West Hartford Public School District

Agenda Item: NEASC Update

Meeting Date: October 7, 2014

From: Nancy DePalma, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Paul Vicinus, Director of Secondary Education

Through: Tom Moore, Superintendent

Background:

In the fall of 2013, both Conard and Hall High School hosted decennial accreditation visits by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). NEASC is the nation’s oldest regional accrediting association serving more than 2,000 public and independent schools, colleges and universities serving member institutions across Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. NEASC accreditation is a voluntary system of accountability that is comprehensive in scope measured against a body of qualitative standards. The accreditation process is structured in a ten-year cycle of:

- **Self-study** whereby the entire educational community engages in structured analysis, self-reflection, and planning in response to the standards.

- **Peer review** process through the observations and judgments of a Visiting Committee of peers from other schools and colleges, informed by the self-study and based on the standards.

- **Follow-up** carried out at the school-level for school-based action committees to implement findings of its own self-study and valid recommendations of the NEASC Visiting Committee.

NEASC accreditation attests to the substantial compliance with established qualitative standards, integrity in statements to the public describing the schools’ programs, institutional commitment to improvement, and sufficiency of institutional resources. NEASC accreditation does not measure the experience of individual students, guarantee the quality of specific programs, nor compare or rank institutions (New England Association of Schools and Colleges website, www.neasc.org).

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The self-study began by completing a comprehensive analysis the schools’ strengths and weaknesses based on the NEASC standards. These Standards for Accreditation fall into two larger categories: Teaching and Learning (Core Values, Beliefs and Learning Expectations, Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment of and for Student Learning) and Support of Teaching and Learning (School Culture and Leadership, School Resources for Learning, Community Resources for Learning). Ultimately, a self-study report was created by teams of teachers, administrators, parents and students who focused on each of the respective Standards.

The NEASC Visiting Committee spent four days in West Hartford, reviewed the self-study documents, 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 NEASC Standards for Accreditation. Since the Visiting Committee represented a variety of public schools, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of each school.

Each conclusion in the report was consensually agreed upon by the Visiting Committee. 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 NEASC Standards.

At the conclusion of each respective visiting committees’ visit, they were extremely impressed with the quality and scope of programming offered at each high school. Ultimately, the Visiting Committees’ recommendation was to maintain the accreditation status for both Conard and Hall.

Below is a summary of each school’s commendations and recommendations by each standard. The full report has a more detailed information of how each school has met the standards. The principal is responsible for completing a two and five year report addressing how the school is progressing on the recommendations identified by the Visiting Committee.

Nancy DePalma, Paul Vicinus, Julio Duarte and Dan Zittoun will be available for questions.
Conard High School

Core Values and Beliefs
Commendations
Processes for developing core values and beliefs that were inclusive and representative of a variety of stakeholders
Identification of measurable and relevant 21st century learning expectations aligned with both district goals and Connecticut core learning standards
Recommendations
Communication regarding implementation process for school-wide rubrics to all stakeholder groups

Curriculum
Commendations
Structures and resources for curriculum to include vertical articulation, dedicated time for curricular review, and adequate funding for resources.
Curricular emphasis on higher order thinking skills, clear alignment between written and taught curriculum, and strong student performance
Recommendations
Continued support to curricular review and technology integration and increased opportunities for interdisciplinary learning

Hall High School

Core Values and Beliefs
Commendations
Processes for developing core values and beliefs that were inclusive and representative of a variety of stakeholders
Levels of collaboration among faculty administration and students and the emphasis on civic and social expectations for students
Recommendations
Communication regarding implementation process for school-wide rubrics to all stakeholder groups

Curriculum
Commendations
Structures and resources for curriculum to include vertical articulation, dedicated time for curricular review, and adequate funding for resources.
Curricular opportunities for authentic learning, clear alignment between written and taught curriculum, and opportunities for collaboration and professional learning
Recommendations
Continued support to curricular review and technology integration and increased opportunities for interdisciplinary learning
Conard High School

Instruction
Commendations
Professional learning around instructional practice, and school-wide emphasis on supporting struggling learners
Emphasis on 21st century learning (i.e., inquiry, problem solving, effective communication, etc.) and application of knowledge to authentic learning tasks

Recommendations
Continued engagement in school-wide professional learning to promote in-depth understanding of dynamic instructional practices

Assessment of and for Student Learning
Commendations
Collaborative process for the design and implementation of common learning experiences and variety of assessments strategies
Common understanding of the essential nature of formative assessment in the instruction process and collaboration around common formative assessment practice and summative measures

Recommendations
Develop methods to report on student achievement of school-wide learning expectations using school-wide rubrics

School Culture and Leadership
Commendations
Welcoming, positive, safe school environment reflective of the school’s core values and beliefs and the strong connections between students and teachers
Opportunities and programs to include Advisory, athletics, and extra-curricular clubs; open enrollment practices for Advanced Placement, inclusionary practices for special education

Hall High School

Commendations
Professional collaboration around instructional practice, personalization of instruction, and engagement of students
Emphasis on inquiry, problem solving, higher order thinking, and application of knowledge to authentic tasks

Recommendations
Promote increased opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning and integration of technology within instructional practices

Commendations
Collaborative process for the design and implementation of common learning experiences and variety of assessments strategies
Common understanding of the essential nature of formative assessment in the instruction process and collaboration around common formative assessment practice and summative measures

Recommendations
Develop methods to report on student achievement of school-wide learning expectations using school-wide rubrics

Commendations
Safe, positive, and respectful school culture, distributed leadership, and the strong connections between students and teachers

School Culture and Leadership
Commendations
Significant opportunities for involvement in clubs, organizations, and co-curricular activities; variety of support programs to implement school’s core values and beliefs, and commitment to 21st century learning
Conard High School

**School Culture and Leadership**

**Recommendations**
Increase time for teachers to collaborate and extend opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration

**School Resources for Learning**

**Commendations**
Strong intervention programs to support at-risk and struggling learners and extensive communication with families

Collaboration across special and general education and contributions of school counseling, health services, and library media specialists to support students and their learning

**Recommendations**
Integrate library services more fully across all disciplines

**Community Resources for Learning**

**Commendations**
Community support for the school budgeting process, capital improvement plans and the Technology Blueprint

Strong relationship with the parent and surrounding community

**Recommendations**
Ensure all students have adequate access to technology and continue to implement the Technology Blueprint

Examine usability of instructional space and assess lighting quality in auditorium

Hall High School

**Recommendations**
Fully implement the WH educator evaluation plan to improve student learning

**Commendations**
Depth and breadth of support services and programs to meet needs of all learners and extensive communication with families

Collaborative relationship among all staff across departments and between school and outside service providers to support students and their learning

**Recommendations**
Expand the co-teaching model to include elective areas of the school’s curriculum

**Commendations**
Community support for the school budgeting process, capital improvement plans and the Technology Blueprint

Communication to all parents and outreach to those less connected to the school and the wide variety of partnerships among school, parents, and surrounding community

**Recommendations**
Increase access to technology and promote and increase participation in job shadowing opportunities

Upgrade outdated science and food labs and remedy HVAC issues