study indicates that practices are not continuously examined to ensure consistency with the school's document. In the Endicott Survey of teachers, 43% report that they consistently examine their instructional practices to align with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Teachers also report few opportunities to discuss instructional practices in order to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The absence of a formal procedure and a school-wide professional practice of examining instructional practices lead to inconsistencies with respect to the use and awareness of the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. The fact that DSHS instructional practices are not aligned with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> learning expectations hinders student achievement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (teachers, self-study, Endicott Survey)

Teachers at Dracut Senior High School do not consistently personalize instruction, ask students to be active and self-directed learners, and integrate technology to support the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Although most teachers are engaged in practices to personalize instructions for students who have individual education plans (IEPs) and 504 plans as a result of special learning needs, general personalization of instruction for all students is not pervasive throughout the school. In addition, larger class sizes hinder teachers from individualizing instruction for students on an ongoing basis. On the Endicott Survey, only 34% of students agree that teachers individualize instruction in their classrooms. Teachers do offer after school help for students to come in for personalized assistance. The lack of common planning time for teachers and the limitations of the school schedule obstruct the creation of cross-disciplinary lessons. Students report that cross-disciplinary learning takes place only coincidentally such as in an AP environmental studies class where students incorporate math to solve science-based questions. Most students are involved as active and self-directed learners in the classroom through hands-on, project-based learning in their classes. Students are required to conduct individual research as in the English research paper that must be submitted at the end of each year that requires students to analyze multiple forms of media. In lab classes, students are using inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking to support the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. In some areas, students are asked to apply knowledge and skills to authentic tasks, as for example, when students use financial literacy skills while participating in their internship at the Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union. Some teachers report that students are given opportunities to self-assess and reflect upon their

work, but these opportunities are not a school-wide practice. Technology is often used to project PowerPoint presentations or notes during whole class instruction, but both teachers and students report that the full capabilities of technology are not utilized in the classroom to meet the student learning expectations of the school. As a result of insufficient professional development opportunities relating to the use of technology in the classroom, technology is not integrated to its full capacity, particularly in the use of interactive whiteboards. When teachers' instructional practices are not personalized and do not reflect the integration of technology, it is difficult for all students to achieve the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Thus, the school should provide professional development in the use of personalization strategies and the use of technology by both students and teachers to support the curriculum and to enable students to master the school's expectations. (classroom observations, teachers, Endicott Survey, students, teacher interview)

Most teachers adjust their daily instructional practices to meet the individual needs of students in various ways; however, teachers do not consistently use effective differentiation within their classrooms. Many teachers describe the use of formative assessment during instructional time such as using student feedback during instruction to form or change lesson plans in order to successfully teach essential concepts to all students. In one class a teacher used multiple teaching strategies such as websites, physical modeling of motion, computer modeling, video clips, and strong active student participation. The teacher asked questions to assess every student's understanding of key kinematics concepts and reformed the questions for any students struggling with the concept. During classroom observations many teachers demonstrated the use of some form of formative assessments to improve instruction. While many teachers say they use strategically differentiated instructional techniques, any differentiation techniques beyond IEP accommodations could not be specified. Throughout classroom observations, some classes showed varying modes of instructional delivery, but varied widespread differentiated instructional practices are not being utilized as an ongoing process in all classrooms. Teachers observe that no professional development training, practice, nor discussion time has been offered for the various types of differentiated instruction. Teachers and students report that organized group activities are widely used within the classroom (80.8 percent of students and 67.1 percent of teachers). One Spanish class used pairs of students conversing about basic medical terms in order to register a patient at a hospital emergency room. A government class used groups of four to five students to analyze parts of the preamble to the Constitution then share their findings with the entire class. Students, teachers, and parents agree that additional support is provided to the students if they need additional clarification or extra help. Teachers are required to offer after school extra help at least

one day per week, but many teachers offer additional time when necessary. Without differentiated instruction, the personalization required to meet the needs of all learning styles cannot take place, thus inhibiting all students from meeting 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (classroom observations, teacher interviews, Endicott Study)

Although most teachers within all departments use student achievement data from assessments to improve instruction, there is no formal opportunity for professional discourse or feedback from parents and other teachers when it comes to instructional methods. Most teachers report that they use student work and achievement data to improve instruction. Math, science, and English departments use item analysis data from common assessments and the MCAS tests to identify and readdress key concepts that large numbers of student are answering incorrectly. Only 23.5% of all student report being asked for their ideas on how to improve instruction, and only 9.5% of parents report being asked for feedback about instructional practices. Interviewed teachers demonstrate little evidence that they are examining current research on best practices for instruction; however, they describe their interest in further professional development and look forward to learning new ways to instruct their students effectively. Teachers engage in professional discourse on instructional practices on a daily, but informal, basis. Only 50% of teachers report that they have improved instructional practices as a direct result of professional discourse. There is a small number of teachers who have been provided with common planning time during the school day, but other teachers often state in interviews that the lack of formal and structured time is the limiting factor for professional discourse. Insufficient time dedicated to teacher collaboration and discussion of instructional practices and the lack of the opportunities for students and their parents to give input on instructional practices hinders teachers from best practices in instruction and limits student opportunity to master the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (Endicott Survey, teacher interviews, school leadership)

Teachers at Dracut Senior High School, as adult learners and reflective practitioners, are maintaining expertise in their content area and in content-specific instructional practices. According to the self-study, most faculty members view themselves as life-long learners. Professional development reports reveal that in 2010, 33% of faculty members have successfully completed credited courses, and 48.7% have attended workshops offering Professional Development Points to maintain or advance licensure. Students agree that their teachers are knowledgeable about subjects they teach. The professional library offers multiple resources such as the *English Journal*, *Mathematica*, and *Teacher Sourcebook* for teachers to connect with current research to inform content area and content-specific instructional practices.

Teachers report that individuals are seeking to maintain their expertise but are missing opportunities to collaborate and reflect with their colleagues. According to the critical strengths of DSHS, the professional staff maintains expertise in their respective content areas and engages informally in professional discourse with their colleagues. The commitment of teachers to seek out resources to maintain their content area and content-specific instructional practices provides learning opportunities for students to achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, teacher interviews, Endicott Survey)

### **Commendations**

1. The commitment of teachers to provide individualized instruction beyond the school day
2. The informal use of data by some teachers to improve their instruction
3. The dedication of the faculty to maintain expertise in content areas

### **Recommendations**

1. Provide professional development for all teachers relating to the use of all school technology and the integration of technology in the classroom
2. Provide professional development in differentiated instruction strategies for all teachers and monitor their use by all faculty members to ensure personalized instruction for all students
3. Develop and implement a plan to ensure all students are engaged in cross disciplinary learning as well as inquiry, problem solving, and higher order thinking
4. Provide structured time within the schedule for teachers to engage in professional discourse for the purposes of examining current research in instructional best practices to improve instruction
5. As part of the professional discourse, include formal faculty discussions of the school's core beliefs and the application of the expectations in all subjects
6. Provide parents and students with a means to provide input comments to teachers about the effectiveness of their instruction



### Assessment of and for Student Learning

*Assessment informs students and stakeholders of progress and growth toward meeting the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Assessment results are shared and discussed on a regular basis to improve student learning. Assessment results inform teachers about student achievement in order to adjust curriculum and instruction.*

1. The professional staff continuously employs a formal process, based on school-wide rubrics, to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
2. The school's professional staff communicates:
  - individual student progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to students and their families
  - the school's progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to the school community.
3. Professional staff collects, disaggregates, and analyzes data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement.
4. Prior to each unit of study, teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed.
5. Prior to summative assessments, teachers provide students with the corresponding rubrics.
6. In each unit of study, teachers employ a range of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessments.
7. Teachers collaborate regularly in formal ways on the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments.
8. Teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to ensure students revise and improve their work.
9. Teachers regularly use formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning.
10. Teachers and administrators, individually and collaboratively, examine a range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practice, including all of the following:
  - student work
  - common course and common grade-level assessments
  - individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
  - standardized assessments
  - data from sending schools, receiving schools, and post-secondary institutions
  - survey data from current students and alumni.
11. Grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning.

## Conclusions

Dracut Senior High School lacks a formal process, using school-wide rubrics, to assess either the whole school or an individual's progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Dracut has only recently introduced new school-wide rubrics based on its expectations so these tools are slowly being adopted across the curriculum. As a result, these rubrics are being used regularly only in certain departments and by certain teachers. For example, they are currently being used within the English and foreign language departments, but neither the math nor the social studies departments use them consistently. Within the English department, many teachers were familiar with the use of course-specific rubrics focused on learning goals. Students comment that these specific rubrics helped them complete their assignments successfully. However, these specific rubrics apply only to certain teachers within the department; they are not used by the entire department or the entire school. Further, these rubrics do not explicitly address the core values although the values are implied. School administrators and instructional leaders feel that with the addition of common planning time in the departments, school-wide rubrics will be embedded deeper in the curriculum, and the assessment feedback from the rubrics can be used more effectively to guide instruction throughout the department and the school. A formal assessment process based on school-wide rubrics would ensure that every student would be regularly assessed using those rubrics thus enabling the school to assess the entire program in relation to its 21<sup>st</sup> century learning goals. (teachers, students, self-study, classroom observation)

Currently, the school's professional staff does not communicate individual student progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to students and their families; nor does the school's professional staff communicate the school's progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to the school community. Although the school has established 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and these expectations are posted in most classrooms, the school is not assessing the students' or school performance regarding these expectations. According to the self-study, teachers report that student learning expectations are communicated in quarterly progress reports and report cards through the use of teacher comments. However, the specific learning expectations of the school are not stated on the report card of every student. Teachers admit that, although 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are often assessed and achieved, this information is not being disseminated to parents and the community. The absence of a formal system to communicate the individual student and school's progress on the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations inhibits the ability of the students, their families, and the school community to monitor and assess progress in the achievement of the expectations, and this

also diminishes the importance of the expectations and the goal-setting process. (teachers, students, instructional leaders, Endicott Survey)

Some members of the professional staff collect, disaggregate, and analyze data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement. Teachers in academic areas that are currently tested on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), that is English, math, and science, have the opportunity to analyze the testing data in monthly department meetings. Their conclusions and the subsequent recommendations are included in the school's MCAS Action Plan and the DSHS School Improvement Plan. Further, science teachers use the disaggregated AP scores to improve student achievement on subsequent AP exams. English teachers demonstrate adjustments to the curriculum made to address concerns raised in the analysis of MCAS exam results. Teachers in AP Biology also demonstrate how the analysis of past test scores has affected the current curriculum. However, there is no evidence of any collection or analysis of data in other departments in order to respond to the inequities of student achievement. The collection and analysis of reliable data in all departments would allow for the inequities in student achievement to be addressed. (teachers, self-study, department leaders)

A limited number of teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed. Many students report that their teachers communicated the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations applicable to their course at the beginning of the school year while explaining the course syllabus. Also, the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are listed for each course offering in the DSHS Program of Studies. However, the majority of students feels that teachers do not relate the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to unit-specific learning goals. In a survey given to students, only 56.6% stated that teachers explain the learning expectations at the onset of a unit of study. Most teachers report that they communicate unit-specific learning goals at the beginning of a unit of study but rarely mention the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations applicable to the unit. While it is likely that classroom assessments of student achievement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are being made, the data is not being measured, collected, or formally analyzed. Learning expectations, along with DSHS Core Values and Beliefs, are posted in most classrooms, and students are aware of their existence, but these values are only sporadically communicated in each department. Students and staff members cannot achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations if those expectations and related unit-specific goals are not consistently communicated. (teachers, self-study, student shadowing, classroom observation, Endicott Survey)

Some teachers provide students with the corresponding rubrics prior to summative assignments, but many do not. As only a few departments use either the actual school-wide rubrics or course-specific rubrics, the students do not generally receive them prior to summative assessments. Students and teachers in the English department report how the rubrics are useful in focusing students' work in writing and speaking, then in assessing the work. In the business department, one teacher reports that rubrics are used before an assignment but that his students don't always "use it or understand it". Dracut Senior High School does present school-wide academic expectations and DSHS Core Values and Beliefs through the student handbook, the program of studies, and the school website, and many of the classrooms feature a small poster listing these goals. However, very few of the students could quote any of the goals, nor could they say that those goals help them in their work. An explanation of rubrics before a summative assessment would help students focus their work on key areas, and it would help them to understand the meaning of the assessments they may receive; consequently, it would also help the students and the school achieve the 21<sup>st</sup> century goals. (student interview, self-study, teacher interview)

Teachers employ a range of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessments. A variety of formative and summative assessments is found in student work and classroom observation in all departments. The foreign language department has completed a technology-driven project on the Chilean mine crisis. The physics department gives a varied summative test which assesses both lower and higher order thinking skills. A government class works in cooperative learning groups to review essential questions for a summative exam. The AP environmental science class has an outside lab where they study the ecosystem of pill bugs. The math department regularly uses portfolios in its college prep 2 classes. The English department completes an annual research paper that encompasses reading, writing, and utilizing an array of methods to research, analyze, and problem-solve. Examples of formative assessments reported include oral questioning, self-evaluation, peer editing, oral presentations, anchoring, critical thinking, lab investigations, modeling, media and technology, jigsaws, and many more. In addition, there is an array of standardized summative assessments. The school reports MCAS, PSAT, SAT, ASVAB, ACT, and AP test scores to students, families, and the community. Varied assessment strategies give students many opportunities to demonstrate success in the classroom. (teachers, student work, self-study, panel presentation, classroom observation)

Teachers seldom collaborate regularly in formal ways although the current schedule is allowing some departments and sections of departments to have a common meeting time. The English teachers who

instruct sophomores and most of the science teachers have common planning time built into their weekly schedules, but collegial planning in other departments is very inconsistent. In 2010-2011, most departments were provided some professional days to write curriculum; however, there is no designated planning time to enable the faculty to create, analyze, or revise common assessments. Many teachers collaborate informally between departments, but this practice is also inconsistent. Providing common planning time for teachers to collaborate is a necessary first step in discussing and sharing best practices, creating common summative assessments, building and using effective rubrics, and renewing the curriculum so that it ensures student achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. (self-study, teacher interview, teaching schedule)

In some areas, teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to ensure that students revise and improve their work. Many teachers use project-based rubrics to illustrate strengths and weaknesses in student work. A world history teacher uses a rubric to provide feedback on a children's book project illustrating religious differences. The English department completes a research paper in stages, with opportunities for student reflection and revision built into the time-plan as well as teacher comment and reaction. In many science, foreign language, history, and math courses, students are allowed to retake or correct quizzes and tests for partial or full credit after showing evidence of their gained knowledge. Many teachers require the students to stay after school to review the material before allowing the retake. However, not all DSHS teachers are providing specific, timely, and corrective feedback. Some students report that some teachers do not allow revision or improvement of work after it has been submitted. In a survey given to parents and students, 31.6% of parents feels the teachers do not provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback. Furthermore, only 63.4% of students believes their teachers have offered suggestions to help them improve their schoolwork. A school-wide system for specific, timely, and corrective feedback would provide all students with the constructive criticism and directive assistance necessary to improve student performance and confidence. (teachers, self-study, students, Endicott Survey, student work)

Some teachers regularly use formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction. Many teachers regularly check in with their students during instruction to assess comprehension of a concept and mastery of a skill. Teachers use a range of techniques to assess their students' progress. In a math class, the teacher asks the students to solve a proof in calculus and then check the proof. In a history class, students review their notes with colored highlighters and respond to a teacher's "dip-sticking" questions, and when the student is correct, he or she is termed a "scholar". A study of Dracut teachers'

strategies shows the use of a variety of formative assessments including outlining, classroom discussion, cubing, and thumbs up/thumbs down signals. While teachers use many different formative assessments, they are not provided formal time to collaborate and to determine appropriate and necessary changes to curricula based upon student assessments. While teachers regularly use formative assessment currently, they will be afforded more opportunity to inform and adapt instruction with common planning time. (teachers, classroom observation, self-study)

Some teachers and administrators, individually and collaboratively, examine a range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practice, including all of the following: student work, common course and common grade-level assessments, standardized assessments, data from sending schools, receiving schools, and post-secondary institutions, and survey data from current students and alumni. Most teachers examine student and common course and grade-level assessments in an effort to revise curriculum and improve instruction. The science department has utilized up to half of the time during some department meetings to perform item analysis of midterm and final exam questions and then used the second half of the meeting to discuss classroom strategies to improve achievement. The social studies department also describes reviewing common summative assessments, discussing the results as a team, and adjusting curriculum based on the discussion. The math department collaborates on quarterly common assessments, analyzing test questions and then deciding which questions to modify or eliminate for subsequent years. The tenth grade English teachers use their common planning time to discuss common course offerings and grade level assessments. The English and math departments look at MCAS scores, perform an item analysis, and tailor instruction as necessary to improve results. The science department also looks at AP test results from year to year to better understand student strengths and weaknesses. The assistant principal from the junior high school says that administration and guidance personnel look at student records from previous schools for placement in levels and determining at-risk populations. Teachers report looking at student grades in prerequisite classes to determine student placement in a sequential class. Many teachers, students, parents, and administrators look at survey data to analyze and report results, but there is no current formal examination of individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The school has created and adopted the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, and these expectations are posted in most classrooms and are listed in the program of studies. However, most teachers are not yet assessing achievement of these expectations. Among the few teachers who are using school-wide rubrics to assess their students on the achievement of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, there is no method to collect and analyze the results to revise curriculum

and improve instructional practice. When the school adopts a system of consistent formal analysis of student assessment results based on its own expectations and the use of its own rubrics, students will be able to understand the results and improve learning, and teachers will be able to use the results to improve curricula and instruction. The examination of a broad range of evidence enables teachers and administrators to revise curriculum and improve instruction in an effort to improve student achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (teachers, department leaders, school leadership, self-study)

Grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs. The DSHS professional staff has designated a leadership team made up of the principal, vice principals, supervisor of guidance, and department heads to review the grading and reporting issues. Recently, the report card was updated to remove out-of-date comment codes and to include codes more in alignment with the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. However, the reports will need to be further revised to better reflect new assessment strategies and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning practices. The leadership team regularly reviews and revises grading and reporting practices, but this process needs to be more rigorous and thorough to include the changes in summative assessments and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning practices. (leadership, assessment committee, panel presentation)

### **Commendations**

1. The frequent use of many and varied methods of formative assessment by all teachers
2. The diversity of summative assessments used by teachers for all students
3. The regular review of grading and reporting practices to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs

### **Recommendations**

1. Develop and implement a process using school-wide analytic rubrics to assess both the whole school and individual student progress in meeting 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
2. Report individual student and whole school progress in achieving 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to the students, families, and the school community
3. Collect, disaggregate, and analyze student performance data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement
4. Communicate to all students the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations prior to each unit and provide rubrics before all summative assessments

5. Provide formal common planning time for each department to allow teachers to collaborate on the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments
6. Provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to all students across all disciplines
7. Create a process where all teachers and administrators, individually and collaboratively, examine a broad range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and to improve instructional practices

## **SUPPORT STANDARDS**

SCHOOL CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

---

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

---

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

**5**

## School Culture and Leadership

*The school culture is equitable and inclusive, and it embodies the school's foundational core values and beliefs about student learning. It is characterized by reflective, collaborative, and constructive dialogue about research-based practices that support high expectations for the learning of all students. The leadership of the school fosters a safe, positive culture by promoting learning, cultivating shared leadership, and engaging all members of the school community in efforts to improve teaching and learning.*

1. The school community consciously and continuously builds a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture that fosters student responsibility for learning and results in shared ownership, pride, and high expectations for all.
2. The school is equitable, inclusive, and fosters heterogeneity where every student over the course of the high school experience is enrolled in a minimum of one heterogeneously grouped core course (English/language arts, social studies, math, science, or world languages).
3. There is a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult in the school, in addition to the school counselor, who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
4. In order to improve student learning through professional development, the principal and professional staff:
  - engage in professional discourse for reflection, inquiry, and analysis of teaching and learning
  - use resources outside of the school to maintain currency with best practices
  - dedicate formal time to implement professional development
  - apply the skills, practices, and ideas gained in order to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
5. School leaders regularly use research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improved student learning.
6. The organization of time supports research-based instruction, professional collaboration among teachers, and the learning needs of all students.
7. Student load and class size enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students.
8. The principal, working with other building leaders, provides instructional leadership that is rooted in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations.
9. Teachers, students, and parents are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership.
10. Teachers exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning.
11. The school board, superintendent, and principal are collaborative, reflective, and constructive in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
12. The school board and superintendent provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school.

## Conclusions

The Dracut Senior High School community exerts significant effort to build a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture that fosters student responsibility and results in shared ownership, pride, and high expectations for all. At DSHS, 67.7% of the students report that they feel safe at school while 56.6% of the staff members report that the school's culture is safe, positive, and supportive. The student and teacher handbooks reflect high academic and behavioral expectations for all. Students at Dracut Senior High School feel that the superintendent, principal, assistant principals, faculty, and staff members at the high school always communicate high expectations to them and that students in turn have set high expectations for themselves. There is classroom evidence that high academic expectations are practiced in the AP and honors courses, but observations in the college prep 1 and 2 courses do not always reflect those same high expectations. Within the corridors and classrooms of DSHS, there is a positive, safe, and respectful school environment. The students treat each other with mutual respect and relate to their school with a feeling of pride and a sense of shared ownership and responsibility. There is also a mutual respect exhibited between students and faculty. The discipline and attendance policies listed in the student handbook also illustrate high expectations and student responsibility. Passing among classes, students show respect for each other and a sense of pride in their school, some wearing school colors and logo attire. When a major issue arises in the school, the principal addresses the faculty and students to express concern and to ensure that communication is direct and consistent. Comparative annual data on discipline actions and incidences of vandalism reflect appropriate trends for a school where a respectful climate exists. The school actively focuses efforts to foster a safe, positive, respectful, supportive environment with programs such as Make a Date with Life, the Gay/Straight Alliance, Renaissance Program, Pride Night, etc., that are related to continuously improving the school climate. Conversations with students reveal that much is expected of them in terms of learning, goal-setting, behavior, respect for others, and participation in school and community. The school has increased student awareness of bullying and safety issues. Dracut Senior High School provides a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture that supports an environment for positive student learning. (Endicott Survey, students, facility tour, teacher interviews)

While Dracut Senior High School is not yet fully meeting the indicator, the school is striving to be equitable, inclusive, and foster heterogeneity where every student over the course of the high school experience is enrolled in a minimum of one heterogeneously grouped core course (English/language arts, social studies, math, science, or world languages). DSHS is committed to supporting an active initiative to guarantee that students are grouped more heterogeneously, in accordance with current

educational research, and to eliminate tracking. Students are treated equally and afforded equal opportunities in their educational programs. Students report that 69.4% have a number of opportunities to take courses in which students of varying levels of ability are enrolled, and 71.1% of the DSHS faculty believes that the school requires each student to enroll in heterogeneous classes in the majority of the school's content/subject areas over the course of four years. The school's program of studies identifies which courses are heterogeneously grouped. There are efforts to end tracking, but there are still college prep 1 and college prep 2 level courses in the science and math departments. Direct classroom observations support the fact that ethnically diverse students are not homogeneously grouped. When varying levels of the same course are offered by the school, there is a greater possibility that students will not be enrolled in heterogeneously grouped classes and some possibility that they will forfeit opportunities of rigorous curriculum. (teacher interviews, school leadership, classroom observations, Endicott Survey)

DSHS does not have a formal ongoing program to provide regular contact between each student and an adult member of the school community who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. While the school did create a program to provide students with an adult in the school with whom they could connect, it was discontinued as a result of a conflict with the collective bargaining agreement. Only 16.1% of students feel that their school has a program which provides them with an adult in the school with whom they can meet regularly and who knows them well. Similarly, only 38.6% of the parents polled feel that their son/daughter has an adult at the school who knows him/her well and assists him/her in achieving the school's learning expectations. The establishment of a formal program through which each student is more closely connected with an adult in the building in addition to the school counselor would result in all students feeling more personally connected to and supported by these adults. (self-study, teacher interview, Endicott Survey, school leadership)

A collaborative spirit of reflection and inquiry exists within most of the departments at Dracut Senior High School. Time for common planning is inconsistent and largely unavailable throughout the school, however, although teachers do routinely engage in informal conversations about learning expectations, consistent grading standards, quality of student work, instructional practices, and curriculum revision. Many teachers seek each other out informally to discuss topics related to teaching and learning. While teachers do have available a variety of relevant readings in their professional library, there is no time for common planning or reflection. The school does currently provide for eight half-days of professional development. Enabling educators to plan and collaborate through organized common

planning time will help increase opportunities for student learning and effective teaching strategies. (teacher interviews, teachers, Endicott Survey, self-study)

The school's leaders regularly use research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improved student learning. The supervision and evaluation process has been thoughtfully designed to improve instruction. Over 57% of staff members report that input from supervisors who are responsible for evaluating their teaching plays an important role in improving their instructional practices. A district-wide teacher evaluation training program was recently completed where all department heads, supervisors, and administrators received four days of professional training in a school-wide research-based supervision and evaluation program. The existence of a comprehensive, research-based supervision and evaluation program contributes to the improvement of teaching and learning throughout the school. (teachers, interviews, self-study)

The organization of time at Dracut Senior High School supports research-based instruction, provides for limited professional collaboration among teachers, and adequately meets the learning needs of all students. The school's current schedule is a rotating six-block schedule with an extended block meeting two times each week. The classes meet for 50 minutes and extended blocks meet for 90 minutes. The extended blocks allow for additional class time for student engagement, in-depth exploration of topics, and project-based learning. While longer blocks allow for laboratory investigations, debates, collaborative learning, and inquiry-based learning, classroom observations indicate that such time is not consistently used to maximum advantage. Currently, the schedule does not allow formal time for interdepartmental and cross-departmental collaboration. Additionally, class sizes, especially in upper level courses, are increasing, and the allocation of rooms within the building is inconsistent. The larger class sizes detract from the goal of increasing student personalization, and the lack of formal time allocated for interdepartmental and cross-departmental collaboration hinders the sharing of instructional ideas within departments and throughout the school. (self-study, teacher interviews, students, teachers)

Student load and class size enable most teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students. However, with enrollment in academic courses ranging from 3 to 34 students, some classes are too large to support optimal student learning. The faculty supplements the learning needs of each student through after school help sessions (late help), organizational skills classes, optional teacher websites, and e-mail correspondence via the Dracut Public Schools network. Peer tutoring is available from

National Honor Society students. Students with IEPs, are mainstreamed into regular academic and other classes with some assistance from special education teachers and paraprofessionals. This additional staff provides assistance not only to students with IEPs but to other classroom students as well. The existence of academic classes containing large numbers of students detracts from teachers' ability to differentiate instruction and provide students with individualized attention. (teacher interviews, students, student shadowing, classroom observations, self-study, Endicott Survey)

The principal, working with other building leaders and central administrators, has begun to provide instructional leadership that is rooted in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. Emphasis is being placed on technology integration, curriculum development, and the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a system-wide priority. The principal maintains open lines of communication with the teachers' association, meeting weekly with its president. The principal was appointed three months ago so that the time elapsing between the recent transition in school leadership and this report is not sufficient to support making informed judgments about his administrative style and effectiveness. However, the appointment of a new principal is viewed as an opportunity to revitalize the educational vision and direction of DSHS toward becoming a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning community with an emphasis on providing students with the academic and technological knowledge and skills required to be prepared for and competitive in an increasingly globalized society. (panel presentation, school leadership, teacher interviews, school board, parents)

Dracut Senior High School teachers, parents, and students are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership. Teachers, parents, and students were represented on the search committee for the recently hired principal, and they report a strong sense of satisfaction and confidence that their voices and opinions were heard in determining the future leadership and direction of Dracut Senior High School. The teachers' association president is a member of the recently established DSHS Curriculum Management Team (CMT) to ensure teachers' voices are heard and their opinions reflected in important issues regarding curriculum and instruction. The student council is an active group that plans new initiatives and communicates regularly with the administration about student concerns and ideas for school improvement. Students visibly demonstrate understanding of the connection between responsibility and ownership for decisions affecting their own overall school experience, for example, the connection between the privilege of eating lunch outdoors and the responsibility for keeping the grounds clean, promoting a sense of student responsibility and ownership. Dracut Senior High School has a parent organization and school

council which provide input to the principal. The meaningful involvement of teachers, parents, and students results in a school culture that welcomes and values the voice of community and is responsive to its needs. (self-study, school tours, teacher interviews, student interviews, meetings with administrators)

Dracut Senior High School teachers exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning. Teachers are actively engaged in developing and revising curriculum, assessment strategies, and instructional practices under the direction of the DSHS Curriculum Management Team (CMT) as well as in revising the process by which the school improvement plan is developed and implemented. Many teachers are pursuing advanced degrees, despite the lack of availability of tuition reimbursement, and others are involved in professional development courses offered through the school district. Teachers are involved in a variety of school-based initiatives such as the anti-bullying curriculum, the freshman support team, the teacher assistance team, and the Dracut Scholarship and financial literacy program. Students report that incidents of bullying have decreased as a result of a protocol in place to effectively address such incidents. Ninth grade students praise the smooth transition to high school. Teachers have written grants to support instructional practices, such as the MMSI (Massachusetts Math and Science Initiative) and the Biotech grant. Teachers and administrators act as curriculum coordinators, department leaders, instructional coordinators, team leaders, and in other formal roles supporting school improvement. While Dracut Senior High School is a place where teachers and students are actively engaged in teaching and learning to provide an enhanced educational experience, there are some indications that not all teachers appear to be invested in student academic success. There is a need for improvement within certain academic departments with regard to setting high academic standards for curriculum and instruction and learning expectations for all students. A commitment to setting high expectations and improving learning for all students by the entire faculty would help ensure success for all students. (self-study, teacher interviews, student interviews, student shadowing, classroom visits, parent interviews, student work)

The Dracut Public Schools has experienced three superintendents over the past five years. The current superintendent, appointed a year ago, has embarked on an ambitious vision for change ranging from renovation of the high school facility, to restructuring of the guidance and other departments, to increased support to ensure the success of ELL students and those with special needs, to the expansion of on-line learning, all in the context of a level-funded fiscal environment as fixed costs increase. A new

initiative, the DSHS Curriculum Management Team (CMT), includes the high school principal, elementary and secondary curriculum coordinators, core content supervisors, and the teacher union president. The principal participates in weekly district-wide meetings and administrative meetings with the superintendent and reports at school committee meetings on an as-needed basis on areas including updates in the school improvement plan, MCAS results, and the NEASC accreditation process. School board members report being impressed by the educational vision and direction set forth by the current superintendent and high school principal, and board members have worked collaboratively with the administration to secure an override to increase the tax base toward funding renovation of the high school physical plant. This constructive collaboration between the school board, superintendent, administration, and parents is a significant accomplishment that will further 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for students and benefit the Dracut community as a whole. (panel, administrator interviews, school board, teacher interviews, self-study)

The school board and superintendent consistently provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school. The principal is the educational leader of the school and, as detailed in the job description, has the responsibility to select, supervise, and evaluate staff members, administer programs that promote student welfare, and provide effective leadership of the management, use, and care of the high school building. The principal oversees and implements the school budget with the support of the superintendent and the school board. The school board serves as the policy-making body and delegates the day-to-day administration of the school to the principal under the direction of the superintendent. Appropriately empowering the principal allows the principal to focus on the achievement by the school of its 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, administrator interviews, school board, teacher interviews)

### **Commendations**

1. The exceptionally safe and secure environment established by the school community
2. The respectful attitude displayed by the student body
3. The involvement of teachers, parents, and students in decision-making in the school
4. Provision by the school board and the superintendent of sufficient decision-making authority for the principal to lead the school
5. The successful and collaborative work of the school board, administrators, faculty, parents, and other community members in securing funding required to renovate and transform the high

school physical plant into a state-of-the-art educational facility that supports 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations

### **Recommendations**

1. Review and revise current student grouping practices to ensure that all student have equitable and inclusive opportunities to access the school's curriculum and achieve the school's foundational core values and beliefs about student learning
2. Develop and implement a plan to ensure that every student over the course of the high school experience is enrolled in a minimum of one heterogeneously grouped core course
3. Develop and implement a formal, ongoing program which provides regular contact to connect each student with an adult member of the school community, in addition to the school counselor, who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
4. Provide formal meeting time for faculty members to collaborate with each other within and across departments to focus on the learning needs of all students
5. Review and remediate instructional practices within each department to ensure that high learning expectations and standards are set forth for all students
6. Ensure that student loads and class sizes are consistent and enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students.



## School Resources for Learning

*Student learning and well-being are dependent upon adequate and appropriate support. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of coordinated programs and services. These resources enhance and improve student learning and well-being and support the school's core values and beliefs. Student support services enable each student to achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.*

1. The school has timely, coordinated, and directive intervention strategies for all students, including identified and at-risk students, that support each student's achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
2. The school provides information to families, especially to those most in need, about available student support services.
3. Support services staff use technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student.
4. School counseling services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
  - deliver a written, developmental program
  - meet regularly with students to provide personal, academic, career, and college counseling
  - engage in individual and group meetings with all students
  - deliver collaborative outreach and referral to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers
  - use ongoing, relevant assessment data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
5. The school's health services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
  - provide preventative health services and direct intervention services
  - use an appropriate referral process
  - conduct ongoing student health assessments
  - use ongoing, relevant assessment data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
6. Library/media services are integrated into curriculum and instructional practices and have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
  - are actively engaged in the implementation of the school's curriculum
  - provide a wide range of materials, technologies, and other information services in support of the school's curriculum
  - ensure that the facility is available and staffed for students and teachers before, during, and after school
  - are responsive to students' interests and needs in order to support independent learning
  - conduct ongoing assessment using relevant data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.

7. Support services for identified students, including special education, Section 504 of the ADA, and English language learners, have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
- collaborate with all teachers, counselors, targeted services, and other support staff in order to achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
  - provide inclusive learning opportunities for all students
  - perform ongoing assessment using relevant data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.

## Conclusions

The combined efforts of support service personnel have resulted in the implementation of intervention strategies that support student achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Prior to students entering the high school, the guidance office works collaboratively with the guidance personnel in the junior high school to identify students who are at risk and in need of support services. At risk students are assigned to an adjustment counselor who monitors student performance regarding academics, attendance, discipline, and transition to high school. Students who are in danger of failing are assigned to DSHS Freshmen Survey, an organizational skills class. Seniors who are in danger of not graduating take part in a DSHS Senior Seminar class where their particular needs are addressed. Teachers and guidance personnel communicate and identify intervention strategies that address specific student needs through teacher assistant teams (TAT). The TAT consists of at least one teacher, one guidance counselor, and an administrator. The team meets as needed or weekly depending on the number of referrals. In addition, a guidance referral process as well as individual education plans and 504 processes are in place to support timely and coordinated interventions for identified students. The DSHS Choices program delivers services to 14 at risk students with social-emotional disabilities. Students in the Choices program receive core content instruction in substantially separate classrooms by certified special education personnel and have the opportunity to take elective classes with regular education students. Additionally, English language learner services are provided by certified personnel with a smaller teacher to student ratio. For students in need of tutoring, National Honor Society students are available to support students identified by teachers or guidance counselors. The school's capacity to provide adequate varied intervention strategies promotes success for all students. (self-study, school leadership, teacher interview)

Dracut Senior High School uses a variety of communication means to adequately inform students, parents/guardians, and school personnel of available support services. The school sends out a ConnectEd phone call to families and staff members every Sunday evening. This message contains information about upcoming school events, including information nights and other school activities. ConnectEd has the capacity to send a targeted message to identified groups of individuals as well as the general school population. Guidance counselors conduct daily phone calls for absent students and utilize the postal services to mail progress reports, schedules, report cards, health forms, and other specific guidance letters and documents. The guidance department conducts freshman information seminars where information is provided about the transition to high school, social issues students may face, and the supports that are available at the high school to enhance learning. The special education

department has a detailed system of communication for those students receiving special education services which include quarterly progress reports and notices of annual meetings to review the student IEPs. The department also communicates with the DSHS Parent Advisory Committee which meets monthly. Effective communication with the school community concerning available services not only supports student learning and well-being but is critical in promoting student academic success. (self-study, teacher interview, central office personnel)

The support staff at Dracut Senior High School adequately uses technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student. The guidance department uses the MMS Student Management System to create schedules, maintain health records, and record disciplinary actions and attendance. The department is in the process of fully implementing Naviance, which is a college planning software program. The school librarian has access to online databases and utilizes Follett Alliance Plus to categorize and track circulation. The school nurses utilize the health module available through MMS to deliver coordinated services for each student. Special education staff members use e-Sped to create IEPs and progress reports, and this program is also used by guidance counselors to write 504 plans. The Kurzweil program which converts text to speech has been used to make the majority of the school's text books available to identified students in special education classrooms. Administrators and the school nurse recently had their computers upgraded and can now access all the features of the student management system as well. The ability of support staff to use technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student enhances learning opportunities and student well-being for all, thus supporting the school's core values and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (school support staff, self-study, central office personnel)

School counseling services at Dracut Senior High School have an adequate number of licensed personnel and support staff to deliver a range of services. The guidance department consists of one adjustment counselor and four, full-time and one part-time guidance counselors. Recently, a new director of guidance was hired to coordinate the guidance program and improve services. The department also has two full-time secretaries to support the delivery of services. The four guidance counselors have a case-load of approximately 280 to 310 students. Students are assigned to counselors alphabetically and remain with the same counselor for all four years. Counselors state that they meet with students on their case-load at least once per year and more frequently at a student's request or through a referral by a classroom teacher. However, only 12.1% of students surveyed report that they meet with their guidance counselor regularly. At the beginning of the year, the counselors meet with

their assigned group of students in the library to disseminate information about guidance services. In the fall, counselors make presentations to senior classes on the college admission process and to provide SAT information. The department also conducts a DSHS Senior Parent Night and a DSHS Financial Aid Night where information about the college application process and the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid forms (FAFSA) is presented. Information on college planning, financial aid, and SAT/PSAT exams is also available on the school website. The guidance department does not have a written developmental program in place. Although the guidance department uses data from the MMS system to track student progress (attendance, health records, disciplinary actions), there is no evidence that the department is using ongoing relevant assessment data and feedback from the school community to improve services. Guidance counselors work collaboratively with a variety of agencies in the community including the police and fire department, the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, and other community outreach organizations. The high student-to-counselor ratio has a detrimental effect on the delivery of guidance services to students, which, when coupled with the lack of a written developmental program, hinders students' social and emotional well-being and their academic success. (self study, school support staff, teachers)

The school's health services department has an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff. A full-time support nurse was recently hired as a response to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health recommendations and the fact that time constraints on the school nurse prevented her from providing adequate health and intervention services to students. As a result, students now have access to health services on a regular basis. The school's health services provide a variety of health and intervention services to students. The health office is located next to the guidance area, allowing for direct communication between departments enabling timely response to and the delivery of appropriate services all students. State mandated screenings for hearing, vision, and body mass index (BMI) are conducted for tenth grade students, and every ninth grade student is screened for scoliosis. Medical treatments for acute and chronic medical conditions are provided on an as-needed basis. The nurses report that they conduct evaluations of non-emergency situations, assess and develop individual treatment plans, and maintain individualized health plans (IHP) for students. Health service personnel are also responsible for the medical aspects of IEPs and 504 plans. They also provide instruction to all staff members on how to recognize the warning signs and symptoms of life threatening allergic reactions and annually review the correct procedure for administering an EpiPen injection. Health services uses an appropriate referral process with primary care physicians and/or the Dracut Board of Health through direct contact via phone, e-mail, or USPS mail. The department also

collaborates with guidance in regard to student mental health issues and assists in making referrals to counseling centers, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Al-Anon. It also maintains productive relationships with community services including Lowell Community Health Center, DCG, Dracut Police, and the Rape Crisis Service of Greater Lowell. The school's health services use ongoing relevant assessment data to improve services. Documentation of services throughout the day is entered into MMS, and data retrieved from MMS is used as an assessment of the effectiveness of health services care and to determine whether other health service strategies should be implemented. Feedback from the school community is not formally solicited for the improvement of services. The health services suite is not adequate for privacy and confidential meetings for preventative and direct intervention services. The area consists of a waiting room, one examination room with two beds, an office for two nurses, and a bathroom. Students enter the bathroom through the office area or from the examination room, and there is only one exit from the suite. The services offered by Dracut High's health services provide for the overall physical health and well-being of the school community, but the lack of the use of feedback from the school community to ensure the appropriate delivery of services and the physical inadequacy of the health services suite impact the effectiveness of the delivery of health services and therefore negatively impact the students' health and well-being, limiting their ability to achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, teacher interview, teachers, students, Endicott Survey)

The Library Media Center is is staffed by a certified Library Media Specialist (LMS) and its services are integrated into curriculum and instructional practices, but the number of support personnel is inadequate. The LMS manages the media center from 6:30 am to 3:00 pm Monday through Thursday and from 6:30 am to 2:30 pm on Friday, providing access to materials, online resources, and computers beyond the school day. The LMS is a member of the DSHS Curriculum Management Team and participates in leadership team meetings. These activities allow the LMS to have first-hand knowledge of curriculum and to be apprised of any changes in the courses which are or are not being offered. The LMS communicates with faculty members through e-mail and personal conversation to alert faculty members to the availability of new resources in their content area. Teachers are consulted every spring for suggestions of items they would like to have purchased for the media center to support their curriculum. The library/media center has an adequate budget to provide a wide range of print and non-print materials, technology, audiovisual equipment, and online resources to support the school's curriculum. Four portable interactive white boards were purchased for the media center that faculty members may borrow for classroom use, further supporting the implementation of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. To support student learning, the LMS is responsive to students' interest

and needs. The LMS been trained in the use of PLATO, which has been used as an online credit recovery program, and ItsLearning, which is a class management software program that some students use for online courses. This enables her to serve faculty members who might use this software to teach or students who use the library to access online courses. The LMS conducts a freshman orientation each semester with all English classes which consists of an introduction to the library's print and online resources. Classes that come to the library for research assignments are given a review of the available print resources as well as information on database use and website evaluation. The media center provides 14 computers for individual student or faculty use and a computer lab of 26 computers for classroom use. Although the media center provides a sufficient number of computers for student use, the quality of the current network affects the efficient use of this technology. Connections can be slow and sporadic, affecting Internet access and the ability of students to access information. Connection speeds are also made slower because of the sharing of network resources with other town departments, and library computer availability is limited. Most people in the school believe the media center is a welcoming environment where one can pursue 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. The LMS uses relevant data from the Follett Library Automation system to assess the appropriateness of the collection. The LMS also maintains folders of all teacher assignments, which are used as an assessment of the library holdings and collection. Feedback from the community is informal, gained from personal conversations and through the media specialist's participation on various committees. Although the library media center appears to adequately meet students' needs, the lack of support staff personnel negatively impacts the processing of media center materials, slowing delivery of these materials for student use. Teachers sit at the circulation desk two to three periods per day so the LMS may attend to library clerical duties, but these can offer only limited assistance to students and faculty members concerning their library inquiries. Although students have come to expect the media center to be open after school, the LMS has to close the media center often in order to attend meetings. Although the writing lab adjacent to the media center is available for student use after school, the main library is not always available. The media center serves the entire school population, and the LMS finds it increasingly difficult to meet the informational needs of the students and staff as well as maintain an up-to-date print collection. The media center provides a wide range of resources for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner, and students and faculty members have access to a wide variety of resources that aids them in attaining the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, but the lack of adequate media center support personnel negatively impacts the delivery and assessment of those resources. (teacher interview, teachers, students, Endicott Survey)

Dracut Senior High School is not able to adequately meet the needs of all identified students, including special education, Section 504 of the ADA, and English language learners. Dracut Senior High School

provides six full-time special education teachers, one full-time special education chairperson, and one full-time adjustment counselor to work with students and provide ongoing collaboration with regular education teachers and guidance personnel. Each special education teacher is responsible for writing IEPs, managing IEPs, providing specialized instruction, conducting annual meetings, and communicating with parents, general education teachers, and related service providers and performing evaluations for three-year reevaluations. Dracut Senior High School has six, part-time related service personnel including a school psychologist, a speech and language therapist, an autism/behavior specialist, and an occupational specialist. The high school has three full-time inclusion paraprofessionals and four full-time paraprofessionals to support students enrolled in the Life Skills program. Paraprofessional support in inclusion classes varies across content areas. Some areas such as math and English have adequate support whereas other areas do not. Weekly collaboration takes place between special education and regular education teachers for students requiring consultation services on their IEP. This collaboration is not scheduled and often takes place through written communication or during unscheduled time in passing. The school has increased the number of students receiving inclusion services in the past three years. The continuum of services ranges from full and partial inclusion to small group resource room and a substantially separate setting. In each setting, students receive the accommodations and modifications they need to access the curriculum. Special education teachers collaborate with regular education teachers to support the implementation of accommodations and modifications. The school has one English as a second language (ESL) teacher who is responsible for assisting a small population of English language learners (ELL) students. The ESL teacher collaborates with the general education teachers in whose classes ELL students are enrolled to provide language strategies and sheltering techniques related to the curriculum content. Depending on their English language proficiency, ELL students are included in general education classes. Formal training opportunities for teachers to learn language strategies have been limited in the previous two years. The guidance counselors and general education teachers communicate regarding students who have accommodations on 504 plans. Guidance counselors develop the plans and the vice principal monitors classroom implementation of the 504 plan as well as scheduling follow-up meetings with guidance counselors, parents, and teachers. Formal opportunities for collaboration with support staff members to develop strategies for implementing 504 plans do not routinely take place across the curriculum. The learning and well-being of identified students at Dracut Senior High School relies on the adequate staffing of special services and ELL programs. The inequitable assignment of paraprofessional support across the curriculum impacts the delivery of specialized services to students and hinders the ability of

the department to adequately respond to students' instructional needs and assist them in meeting the learning expectations of the school. (self-study, classroom observations, teacher interview)

### **Commendations**

1. The addition of support personnel in guidance and health services to better meet students' needs
2. The effective communication with parents and the community
3. The effective use of technology to deliver services to students
4. The involvement of the Library Media Specialist in curriculum revision and development across all disciplines

### **Recommendations**

1. Ensure that there is classroom support across the curriculum for identified students
2. Develop and implement a formal process to evaluate the effectiveness of student services programs in providing for the needs of all students
3. Expand the health services suite to accommodate the nursing staff and student privacy
4. Provide adequate clerical support for the library/media center
5. Ensure the library/ media services center is staffed and available to students before, during and after school
6. Develop and implement a written developmental program for guidance services
7. Provide special education and ESL staff members with the regular opportunity to collaborate with regular education teachers



## Community Resources for Learning

*The achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations requires active community, governing board, and parent advocacy. Through dependable and adequate funding, the community provides the personnel, resources, and facilities to support the delivery of curriculum, instruction, programs, and services.*

1. The community and the district's governing body provide dependable funding for:
  - a wide range of school programs and services
  - sufficient professional and support staff
  - ongoing professional development and curriculum revision
  - a full range of technology support
  - sufficient equipment
  - sufficient instructional materials and supplies.
2. The school develops, plans, and funds programs:
  - to ensure the maintenance and repair of the building and school plant
  - to properly maintain, catalogue, and replace equipment
  - to keep the school clean on a daily basis.
3. The community funds and the school implements a long-range plan that addresses:
  - programs and services
  - enrollment changes and staffing needs
  - facility needs
  - technology
  - capital improvements.
4. Faculty and building administrators are actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget.
5. The school site and plant support the delivery of high quality school programs and services.
6. The school maintains documentation that the physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
7. All professional staff actively engage parents and families as partners in each student's education and reach out specifically to those families who have been less connected with the school.
8. The school develops productive parent, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support student learning.

## Conclusions

In recent years, the community and district's governing body have not sufficiently supported dependable funding for school programs and services, professional and support staff personnel, professional development, curriculum revision, and technology and equipment. In response to the survey statement that the community and district's governing body provides dependable funding for a wide range of programs and services, 68.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed. For the past two school years, the district budget has been level-funded. In the 2009-2010 school year, funding was reduced by \$1,172,000. Per pupil expenditure for the FY10 was \$9,876.00, significantly lower than the state-wide average of \$13,055.32, which puts Dracut fifth from the bottom in the state. User fees are required for participation in a variety of activities, including all athletic programs, extracurricular activities, and bus transportation. Funding for curriculum revision has been reduced by 74% from \$8,000 FY09 to \$2,300 in FY10. For the current school year, funding for curriculum revision is under the auspices of the chief academic officer, and it is difficult to determine specific high school expenditures. The provision of one half day per month for professional development was instituted in the 2011 school year, and this schedule will remain in place for the current year to provide additional professional development in technology and other curriculum areas. A recent override was passed by the community, approving \$60 million dollars to add to and renovate the existing school plant and provide for the acquisition of new equipment. Technology support has been lacking, but a new director of technology position has been created and will soon be filled. While the upcoming school renovation program should be commended, general evidence has not been found of sufficient community funding of the operational school budget. The insufficient funding by the community and governing body to support school programs, services, professional and support staff, professional development, curriculum revisions, technology support, and instructional materials does not provide the resources necessary for students' achievement of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (facility tour, observations, Endicott Survey, documents, meetings)

Dracut Senior High School is well-maintained and cleaned daily despite the constraints of a sparse budget. In response to the Endicott Survey item saying that there are sufficient financial resources available to ensure the maintenance and repair of facilities and equipment, only 39.7% of the school board was in total agreement. The maintenance and custodial department works creatively to stretch the budget by having a staff cross-trained in several trade areas including plumbing, electrical work, cabinet-making, and locksmithing as well as an HVAC person who is also a mechanic. Staff members turn in a repair request to the administration, and tasks are addressed in order of priority. To the

statement, "furniture and equipment in my classrooms are in good condition," 46% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed compared to only 30.7% who agreed or strongly agreed. To the statement, "needed repairs are completed in a timely manner," 64.5% of staff members disagreed or strongly disagreed. Student pride in their school is evident in the lack of graffiti and the absence of trash in halls and the cafeteria. However, school staff members and students have expressed concerns about the cleanliness of restroom facilities. While maintenance has been deferred in recent years, the upcoming high school renovation will include replacement of equipment and the upgrade of the existing school plant. The lack of sufficient funding to fully support the ongoing repair and maintenance of the building and equipment results in a school environment that is not conducive to learning. (facility tour, observations, Endicott Survey, school support staff)

While the community has a long-range plan that appropriately addresses the areas of programs and services, enrollment changes and staffing needs, facility needs, technology, and capital improvements, there is little evidence that the community funds the long-range plans of the school. Dracut Senior High School uses the Modular Management System (MMS) to track enrollment trends, and the administration uses this information, along with course maximums, graduation requirements, and other space considerations to determine future course offerings and staff allocations. The Dracut Senior High School Building Project will address improvements to facility needs, technology, and capital improvements on a one-time basis. Ongoing funding support continues to be necessary to provide the students with a relevant and challenging educational experience. (Endicott Survey, central office, school leadership)

The faculty of DSHS is not actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget. Although the self-study states that a "formal process exists for soliciting feedback from teachers and other staff members concerning budgetary needs", many faculty members disagree, commenting that there is a lack of faculty input in the development of budget. The budget is developed by the principal, who works with the superintendent to determine the departmental budgets based on available monies. The principal then communicates the respective budgetary amounts to department chairs rather than inviting teachers to project the monetary requirements driven by their curricular and instructional needs. A survey of faculty members indicates that 76% either disagrees or strongly disagrees with the statement, "I have input in the development of the school budget." When asked in a meeting if they routinely have knowledge of current balances for department/school budgets, faculty members did not feel this to be true. As a result, the budget does not accurately reflect the input of the faculty in the

development nor the implementation of the budget regarding the priorities needed to support student learning. (Endicott Survey, teachers, department heads)

The school site and plant do not sufficiently support the delivery of high quality school programs and services. To the survey statement, "The school's physical plant and site support the delivery of high quality programs and services," 68.4% of high school staff members either disagree or strongly disagree. The building, which was built in 1957, went through a renovation in 1997 and experienced other smaller upgrades such as the replacement of gymnasium bleachers and windows. The school site is good, including adequate outdoor fields, parking, and a spacious courtyard. Overall, the building is well maintained despite the funding constraints and is generally clean, but it does not support 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Upgrading technology is one area that needs to be addressed in order to support teachers as they attempt to meet the core value of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in technology. The lack of consistent Internet access limits the use of technology to its fullest in the areas of instruction and assessment. The foreign language department does not have a language lab. Tiles are cracked in some areas, heating ducts are in need of repair, locker rooms are small, the art room kiln has been shut down, and windows are cracked and scratched. An override has been passed to add to and renovate the existing building. This \$60 million project is due to break ground by next June 2012. As the current building plant does not support the delivery of high quality school programs, until Dracut Senior High School improves the deficiencies in the physical plant, it will continue to be difficult for students to achieve their 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (facility tour, observations, Endicott Survey)

Dracut Senior High School maintains documentation that the physical plant and facilities meet all the applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations. Documentation verifies compliance with state building and fire codes. Hazardous materials are stored properly in maintenance and janitorial closets. A board of health inspection is conducted annually as is the review of the occupancy permit. Because Dracut Senior High School maintains the plant to meet all federal and state laws, students and staff members come to school daily and feel safe and secure. (facility tour, observations, Endicott Survey, school support staff)

Professional staff actively engages most parents and families as partners in each student's education and reaches out specifically to those families who have been less connected with the school. In September, parents are invited to a curriculum night where they follow their student's class schedule, meet their child's teachers, and learn about their classes. A second open house takes place after the first

marking period when parents are invited to meet with teachers to discuss student progress. Other events are held for the dissemination of college information, financial aid, and eighth grade transition. The principal uses the ConnectEd phone message system to communicate weekly to each student's home, often to invite parents to various forums or other activities or to provide relevant information about school events. The district maintains a website, and some teachers have web pages. Additionally, some teachers routinely contact parents by e-mail. Teachers are requested to contact parents of students who are failing before report cards are distributed. Guidance makes specific contact with the parents of at-risk students, and special education students receive an additional progress report each quarter. Although orientation nights are scheduled for incoming students and their parents, both parents and students express a concern that some students entering Dracut Senior High School from outside the public schools are not well informed about this orientation and initially feel disconnected from the school. Broader and deeper contact with families, particularly those families who are not well connected to the school, would enhance the partnership that results from close school engagement and leads to increased student learning. (teachers, parents, students, school leadership)

Dracut Senior High School develops productive parent, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support student learning. Fifty-six percent of parents either agree or strongly agree that "the school has effective partnerships with parents, community organizations, businesses, and higher education to support learning". A parent teacher organization is in place which encourages parents to be involved, and parents, staff, and administrators all proudly note that the Dracut Scholarship Foundation involves the entire community in raising over \$100,000 annually through a four-day telethon on the local cable channel. The funds raised go directly back to the students in the form of scholarships. Dracut Senior High School is involved with many local businesses including the Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union, which has a satellite branch located at the high school. The bank branch is open daily and employs students as interns. The credit union also conducts workshops in personal finance. The Life Skills program maintains a partnership with the Boott Cotton Mills Museum in Lowell where students assemble informative packets for the museum visitors. Lowell General Hospital has a "Shadow a Nurse" program. There are several education partnerships, including Massachusetts Biotech Council and Boston University that provide professional development to three science teachers in biotechnology. The University of Massachusetts at Lowell, through the Francis College of Engineering, provides the science department with a program that allows students to explore possible careers in engineering. The University of Massachusetts, Lowell, and Middlesex Community College provide opportunities for dual enrollment classes. Northern Essex Community College administers the

ACCUPLACER exam and has an articulation agreement whereby students who have completed drafting courses at Dracut Senior High School have their Drafting 1 requirement waived. Dracut Senior High School's partnerships with parents, community, business, and higher education help Dracut Senior High School connect to the larger community, increase student involvement in that community, and provide opportunities for authentic learning beyond the school walls. (Endicott Survey, teacher interviews, department heads, school leadership)

### **Commendations**

1. Community funding of the building renovation and addition project
2. The innovative and cost effective maintenance program
3. The effort by the maintenance staff to keep the building current with health and safety codes
4. The school's extensive business and community connections which provide opportunities for students to extend their learning beyond the school walls

### **Recommendations**

1. Provide dependable funding to effectively provide support for school programs and services, professional and support staff personnel, professional development, curriculum revision, and technology and equipment
2. Create a formal process to allow greater faculty input in the development of the school's budget
3. Upgrade the existing technology infrastructure to improve student and staff access to technology
4. Expand transitional communication efforts to include eighth grade students and families who are not part of the Dracut Public School community

## *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 Dracut Senior High School. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should be apprised by the building administration yearly of progress made addressing visiting committee recommendations.

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

A school's initial/continued accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing valid recommendations of the visiting committee and others identified by the Commission as it monitors the school's progress and changes which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle. To monitor the school's progress in the Follow-Up Program, the Commission requires that the principal of Dracut Senior 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 days (60) of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact which the change has had on the school's ability to meet the Standards for Accreditation. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix on page 15. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report which is required of each member school to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

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

The visiting committee extends its thanks to Dracut Senior High School for the hospitality extended throughout the visit. From the wonderful musical performance by the string quartets and the welcoming reception, to the comfortable accommodations provided to the visiting team, all contributed to a very positive experience for all team members. The visiting committee is very appreciative of the effort expended by everyone at Dracut Senior High School to produce an especially candid and

accurate self-study. This contributed to making the work of the visiting committee significantly more efficient which allowed the members to focus more appropriately on crafting purposeful and productive recommendations to help drive school improvement. The visiting committee also thanks the school's faculty and staff for their participation in various meetings, including the thirty-two teacher interviews on Sunday afternoon, and for the willingness of teachers to welcome visiting team members into their classes as the team shadowed sixteen Dracut Senior High School students for half a day each. Thanks as well to the shadowed and interviewed students, parents, school board members, and central office personnel who took time from their professional and personal schedules to meet with the visiting committee members on Sunday and during the three school days of the visit.

Finally, congratulations and thank you to the co-chairs of the Dracut Senior High School Steering Committee, the remaining members of the Steering Committee, the chairs of the seven self-study subcommittees, and to the superintendent, principal, and administrative staff members for their assistance and their support throughout the visit.

**Dracut Senior High School  
NEASC Accreditation Visit  
September 25 - 28, 2011**

**Visiting Committee**

<p>Paul Mangelinkx, Chair Chatham High School Chatham, MA 02633</p>	<p>Ron Keough Mashpee High School Mashpee, MA 026494</p>
<p>Dr. Ruth Gilbert-Whitner, Assistant Chair Whitman-Hanson Regional School District Whitman, MA 02382</p>	<p>Scott Larsen Rockport High School Rockport, MA 01966</p>
<p>Kathleen Aiello Lynn Classical High School Lynn, MA 01905</p>	<p>Allyson Machado Southwick-Tolland Regional High School Southwick, MA 01077</p>
<p>Barbara Allen Cambridge Public Schools Cambridge, MA 02141</p>	<p>Stephanie Savoy Bridgewater-Raynham Regional High School Bridgewater, CMA 02324</p>
<p>Robert Barsanti Pittsfield High School Pittsfield, MA 01201</p>	<p>Brad Toney Chelsea High School Chelsea, MA 02150</p>
<p>Brian Cote Nashoba Regional High School Bolton, MA 061740</p>	<p>Paul Vigeant Billerica Memorial High School Billerica, MA 01821</p>
<p>David Desmond West Springfield High School West Springfield, MA 01089</p>	<p>Greg Waters Andover High School Andover, MA 01810</p>
<p>Sharon Euvrard Athol High School Athol, MA 01331</p>	<p>Charles Willis Revere High School Revere, MA 02151</p>

# NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

## Commission on Public Secondary Schools

### SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

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

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