

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE

Simsbury High School

Simsbury, Connecticut

November 12 – 15, 2006

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STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS

The Distribution, Use, and Scope of The Visiting Committee Report

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this visiting committee report of Simsbury 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 Simsbury 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 team.

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INTRODUCTION

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

The governing body of the Association is its Board of Trustees which supervises the work of 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

- Mission and Expectations for Student Learning
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment of Student Learning

Support of Teaching and Learning Standards

- Leadership and Organization
- School Resources for Learning
- Community Resources for Learning.

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

The self-study of Simsbury High School extended over a period of eighteen school months from December 2004 to August 2006. The visiting committee was pleased to note that students and parents 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, Simsbury High School also used questionnaires developed by The Global Institute 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 fourteen evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Simsbury High School. The Committee members spent four days in Simsbury, 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, the state department of education, and central office administrators, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Simsbury High School.

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

- review of the school's self-study materials
- thirty hours shadowing thirteen students for a half day
- a total of twenty 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 twenty eight teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning
- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers
- the examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

Each conclusion on the report was agreed to by team consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting committee appear in parenthesis in the Standards sections of the report. The seven Standards for Accreditation reports include commendations and recommendations that in the team'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 Simsbury 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.

The entire Simsbury High School community was involved in the excellent preparation for the accreditation visiting team. Administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents demonstrated warm hospitality throughout the four day visit. The team felt welcomed and that the school truly believed the team was there to help the school continue to improve learning for all of its students. The team greatly appreciated the reflective and thorough nature of the school's self-study and the openness and honesty of the administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents in their discussions with team members during the visit.

Simsbury High School is a very special school. It has a wonderful and dedicated faculty whose members care deeply about their students both as students and as individuals. It has awesome students who recognize the dedication of their teachers, who want to learn, and who love their high school. The Simsbury High School community has the strong support of its parents and the community as a whole. It has a leader who cares deeply about teaching and learning.

With all of these fantastic resources, there is no limit to what Simsbury High School, as a true learning community, can achieve and what it can do to improve learning for all students, making them better prepared to live and succeed in a technologically driven, information-based, global community.

In the last few years much has been asked of the faculty; it has transformed the school from a school of outstanding teachers who were free to teach whatever and however they thought best to taking the first challenging steps to becoming a learning community where there are high and common expectations for learning for all students, where teachers collaborate on how best to enable every student to achieve those expectations, and where there are common assessments so students, parents, teachers, and the school as a whole can know how well each student is achieving those high and common learning expectations.

In the last two plus years, as the school conducted its New England Association of Schools and Colleges self-study and prepared for the accreditation team visit, significant progress has been made in building the foundation for continued school improvement and improved learning for all students. The school community should be justifiably proud of these initial achievements.

On top of the accreditation self-study that the school has done so well, it has also experienced several changes in leadership, a massive renovation, learning about the Understanding by Design curriculum framework, integrating technology into the teaching and learning process, and the initial discussion about the impact of the leveling practices on student self-perceptions and student achievement.

The visiting team hopes that this report and its recommendations will help Simsbury High School become more focused and unified in finding the right combination of efforts to fulfill the vision of improved learning for all students.

The students in school today have grown up in a rapidly changing world. The technology changes in the last ten years alone have created whole new methods of research, analysis, and communication. These students will be entering an information-based, technologically driven, global economic system and society. This world will be more challenging and will present far more rapid changes than previous students have ever experienced. Thus, they must learn how to handle change, to know what to do when they don't know what to do, to develop answers to ill-defined problems by finding information, analyzing it, organizing, and making sense of it, and expressing coherently what they have found. They need to learn to navigate in a world that can not even begin to be envisioned.

That means their teachers must do things differently; not that they have not been doing a great job before. But now students' needs are very different because the world they are entering is very different, and teachers must be responsive to those new needs and help students develop the skills, attitudes, attributes, and understandings that will enable them to be life-long learners and to continue to be successful once they leave school.

That is why Simsbury High School must have clear and high expectations for every student and a mission statement that guides decision-making and supports every student in achieving those expectations. Simsbury High School has an outstanding set of core beliefs that truly reflect the culture of the school; and it has recently developed a set of academic expectations that must guide curriculum development, instructional strategies, and common assessments.

Simsbury's academic expectations and their accompanying rubrics are a significant accomplishment in that they build a strong foundation on which to revise its educational program

and pursue continuous improvement. Those expectations must now become real as they are made the key component of all course outcomes and are the goals in designing lesson plans, and are integrated into varied assessments of how well students demonstrate that they have achieved those school-wide academic expectations. Simsbury High School's academic expectations must become real as the school makes it clear to students how those expectations are a key component of what they are expected to learn in every class and what they will have to do to demonstrate the achievement of those academic expectations. Students will have to be taught how to use those aligned rubrics to self-assess and self-correct their own performances. Only then will Simsbury's graduates be autonomous and true life-long learners.

This will be a large on-going challenge for all of Simsbury's dedicated teachers and professionals. It is a challenge on which Simsbury must concentrate its efforts over the next several years.

Making academic expectations a real and significant part of Simsbury High School's educational program will provide an excellent, collaborative opportunity to develop alternative forms of common assessments. Collaborating within and across departments to develop varied assessments that address various learning styles will provide all students with opportunities to demonstrate more accurately what they have learned and what they can do as a result of seeking to achieve the school's academic expectations. The results of those assessments should be used to design curriculum that will better enable students to achieve those expectations. The results of those assessments should be used to adjust how learning activities are developed to insure that all students are actively and successfully involved in the learning process. Those results should be used to create alternative forms of assessment beyond the standard tests so students have a variety of opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned, what they truly understand, and how they can apply what they have learned in the 'real' world.

Working together to make the school's academic expectations the keystone of the entire academic program will enable Simsbury High School to become a true learning community with all teachers and staff members focused on clearly identified and measured improved learning for all students.

The infusion of technology as a result of the extensive renovation is a testament to the vision and support of the greater community for the education of Simsbury's youth. The support staff, the library programs, the openness of the guidance counselors and career center as well as the special education and student support personnel provide all students with the needed safety net, support, and advice they need to succeed both at Simsbury High School and as they prepare to enter that unknowable future. Simsbury students, almost unanimously, appreciate the dedication and support they receive from all the adults in the high school. They respect the unselfish efforts of administrators, teachers, staff, and custodians. They know they are attending a very special school.

The school's leadership, like all of the teachers and staff members, cares deeply about students and student learning. One overriding observation from the visiting team is that it was very obvious that every teacher at Simsbury High School accepts the need to do what is necessary to improve learning for all students. With all these resources available to such a

dedicated group of teachers, there is no question in the visiting team's mind that Simsbury High School can fulfill the vision of making Simsbury High School a school in which every student is challenged to achieve high expectations and is supported with encouragement and guidance so they do, in fact, achieve those expectations.

In summary, Simsbury High School has made impressive and significant progress in a very short time. The faculty and staff have built a strong foundation on which to build the educational program that insures success for all students. The priority for the next phase in fulfilling the vision of Simsbury High School is to make the school-wide expectations a reality so that all students know and understand what they are expected to learn and to be able to do by the time they graduate, so their progress in achieving those expectations can be assessed, and the results of those assessments can be used to revise curriculum and adjust instruction to continue to improve the learning for every Simsbury student.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PROFILE SIMSBURY HIGH SCHOOL

The Town of Simsbury was incorporated as Connecticut's twenty-first town in May, 1670. It has a land area of approximately 34.5 square miles and a population of approximately 24,500. Located just over twelve miles northwest of Hartford, Simsbury is one of the Capitol Region's most desirable residential communities made up primarily of professional and junior executive families. Simsbury has preserved the charm of a small New England town while moving progressively forward to provide its citizens with outstanding educational, cultural, and recreational facilities. As part of the beautiful Farmington Valley, Simsbury offers an unmatched quality of life within a setting of rolling hills and the picturesque Farmington River.

The median household income in Simsbury is \$101,045 with a per capita income of \$44,617. The unemployment rate is 1.1 percent, significantly below the state average. As of 2000, 1.0 percent of families were below the poverty line. The average cost of a single family home is \$388,428. The top employers in Simsbury include Hartford Life Insurance Company, Ensign-Bickford (Dyno Nobel) Industries, McLean Home, the Town of Simsbury, and the Town of Simsbury Public Schools.

In 2004-2005, 70.91 percent of the town budget was allocated to the Simsbury Public School system. The average per pupil expenditure was \$9,523 while the state average was \$9,192. The town provided 91.8 percent of the schools' funds, and 6.7 percent was provided by the state with the balance obtained from other sources.

Seven public schools comprise the school district, including five elementary schools, one middle school (grades 7-8), and one high school. Private schools include the Cobb Montessori School; two independent secondary schools, Westminster School and Ethel Walker School; and two religiously affiliated schools, St. Mary's and The Master's School. The percentage of eligible Simsbury children who attend public schools in Simsbury is 86.8. The total public school population during 2005-06 in the district is 5,011. A total of 132 high school age students who live in Simsbury do not attend Simsbury High School.

Simsbury High School is a four-year comprehensive public high school offering curricular and co-curricular programs to 1,511 students in grades 9-12. The school offers an extensive range of courses for college and career preparation.

The student body of Simsbury High School is drawn from both Simsbury and other areas through programs such as A Better Chance and Program Choice. Thirty-two non-resident students attend Simsbury High School.

The approximate breakdown of the identifiable ethnic and racial groups is as follows: American Indian, 0.2 percent; Asian American, 3.2 percent; Black, 3.1 percent; Hispanic, 1.4 percent; White, 91.3 percent; and other, 0.3 percent. Although total enrollment continues to increase at a rate of approximately 3 percent per year, there has not been a significant change in the ethnic/racial/cultural composition of the student body in the past 10 years.

Simsbury High School employs 143 faculty members, which includes nine guidance counselors, two psychologists, one social worker, 13 department supervisors, one principal, three assistant principals, and one athletic director. Faculty members have been recognized by the National Endowment for Humanities through fellowships. In addition, teachers have received Fulbright awards and have been elected to leadership positions within professional associations. The approximate student-teacher ratio at Simsbury High School is 14.6 to 1. Teachers have an average of 91 students, and the average class size is 19.7. The most common class size is 24 (the mode). The 2004-2005 average daily attendance rate for teachers was 95.6 percent.

The student body is grouped into three houses supervised by the three assistant principals. Guidance counselors are assigned students alphabetically so that students maintain the same counselor throughout their Simsbury High School experience.

From 2003 until 2006, due to space limitations caused by the construction project, the school's schedule consisted of eight forty-four minute periods per day. For the 2006-07 school year, the school returned to a seven-period day with 47-minute periods in order to increase overall instructional hours. This daily schedule does not rotate. Courses are currently grouped into three ability based levels: level I, honors/advanced placement; level II, competitive college preparatory; and level III, college preparatory. Some math courses are offered at level IA which is identified as very competitive college preparatory. In addition, there are some self-contained special education classes. Common planning time for teachers is provided for some levels and some courses.

The majority of students transition to Simsbury High School from Henry James Memorial School, the town's sole middle school. Five elementary schools feed into Henry James Memorial School -- Central, Latimer Lane, Squadron Line, Tariffville, and Tootin' Hills.

The average daily student attendance rate is 97.5 percent. Each year on average 0.4 percent of the students either drops out or transfers to other schools/school districts compared to the state average of 2.1 percent.

Many academic and non-academic awards are presented to students, including National Merit Scholar Awards, advanced placement scholar recognition, State Scholastic Arts Awards, National Scholastic Art Awards, state math team awards, Northern Regional Music Festival awards, and state and league athletic championships.

Seventy percent of all students is involved in athletics, and seventy-five percent is involved in clubs and activities. Simsbury High School was selected as having one of the top 100 Outstanding Music Programs in the United States and has won the Michaels Achievement Cup for overall program excellence in interscholastic athletics in Connecticut for six consecutive years.

The total number of credits required for graduation is 21.5, which must include English (4.0), math (3.0), social studies (3.0), science (2.0), vocational/fine arts (1.0), physical education (1.0), health education (0.5) and additional courses (7.0).

Some of the standardized tests in which students participate include advanced placement exams, Connecticut Academic Performance Tests (CAPT), SATs, and PSATs. In addition, all

students must adhere to Simsbury's district performance standards for graduation. Average standardized test scores are consistently well above state and national averages. For the class of 2005, the average SAT scores were 587 verbal and 582 math. In 2004-05, 61 percent reached the state goal in all four areas of the CAPT test. The participation rate was 99 percent. Simsbury High School offers a total of sixteen advanced placement courses in the following areas: art, biology, calculus, chemistry, computer science, economics, English, European History, French, Latin, music theory, physics, psychology, Spanish, statistics, and U.S. History. In 2005-06, a total of 220 students participated in AP exam testing with 335 scores reported. Overall, 29.6 percent of the class of 2006 participated in AP testing. Furthermore, 93 percent of students who participated scored a 3 or higher. AP enrollment has increased 400 percent since the 1998-99 school years. Traditionally, a number of Simsbury High School students receives National Merit Commendations; in fact, eleven percent of the Class of 2005 received National Merit recognition.

In addition to standardized measures, the school celebrates student achievement through a published honor roll, National Honor Society inductions, academic and sports award nights, arts fairs, and musical performances.

In 2004-05, 12.5 percent of the students was enrolled in special education programs. Simsbury High School does not offer bilingual classes.

There are eight students enrolled in the English language learner program. By graduation, 50 percent of Simsbury High School students enroll in at least one upper level (Level I) course.

In the class of 2006, 92.8 percent of the graduates pursued post-secondary education, including 86.2 percent attending four-year institutions and 4.5 percent attending two-year colleges.

A self-reported student survey between 1998 and 2003 indicated that 90 – 95 percent of graduating seniors was accepted to their first choice school. The national percentage is approximately 70 percent based on the National Association of College Admissions Counselors' surveys. Just over 1 percent of the 2006 graduates entered the armed forces, while 4.8 percent secured immediate employment.

Many educational opportunities that extend beyond the walls of Simsbury High School are available to students. They include the opportunity to take courses at local community colleges. Students may attend magnet schools within the Hartford Host Magnet Schools, the Bloomfield Host Magnet Schools, and The Trinity Learning Corridor which includes the Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science and the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts.

The Simsbury Public Schools have an articulation agreement with Johnson & Wales and Manchester Community College and partnership programs with the University of Hartford, Tunxis Community College, and St. Joseph College. The Phoenix School, an alternative educational option, combines work opportunities with classroom experiences. In addition, Simsbury students can attend any state vocational school. The Enfield Public Schools offer a continuing education program to Simsbury students who have withdrawn from high school prior to attaining a diploma.

Students are enrolled in numerous formal inter-district programs including The Connecticut Youth Forum, a steel pan ensemble, and Hartford Stage Productions. The town strongly supports A Better Chance (ABC), a program in which boys from urban areas throughout the Northeast live in a residential environment in town and attend Simsbury High School. The Choice Program allows for a limited number of students who reside in Hartford to attend the Simsbury Public Schools.

Special education and general education students work together in Unified Sports and Circle of Friends. The Simsbury Chamber of Commerce and Simsbury High School collaboratively participate in National Groundhog Job Shadow Day.

Simsbury High School has addressed many of its physical plant as well as instructional needs. The final phase of a major renovation/expansion project included a science wing, a media center, a renovated auditorium, a number of additional classrooms, art studios, athletic facilities, and administrative facilities.

Recent initiatives include creating and developing district-wide goals for increasing critical and creative thinking, studying the leveling trends at schools similar to Simsbury High School, evaluating the scope of activities related to athletic clubs and teams, increasing opportunities for dialogue among faculty, staff and administration, forming a student advisory committee, recalculating the GPA based on a 4.0 scale, improving parent/school communication, and implementing new technologies.

Other instructional initiatives include defining a comprehensive high school, developing professional growth plans around common assessments, revising curricula, improving the performance of Level III students, and developing and implementing school-wide rubrics.

Simsbury High School's Mission and Expectations

MISSION STATEMENT

Simsbury High School, in striving for academic excellence, seeks to provide a comprehensive education that engages all students in meaningful learning and to develop the intellectual, creative, social, emotional, technological, and physical skills necessary to prepare them for the next phase of their lives.

PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

In following the school's mission statement, the faculty and staff of Simsbury High School maintain a supportive, stimulating, and nurturing environment that engages students in their learning. Teachers establish clear, rigorous, and realistic expectations and help students to put new knowledge into context. Students further establish their own meaningful, personal goals.

Teachers create a safe learning environment where there is active participation and mutual respect, where a variety of instructional strategies is employed, and where they reflect upon research and their own instruction as they strive for best practice. Students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to learn. When appropriate, students will be given choices to encourage self-directed learning.

Teachers employ a multitude of assessment strategies, based on learning expectations, with an emphasis on authentic outcomes. Students receive individualized and timely feedback about their performance but are also expected to assess their own learning in relation to their goals.

The school and community have a responsibility to provide adequate and appropriate resources to fulfill the mission. Simsbury High School fosters a collaborative culture as educators continuously review and revise curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments. As our partners, students, families, and community members are encouraged to provide feedback about the school's program.

CORE BELIEFS

Continuous Improvement

We believe the school community must, through reflection, strive for continuous improvement in order to become a center of educational excellence.

Diversity

We believe an understanding of and respect for diversity in beliefs, cultures, backgrounds, abilities, and perspectives enrich the learning environment.

Passionate Learners

We believe each member of the school community should strive to face challenges, take intellectual and creative risks, develop independence, and cultivate a lifelong commitment to the joy of learning.

Respect

We believe all members of the school community should be part of a safe, trusting, nurturing environment that values and respects each of its members.

Perspective

We believe each member of our community should be both aware and appreciative of the contributions of others.

Character

We believe each member of the school community should demonstrate appropriate standards of conduct, courtesy, honesty, service, and responsibility.

Teamwork

We believe a quality education results from a partnership that requires shared responsibility for advancing the school's mission and fosters a sense of connectedness, open communication, and respect among members of the school, families, and the local community.

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

1. Students will gather, prioritize, and organize information.

Expectation will be met through the following

- reading
- listening
- observing
- quantifying

2. Students will demonstrate critical and creative thinking.

Expectation will be met through the following

- Problem-solving
- justifying and defending a position
- conducting inquiry-based research
- creating original works and products
- evaluating work of self and others

3. Students will communicate knowledge and exhibit skills.

Expectation will be met through the following

- writing
- speaking
- practicing and performing demonstrations

SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

1. Students will demonstrate active involvement in their own educational experience.

Expectation will be met through the following

- attending classes on a regular basis
- achieving satisfactory grades

2. Students will demonstrate responsibility for their own behavior.

Expectation will be met through the following

- attending school on a regular basis
- arriving at school in a timely manner
- abiding by school rules

3. Students will participate in the school and/or community-based activities.

Expectation will be met through the following

- being involved in school-sponsored activities
- being involved in community-based activities

CIVIC EXPECTATIONS

1. Students will understand the responsibilities of citizenship.

Expectation will be met through the following

- meeting graduation requirement for civics

2. Students will take advantage of opportunities to learn about careers and to develop vocational and practical skills.

Expectation will be met through the following

- meeting graduation requirement for vocational/fine arts courses
- participating in career assessments

TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

CURRICULUM

INSTRUCTION

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

I. Mission and Expectations for Student Learning

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

1. The mission statement and expectations for student learning shall be developed by the school community and approved and supported by the professional staff, the school board, and any other school-wide governing organization.
2. The school's mission statement shall represent the school community's fundamental values and beliefs about student learning.
3. The school shall define school-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations that:
 - are measurable;
 - reflect the school's mission.
4. For each academic expectation in the mission, the school shall have a targeted level of successful achievement identified in a rubric.
5. The school shall have indicators by which it assesses the school's progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations.
6. The mission statement and the school's expectations for student learning shall guide the procedures, policies, and decisions of the school and shall be evident in the culture of the school.
7. The school shall review regularly the mission statement and expectations for student learning using a variety of data to ensure that they reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state and national standards.

Conclusions

The Simsbury High School Mission Statement and Expectations for Student Learning were developed by a leadership committee comprised of faculty members, administrators, students, members of the community, and a board of education representative. The common themes shared by the high school mission statement and the district's mission statement include shared accountability for maximizing each student's academic, social, and civic potential. The mission statement is becoming more familiar to all constituencies because of its connection to their core values. Students can clearly identify the six core values from the school's mission, but they are not as familiar with the academic expectations that are driven by those values. The mission statement has been published in the student handbook, the school profile, on the school letterhead, and throughout the building. The leadership committee held seven meetings, and gathered input from the community. The faculty approved the mission and expectations in January 2005 and shared it with the students in February 2005. The final draft was accepted by the school board on May 24, 2005. The mission statement and expectations for student learning are the product of a collaboration among all of the school's stake-holders. While administrators are fully committed to implementing the mission and expectations, student achievement will not realize the full impact of this until the faculty reach the same level of commitment. (self-study committee, teachers, panel presentation)

The Simsbury High School Mission Statement articulates the school's fundamental beliefs about student learning and the purpose of the school. The foundation of the mission statement is the commitment to a tradition of academic excellence for all students. Four on-line surveys were administered to the faculty, students, and members of the board of education and the community for the purpose of determining the common beliefs and values of the school community. Parents, teachers, and members of the school board express enthusiastic belief in the process used to develop the mission statement and expectations for student learning. As a result of this process they were able to codify their fundamental beliefs; and as a reflection of the support for the process, there is an emerging focus on creating authentic performance tasks, engaging students in a rigorous curriculum, and encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning experience. With this new mission and expectations document, Simsbury High School is committed to providing a full a variety of teaching and learning strategies that both involve and challenge students. (parents, teachers, school publications)

The Simsbury High School community has identified three categories of academic expectations and five civic and social expectations that support the values and educational beliefs of the school. The academic expectations and their subcategories provide that students will: (1) gather, prioritize, and organize information; (2) demonstrate critical and creative thinking; and (3) communicate knowledge and exhibit skills. The well-defined social and civic expectations provide that students will: (1) demonstrate active involvement in their own educational experience; (2) demonstrate responsibility for their own behavior; (3) participate in the school and/or community-based activities; (4) understand the responsibilities of citizenship; and (5) take advantage of opportunities to learn about careers and to develop vocational and practical skills.

These academic and civic and social expectations form a basis for implementing the school's mission. As a result, the expectations clarify what all students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate. (student work, mission statement committee, teachers)

Each academic expectation has a targeted level of successful achievement identified in a rubric. These expectations have clearly defined descriptors representing successful accomplishment, but they have not been fully implemented school-wide. Clear, concise, school-wide rubrics were designed for the purpose of measuring each of the academic expectations such as successful achievement in writing, speaking, and thinking, but they have not yet been incorporated into the routine assessment of student performance. Many individual teachers are using various rubrics and grading checklists, but they are not aligned with the school-wide rubrics developed during the study. Therefore, although Simsbury High School has developed school-wide rubrics for each of its academic expectations, the school has not yet integrated them into daily practice for the measurement of successful academic achievement. (self-study, teacher, students)

Simsbury High School has clearly written indicators that assess the school's progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations. A process is in place to assess performance in civic and social expectations, with information derived from School Administrative Student Information (SASI) and the school-developed social and civic expectations database. The data is used to rate the degree to which the school meets each expectation. Regular review of the data is conducted by the guidance department and is appropriately disseminated for analysis and to identify individual students who may not be achieving those expectations. Therefore, the school demonstrates that it uses these indicators to assess progress in achieving school-wide civic and social expectations. (self-study, department leaders, parents)

The school's mission statement and expectations for student learning are evident in the historical culture of the school, but they are not currently used to drive the school's decision-making process. The mission and expectations are prominently posted throughout the school, but they are not used to guide decision-making. While the core values described in the school's mission statement are widely acknowledged, their connection with the mission is not evident in practice. The school recognizes the importance of tying the mission and expectations to the decision-making process and is able to cite several decisions that were guided by the school's new mission. However, while departments have identified the academic expectations for which they are responsible, most departments have yet to connect them with actual classroom and learning activities to assess student progress in achieving those expectations by using the rubrics. The expectations exist only on paper, are not being consistently used, and are not fully integrated into the school culture. Therefore, the school's procedures, policies, and decisions are not yet driven by a commitment to the statement of the mission and expectations for student learning. (self-study, teacher, standards committee)

Simsbury High School has stated its commitment to regular review of the mission statement and expectations for student learning. The entire community has worked intensely for two and one half years to develop the mission statement, but the process is too recent to effectively

incorporate a regular review of this document. As stated in the school's self-study and panel presentation, although the mission statement and expectations for student learning are viewed as stating the school's core values, at this time they do not drive the culture of the school. The faculty acknowledges the importance of regular review of the mission and expectations and is working toward incorporating regular review as part of its procedures. The school is in the beginning stages of using data derived from SASI and the social and civic expectations database to ensure that the mission and expectations reflect student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state and national standards. However, until the school embraces the use of rubrics to assess the achievement of the school's academic expectations it cannot ensure that student needs, community expectations, the district mission, and state and national standards are reflected in the mission and expectations nor that the learning community's own principles direct its activities and decisions.

Commendations

1. The comprehensive process used to develop the new mission and expectations for student learning
2. The pride and sense of community in the school shared by parents, students, faculty, administrators, and members of the board of education as evidenced in the mission statement
3. The high visibility of the mission and expectations for student learning posted throughout the school
4. The significant progress made in such a short time toward meeting the missions and expectations for student learning standard
5. The development and use of the school's social and civic expectations database

Recommendations

1. Use the mission statement to guide the school decision-making process
2. Establish a clear policy for and an ongoing practice of review and revision of the mission statement and expectations for student learning
3. Integrate the school's mission statement and academic expectations for student learning and the aligned rubrics into daily instructional practice
4. Develop an ongoing process of assessing the effectiveness of the school-wide academic rubrics and revising them as needed
5. Provide opportunities to increase both teacher understanding and use of rubrics in general and the school-wide rubrics in particular
6. Insure that all students are aware of the school's academic expectations and are able to use the school-wide rubrics in assessing their own progress in achieving those expectations

II. Curriculum

The curriculum, which includes coursework, co-curricular activities, and other school-approved educational experiences, is the school's formal plan to fulfill its mission statement and expectations for student learning. The curriculum links the school's beliefs, its expectations for student learning, and its instructional practices. The strength of that link is dependant upon the commitment and involvement of the professional staff to a comprehensive, ongoing review of the curriculum.

1. Each curriculum area shall identify those school-wide academic expectations for which it is responsible.
2. The curriculum shall be aligned with the school-wide academic expectations and shall ensure that all students have sufficient opportunity to practice and achieve each of those expectations.
3. The written curriculum shall:
 - prescribe content;
 - integrate relevant school-wide learning expectations;
 - identify course-specific learning goals;
 - suggest instructional strategies;
 - suggest assessment techniques including the use of school-wide rubrics.
4. The curriculum shall engage all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as provide opportunities for the authentic application of knowledge and skills.
5. The curriculum shall:
 - be appropriately integrated;
 - emphasize depth of understanding over breadth of coverage.
6. The school shall provide opportunities for all students to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings and the school campus.
7. There shall be effective curricular coordination and articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district.
8. Instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, staffing levels, and the resources of the library/media center shall be sufficient to allow for the implementation of the curriculum.
9. The professional staff shall be actively involved in the ongoing development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum based on assessments of student performance in achieving the school's academic expectations and course-specific learning goals.
10. The school shall commit sufficient time, financial resources, and personnel to the development, evaluation, and revision of curriculum.

11. Professional development activities shall support the development and implementation of the curriculum.

Conclusions

Each curriculum area in Simsbury High School has identified school-wide academic expectations for student learning for which it takes responsibility to insure that all students have the opportunity to learn, practice, and be assessed on the achievement of those expectations. While each department has taken on the responsibility for aligning its curriculum with selected academic expectations, most departments are still only in the beginning stages of this important process. The lack of an on-going curriculum review and revision process and the late development of the school's mission and expectations resulted in a dated and individually taught curriculum that was not aligned with school-wide expectations. With the recently adopted Understanding By Design framework for curriculum development, departments are now expected to list those school-wide academic expectations for which they have taken responsibility to insure they are integrated into the overall curriculum and specific curriculum units. However, only a few departments have had the opportunity to develop a curriculum with those expectations actually integrated into the plan. Thus, there is an inconsistent understanding and use of the school's academic expectations by teachers, students, and parents. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers)

Only the most recent curriculum guides developed using the Understanding By Design framework identify the school-wide academic expectations, and the link between each of the listed expectations and specific course content and learning activities is more implied than specified. Some guides still in use date back to the early 1990s. The majority of departments has not yet integrated identified academic expectations with the curriculum's essential questions, content, and skills or with common assessments. Most of the out-dated department curricula prescribe content and some form of academic learning expectations.. Until the recently adopted curriculum review and revision process, there was no on-going curriculum revision process, and teachers tended to develop their own specific course curriculum guides which were not always aligned with overall department curricula. When instructional strategies and assessment techniques are not based on the school-wide expectations and their aligned rubrics, there can be no consistent set of expectations for all. (teacher interviews, teachers, department leaders, student work)

The curriculum that is currently being delivered attempts to engage all students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking as well as offering increased opportunities for authentic learning and alternative and common assessments. Although the older curriculum documents have very limited references to these activities, teachers were able to identify some learning activities they had implemented to provide students with increased opportunities in these areas. As the school's curriculum revision plan is implemented, there must be more explicit identification of where and when these higher-order learning skills will be integrated to insure that all students can benefit from these opportunities. Authentic learning and assessments that are tied to 'real world' experiences are most clearly evidenced in the culinary arts, world languages, and technology education programs. Such connections between the classroom and

the ‘real world’ increase the relevance of what is learned and, thus, of student motivation to learn. When explicit curricular emphasis on inquiry, problem-solving, higher order thinking, authentic learning, and alternative assessments are made available to all students in all courses, the school will ensure adequate student preparation for the next phases of their lives. (curriculum guides, teachers, student work)

Some curricula at Simsbury High School include cross-disciplinary integration and an emphasis on developing a depth of understanding of concepts and skills. Too often, however, the content of the curriculum documents and the curriculum that is taught is mostly factual and focused on student recall rather than analysis, synthesis, or application. Most of the current curricular evaluations are multiple-choice, true-false, and short answer forms of tests that require only recall. In general, students in level 3 classes and even in many level 2 classes are not being challenged to meet higher expectations that include higher order thinking, problem-solving, cross-disciplinary learning, and alternative assessments. Thus, the school’s mission goal of meaningful learning for all students is not being met in the curriculum. (curriculum guides, students, student work)

Simsbury High School provides a variety of opportunities for students to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings. Students can participate in on-line learning with Virtual High School (VHS) and have access to several magnet and specialty schools such as the Greater Hartford Academy for Mathematics and Science, the Greater Hartford Academy for the Arts, several technical schools, an agricultural school, and college courses on and off campus. In addition, at another site, Simsbury offers the Phoenix School, a program for students experiencing difficulty being successful in the regular school program. Simsbury students also have the opportunity for independent study and can select to complete a senior project related to their interests although the senior project participation has recently declined. There is a wide variety of clubs and activities for students to pursue their interests and further their learning. These experiences provide a range of meaningful, self-directed learning opportunities for a large number of students. (program of studies, self-study, teachers)

With the new, system-wide emphasis on curriculum development and common assessments, increased attention is being paid to curriculum coordination. For example, currently there is a proposal to move the study of American literature to the junior year in order to connect it to the American history program. The district has also embarked on a serious effort to articulate the curriculum K-12 in all curricular areas. For several years, some curricular areas, notably world languages, art, music, and physical education, have been engaged in articulating their curriculum K-12. Mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies have only recently begun this form of comprehensive articulation. Vertical curriculum teams are now in place in most curricular areas to facilitate the development of an articulated curriculum sequence throughout the school system. These initiatives in curriculum review and revision are being addressed by the high school departments, the system-wide curriculum council, department supervisors, elementary resource teachers, K-12 administrators, and the assistant superintendent. Students will benefit by making interdisciplinary connections and by following a well-planned sequence of learning from year to year. However, although insuring the implementation of the school’s academic expectations as the keystone of curriculum development would greatly increase cross-

disciplinary connections for students, care must be taken to insure that all these initiatives be planned in such a way that there are time and resources available to insure that teachers are not overwhelmed. (teachers, department leaders, central office)

The new library/media center provides much improved access to print and electronic media for the school and is a welcome change for all staff members. Librarians seek teacher input on book and media purchases and assist students in searching for information. On-line access to the library/media center's resources is available to students and faculty members in school as well as through the Internet at home. Library/media staffing is deemed to be adequate, and the new library/media facilities and resources have greatly improved the work areas for students. (library/media staff, teachers, students)

As a result of the renovation project, there are many computers and other forms of up-to-date technology throughout the school. However, students describe their ability to use the technologies in the library/media center and other technology in other parts of the building as being restricted when they were not in class. The students in the upper grades said they often did not go to the library to use the technology because what they wanted to do would not take a full period but they were required to stay there until the end of the period. Teachers request on-going technology training so they can be more effective in the use of new and available software programs and more efficiently use the new hardware throughout the building. Teachers are also concerned about the number of classrooms that do not have the new projection system, hardware, and programs. Restricted access and untrained use of the available technologies and software programs limits student learning.(teachers, students, self-study)

Students and teachers complain that many classroom resources have not been up-dated and that textbooks are limited in number and often so outdated as to be inaccurate. Updated textbooks and resources are essential for teachers to ensure that learning activities support the school's mission and expectations and improve learning for all students. (teachers, students, shadowing)

The Simsbury High School staff is currently involved in a major revision of both the design and substance of the school's curriculum documents. Until two years ago, the absence of curriculum revision resulted in a lack of consistency in learning for students. The teachers have been trained in the Understanding By Design curriculum framework and are developing three levels of curriculum documents that are expected to include academic expectations. Until the introduction of the Understanding By Design framework, the school did not follow an explicit curriculum review cycle. Without the school's academic expectations and the aligned rubrics, there was no effective assessment of student work to assist in the curriculum revision process. With most of the curriculum based on what the individual teacher thought was important, there was also a lack of consistency in learning expectations across courses, departments, and the entire school. Even now, however, with the curriculum evaluation and revision process unfinished, teachers and students are still working from outdated curriculum documents in most areas. Some teachers do not even reference the old documents. The district has provided a significant increase in professional development opportunities focused on learning about Understanding By Design and developing common assessments within departments. As a result,

80% of the teachers have now had some training in the Understanding by Design curriculum framework. All departments have been directed to develop common assessments and to use the framework for curriculum development. (self-study, teachers, central office personnel)

Newly developed curriculum documents address school expectations, national and state standards and identify enduring understandings, essential questions, expected knowledge and skills, and alternative assessments. But with no data from assessment of student achievement of the school's academic expectations yet collected and analyzed, student performance cannot be used in making curricular decisions. A curriculum revision process that is based on student assessment results is better able to address student needs and to enable students to achieve the school's academic expectations. (teachers, administrators, self-study)

Time has been provided over the last two years to review and revise curriculum aligned through the Understanding By Design framework and for departments to develop common assessments. For the 2006-2007 school year, to achieve these two goals, teachers have been given ten three-hour sessions per year and two full days of professional development time. In addition to the professional development time provided by the school system, teachers also have the opportunity to attend professional conferences and to participate in paid summer curriculum work. Because the time has been split among so many initiatives, however, including the accreditation self-study, learning Understanding By Design, and developing common assessments, teachers believe there is no unifying focus to their efforts and report that they are overwhelmed with trying to meet so many expectations at one time. Thus, while some course documents have been developed, other departments are only in the beginning of the curriculum development process. Most departments are at the first or second phase of a three-phase process for most courses. Much work needs to be done to build a curriculum in all areas of the educational program that will insure that all students are challenged to achieve and be assessed on the school's academic expectations. (teachers, administrators, professional-growth calendar, curriculum guides)

The professional development activities for the past several years support the development and implementation of a more consistent, aligned, and challenging curriculum for all students. The expectations have been identified for the curriculum, but how they are to be made real, actually brought into the classroom through lesson design, and used to improve and assess student learning has not been clearly articulated. The progress on this work varies from department to department, but the professional development time has helped support this effort. When all teachers focus on insuring that the school's academic expectations become real learning goals for all students and use the aligned rubrics to support and assess student learning, curriculum development will have achieved a major step in insuring improved learning for all students. (teachers, administrators, self-study)

Commendations

1. Teacher recognition that a common curriculum with consistent expectations across course sections and levels will improve learning for all students
2. The generous professional development time made available so all teachers could learn the Understanding By Design curriculum framework
3. Extensive efforts to develop common assessments in all departments across levels and including all grades to provide valid data for work on curriculum development
4. Opportunities for authentic learning in areas such as culinary arts, technology education, and world languages
5. Teachers creating common time during the day and after school to discuss curriculum, lesson plans, and assessments with their colleagues
6. Variety of opportunities for students to extend learning beyond normal class offerings
7. Developing clear academic expectations to drive future curriculum development and student assessments
8. Each department taking responsibility for selected school-wide academic expectations to insure that all students are assessed on their progress in achieving those expectations
9. World language, arts, music, and physical education programs for developing curricula based on clear expectations and performance standards
10. The new library/media center with twenty-four hour, on-line access for all students and teachers
11. The extensive installation of up-to-date technology through some sections of the building that support effective delivery of the curriculum

Recommendations

1. Insure that the school's academic expectations become the keystone in developing, assessing, and revising curriculum
2. Develop a formal curriculum development process and cycle that recognize the school's academic expectations as the keystone to effective curriculum development
3. Develop and implement a plan to insure that the school's academic expectations and their aligned rubrics become an integral component of all course curricula
4. Provide a reasonable and extended timeline to insure teachers can give a focused effort to the extensive curriculum development that needs to be done
5. Use the results of departmental common assessments of student progress achieving the school's academic expectations in the curriculum development process
6. Provide time and support for teachers and departments to explore and develop opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning
7. Demonstrate that the curricula for all level of classes have high expectations and challenge all students with higher order thinking, problem-solving, relevant learning activities, and authentic and alternative assessments
8. Evaluate the impact of course leveling on students' self-esteem and achievement using the extensive research available on grouping and best practices to make any needed adjustments to improve learning for all students

9. Continue the installation of up-to-date technology throughout the building and provide the necessary training for its effective integration into the teaching learning process and provide sufficient up-to-date materials and textbooks for effective curriculum delivery

III. Instruction

The quality of instruction in a school is the single most important factor affecting the quality of student learning, the achievement of expectations for student learning, the delivery of the curriculum, and the assessment of student progress. Instructional practices must be grounded in the school's mission and expectations for student learning, supported by research in best practice, and refined and improved based on identified student needs. Teachers are expected to be reflective about their instructional strategies and to collaborate with their colleagues about instruction and student learning.

1. Instructional strategies shall be consistent with the school's stated mission and expectations for student learning.
2. Instructional strategies shall:
 - personalize instruction;
 - make connections across disciplines;
 - engage students as active learners;
 - engage students as self-directed learners;
 - involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding;
 - provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge or skills;
 - promote student self-assessment and self-reflection.
3. Teachers shall use feedback from a variety of sources including other teachers, students, supervisors, and parents as a means of improving instruction.
4. Teachers shall be expert in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective about their own practices.
5. Discussion of instructional strategies shall be a significant part of the professional culture of the school.
6. Technology shall be integrated into and supportive of teaching and learning.
7. The school's professional development program shall be guided by identified instructional needs and shall provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies.
8. Teacher supervision and evaluation processes shall be used to improve instruction for the purpose of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs.

Conclusions

With the mission statement and academic expectations being only recently developed, Simsbury High School teachers are not consistently guided by this document in the planning and implementation of instructional strategies. In a very short time frame, the faculty members worked together to compose and approve the mission statement and academic expectations. However, they readily admit this document does not yet drive instruction or assessment. Although teachers frequently use instructional strategies such as round-table critiques, the integration of technology in the teaching-learning process, collaborative student work, and oral presentations to promote meaningful learning for all students, the majority of teachers has not yet integrated the mission and academic expectations into their lessons. Thus, the students are unaware of the purpose and content especially of the academic expectations despite its being posted all around the school and in all classrooms. The majority of the faculty is aware of the academic expectations for which they have primary and secondary responsibility, but they have yet to make these expectations a serious component of their lesson design, instruction, or on-going assessment in the classroom. The school's newly developed mission and expectations does not yet drive teaching and learning and is seen as of little importance to the students. Without the actual implementation of common expectations for learning into the daily lesson, a school can not provide consistent and challenging learning opportunities and assessments for all students in all classes. As a result, the school can not fulfill its own mission. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers, students)

The Simsbury High School faculty employs varied instructional practices to personalize instruction, to engage students as active learners, to apply knowledge and skills, and to promote student self-assessment and self-reflection. To a much lesser extent do teachers create opportunities for students to make learning connections across disciplines and involve all students in higher order thinking and 'real world' problem-solving. Thus, the more complex, higher order learning processes are not a part of all students' learning. (student shadowing, student work, teachers)

Every student in Simsbury High School meets with their English teacher at least twice a year for one-on-one writing conferences. Times for extra help are clearly posted in or outside the classrooms of most teachers and are used regularly by students. Nearly 70% of the students agreed in the Endicott survey that their teachers have time for them. Students interviewed were quick to state that the best thing about their school was their teachers because teachers care about them not only as students but also as individuals. The attempt to personalize instruction is challenged in some classes, however, where enrollments exceed the 21-25 student range recommended by the board of education. Teachers make a concerted effort to communicate with parents through e-mail, voicemail, and the newly required submission of interim progress reports for all students. Some teachers have also created personal web sites and blogs to further facilitate parental contact. The efforts of the faculty to reach out to their students and the parents provide a strong base of support for the school and the teachers. (self-study, teachers, students)

Simsbury High School teachers understand the importance of students' being actively engaged and self-directed in their learning. Among the instructional strategies to foster student

learning are round-table critiques of student work; science laboratory sessions designed to practice what has been learned; use of the computer labs to enrich learning and to deepen understanding; small group work; class discussions; and student presentations of learning projects. As a result of the renovation, there is a ‘cutting-edge’ world languages lab that the teachers are beginning to learn to use so students can apply their learning in an authentic, ‘real world’ situation. The effectiveness of the teachers’ efforts to engage actively students in the learning process was also demonstrated in that only 30% of parents surveyed reported that their students complained of being bored in school, and 91% of teachers expressed the opinion in the survey that their classes actively engage students. Actively involving students in the learning process increases student motivation to learn and deepens student understanding of what they are expected to learn. (self-study, shadowing, students)

Students are provided with opportunities to share their work publicly. Some examples include art shows, dramatic productions, concerts given by the music department, and meals designed and prepared by the culinary arts program. In addition, students are encouraged to submit original works to the school publications *The Spectrum* and *The Forum* and are actively involved in creating the school yearbook. Within the classrooms, modern language students regularly perform skits to demonstrate their comprehension of vocabulary and concepts, English and social studies classes stage debates, and science students present laboratory reports are presented. Student work is also displayed in most classrooms, giving important recognition to student achievement. (shadowing, teachers, self-study)

Across the disciplines, teachers value the role of self-assessment and reflection of student learning, frequently asking students to critique their own work and that of their peers. In the arts classes, students provide written and oral feedback; in English, students read their classmates’ papers and then discuss their strengths and weaknesses; English teachers frequently ask students to self-assess papers using a provided rubric prior to the individual writing conference; in physical education, students assess themselves and/or their teams at least once a week, identifying their strengths and weaknesses in various activities. In addition, students are regularly provided with written assignment expectations and rubrics and therefore have the occasion to self-assess informally their work before it is submitted. Knowing how to assess one’s own work means that the student is able to self-correct and improve his/her performance, an important characteristic in being a life-long learner. (student work, teachers, shadowing)

Teachers cite the lack of common planning time as an impediment to increasing cross-curricular connections in instruction. Despite this, a few teachers have taken the initiative in incorporating interdisciplinary elements in their courses, and more teachers indicate the desire to create these effective learning options. Notable among these efforts is the collaboration between visual arts and social studies on a pottery unit in the Native American History Course and a pairing of the science teachers and librarians to study energy transformation. English and social studies teachers are planning to realign their junior curriculum so that American literature and American history courses will be taught in the same year to provide students with the regular opportunity to make cross-curricular connections. Teachers note that the implementation of their curriculum initiative, Understanding by Design, will likely facilitate cross-curricular references as well. Also, with the school’s newly developed academic expectations being cross-disciplinary

and skill-based, even more opportunities will be created for cross-disciplinary planning and assessments. In addition, with departments being required to develop common assessments across all three levels of their courses, the ability to foster high expectations for all students across all disciplines will be greatly enhanced. (teachers, central office personnel, department leaders)

While classroom observations demonstrate varied instructional activities and some examples of student work demonstrate evidence of a depth of knowledge and higher level thinking many classes are focused on factual recall and rote learning rather than on critical thinking and interpretation. An inspection of student work reveals very traditional instructional assessments with little constructive teacher feedback provided on the students' work. Students also commented that most of their course evaluations were multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank, and short essay tests. These types of evaluations are not commensurate with the high standards called for in the mission statement and they limit the opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know, understand, and can do as a result of instruction. Without the application of learning to problem-solving and connecting it to the "real world", the student makes no connection between what goes on in the classroom and what is needed to be successful after graduation. (student work, students, shadowing)

Although there are varied instructional strategies being used throughout the building, it is not clear that all students benefit from instructional strategies that foster high expectations as is called for in the mission statement. Many classes on all three levels reflect traditional instructional strategies and evaluations without the challenge of high order thinking, problem-solving, alternative assessments, and application of learning. The lack of interdisciplinary connections and, more importantly, the lack of higher order thinking and self-directed learning in those courses, limit the opportunity for students to develop the skills needed in an information-based, technology-driven, world economy. Thus, not all Simsbury High School students are being adequately prepared for post-high school education and careers. (self-study, observations, student work)

Simsbury High School teachers regularly solicit feedback from students and colleagues as a means of improving instructional practices. Year-end student surveys are distributed for every course. These surveys have a common, required format, but teachers are free to expand upon the surveys to solicit more course-specific feedback. Teachers acknowledge that the surveys can be useful in modifying instructional strategies to better meet student needs. Teachers consider informal dialogue with peers to be a valuable forum to discuss the effectiveness of current instructional practices and share new ideas. They also feel supported by their peers and department supervisors and are comfortable soliciting advice when necessary as to how to address specific instructional challenges. Parents believe they have ample means to communicate with teachers via e-mail, voicemail, or conference, but only 14.9% of surveyed parents indicated that teachers ask for their input regarding their child's instruction. Also, teachers do not believe the current evaluation model provides useful feedback to improve instructional practices. They believe the professional improvement plans inhibit their having individual professional goals and that the paperwork involved in the process is cumbersome and unnecessary. Thus, the current

model for formal evaluation, particularly of tenured teachers, currently does not support widespread improvement of instruction. (self-study, teachers, parents, Endicott survey)

Simsbury High School teachers are expert in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and often reflective about their own practices. Simsbury High School employs 143 teachers, 88% of whom hold a master's degree or above. Faculty members belong to over thirty different professional organizations. The administration regularly distributes current research literature about instruction to the faculty, and speakers from outside the district are invited to share best practices with the Simsbury High School teachers at faculty meetings. In addition, Simsbury High School teachers lead seminars and provide training and share information in their areas of expertise to educators not only at Simsbury High School but also around the region. Simsbury High School teachers have presented at the New England Regional Forum and the COLT Fall Conference as well as facilitating workshops for the Alternate Route to Certification Program (ARC). Teachers also have the opportunity to engage in limited formal and mostly informal dialogue with colleagues regarding best practice and instructional strategies, often using a portion of monthly department meetings to do so. Further, each teacher completes a professional growth plan (PGP) which, by its design, facilitates teacher reflection, though teachers have expressed concern that the goals selected for them do not target their specific instructional needs, so the ensuing reflection is not as valuable as teachers would like. Independently, many teachers reflect on the success of their instructional strategies, often modifying assignments to improve student learning. For example, a visual arts teacher regularly solicits written feedback from students at the end of an instructional unit, and an English teacher revised a literary unit after determining that the scope of the summative assessment had been too broad. The expertise and professionalism of the Simsbury High School faculty demonstrate their commitment to meeting the needs of their students. (self-study, teachers, teacher interviews)

The formal discussion of instructional strategies is not a significant part of the professional culture of the school at this time. Though teachers regularly engage in informal conversations with their colleagues and supervisors about instructional strategies, they do not have a formal process in place to facilitate such discussions. Previously, an effort was made to provide common planning time to teachers instructing the same course. Such common time was eliminated with the return to the seven-period day. While there are ten, three-hour, half-day professional development sessions on the 2006-2007 calendars, in large part, these sessions have been dedicated to the creation of Understanding by Design curriculum units and common assessments. Teachers value the discussion of instructional strategies enough to conduct such discussions on their own time but believe such discussions are not given appropriate emphasis at Simsbury High School. There has been very little time at faculty or department meetings specifically set aside for the discussion of instructional strategies. The lack of formalized opportunities to discuss varied instructional strategies limits professional growth and hinders improved student learning. (self-study, teachers, survey)

Technology is increasingly integrated into and supportive of the teaching and learning process. As a result of the recent renovation and addition to Simsbury High School, there has been a tremendous infusion of technology, and, for many students and teachers, it is a regular facet of instruction and learning. However, technological elements such as the SmartBoard and

LCD projectors are not currently available to all teachers and, thus, to all students. A single technician is currently responsible for the maintenance of 670 computers. Many teachers are untrained in the use of the technology that is available to them and therefore the abundance of technology is underutilized. For example, the world language teachers express excitement about the new, 'cutting edge', language lab, but they are not adequately trained in its use. On the other hand, evidence of the use of technology to enhance instruction is abundant. Math teachers use sketchpad in conjunction with the SmartBoard to manipulate shapes and illustrate mathematical concepts. Art and technology students are able to use the art lab for digital photography and computer animation. Students design web sites, power point presentations, video clips, and word processed documents in a variety of subject areas. When the issues of equitable distribution of technology throughout the building, adequate staff to maintain the equipment and infrastructure so it can be consistently used, and on-going training of all faculty members are fully addressed, technology will greatly enhance the learning of all students in all subject areas. (self-study, facility tour, observations, student work, teachers, students)

At present, the school's professional development program is guided by needs identified at the district and the building level. Simsbury High School employs a professional improvement plan called the professional growth plan, or PGP that outlines the steps to be taken to ensure continuous growth and improvement towards an identified goal. However, in recent years, teachers have been denied the opportunity to select their own professional growth goals as had been done in the past. Instead, the goal(s) is determined by the district or the administrator. While many teachers agree that the identified goals are valid, they do not believe the achievement of those goals directly impacts and improves their own instruction or student learning. In-school professional development opportunities are collaborative in nature and have centered largely around the design of common assessments, the Understanding By Design curriculum framework, and accreditation self-study. However, teachers feel overwhelmed by the number of simultaneous initiatives and do not believe that they understand or have been trained in the initiatives well enough to be successful in pursuing them. Having a more focused purpose to the professional development program and a time line that clearly identifies the priorities for that program would address the sense of too much too fast. While the district and school may establish professional priorities, teacher input into the establishment of individual professional goals would provide teachers with a sense of ownership and the opportunity to develop and improve their personal instructional strategies. (self-study, teachers, school board, standards committee)

The teacher supervision and evaluation process, though clearly defined, is not an adequate means to improve instruction. It encompasses both formal and informal observations as well as the professional growth plan, and its components vary depending on the teacher's tenure status. However, the supervision and evaluation processes do not seem to be structured to improve instruction and thus meet student learning needs. Teachers believe there is a disconnect between the observations and the professional growth plan goals. The professional growth plan goals are generally identified by the administration that also does some of the observations. The department supervisors conduct most of the observations. Observations consist of both a pre- and post-observation conference a. The department supervisors draft the year-end evaluation

with varying degrees of assistance from the administrative team. Teachers do not believe that the goal identified for the professional growth plan, the data subsequently gathered, and their reflections on the student learning goals, in conjunction with their formal or informal observations, provide an accurate reflection of the teacher's strengths and weaknesses regarding instructional practice. Without providing sufficient feedback and appropriate self-reflection on instruction, and addressing teacher concerns, the ability to meet more effectively students' learning needs through this process is hindered. (self-study, teachers, interviews)

Commendations

1. The variety of instructional strategies used by many teachers that enable students to be actively involved in the learning process
2. The personal and academic concern for students demonstrated by faculty members through their willingness to provide extra help as well as through their recognition of student activities and accomplishments beyond the classroom
3. The many opportunities for students to be active, self-directed learners
4. The opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in public forums
5. The regular solicitation of feedback from students to help improve instruction
6. A faculty that is highly educated, professionally active, expert in their content area, and diverse in experience
7. Concerted efforts made by faculty members to collaborate with colleagues
8. The widespread infusion of technology to improve instruction and learning
9. The ready availability of release time to pursue professional development

Recommendations

1. Demonstrate that the instructional strategies integrate the school's academic expectations into the teaching-learning-assessment process in every class at every level
2. Explore scheduling options to provide common planning time, facilitate collaboration, and allow for cross-curricular instruction and learning
3. Keep class enrollments within the 21-25 student standard established by the board of education to provide challenging high expectations, foster differentiated instruction, and allow alternative and authentic assessments of student learning
4. Increase the variety of instructional strategies for students at all course levels
5. Assess all courses and make any necessary adjustments to ensure that higher level thinking skills and an emphasis on depth over breadth of knowledge exists in all classes for all students on all levels
6. Create and implement a technology plan that addresses equitable distribution and use, adequate maintenance, and on-going training to insure effective integration of technology in the teaching learning process
7. Afford teachers the opportunity to select personal professional goals that both support district goals and address individual instructional needs
8. Revisit the supervision and evaluation process to address the perception that the program is overly bureaucratic and limited in improving instruction

IV. Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Its purpose is to inform students regarding their learning progress and teachers regarding ways to adjust their instruction to better respond to the learning needs of students. Further, it communicates the growth and competence of students to parents, school officials, and the public. The results of student learning must be continually discussed and used to develop short-term and long-term strategies for improving curriculum and instruction.

1. The school shall have a process to assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the academic expectations in the mission based on school-wide rubrics.
2. The school's professional staff shall use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its civic and social expectations.
3. For each learning activity, teachers shall clarify to students the relevant school-wide academic expectations and course-specific learning goals that will be assessed.
4. Teachers shall base classroom assessment of student learning on school-wide and course-specific rubrics.
5. Teachers shall use varied assessment strategies to determine student knowledge, skills, and competencies and to assess student growth over time.
6. Teachers shall meet collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessments for the purpose of revising the curriculum and improving instructional strategies.
7. The school's professional development program shall provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies.
8. The school's professional staff shall communicate:
 - individual student progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to students and their families;
 - the school's progress achieving all school-wide expectations to the school community.

Conclusions

The mission statement and student academic expectations at Simsbury High School are a recent development for the school. These documents are posted throughout the building in every classroom and many common areas and are found in many publications such as the school website, program of studies, and staff and student handbooks. However, at this time, there is little connection of these documents to teaching, learning, and assessment at Simsbury High School. The academic expectations are not yet integrated into the curriculum and lesson planning but departments are developing common assessments aligned with the expectations and the school-wide rubrics. Many faculty members recognize this deficiency and are intent on correcting it. World language, art, music, technology education, health, and physical education programs have integrated the aligned academic expectations into their courses and have used variations of the school-wide rubrics to assess student learning and progress in achieving those expectations. Although school-wide rubrics exist and are electronically accessible to all staff, most teachers have not yet made the academic expectations a reality in their classrooms nor do they yet use these rubrics to assess student learning. Thus, the school does not have a process to assess school-wide and individual student progress in achieving its academic expectations. This disconnect between the classroom and the school's mission and academic expectations creates a lack of focus within and across most disciplines that makes it impossible for all students to achieve the school's expectations nor to understand why they should do so. (students, parents, student work, observations, self-study)

Simsbury High School students are very active in extra-curricular, community, and athletic activities, all of which are tied into the social expectations of the school. The school's professional staff often uses data to assess the success of the school in achieving its civic and social expectations. Using the SASI program and the school's own social and civic expectation database, the school is able to demonstrate that most students have the opportunity to fulfill these expectations and to identify individual students who are not achieving success in these areas. The database tracks student attendance, grades, discipline records, and completion of graduation requirements in civics and vocational/fine arts. Along with the administration of two career surveys given to every student, the school keeps track of its students' progress in achieving civic and social expectations. (student shadowing, teachers, students, self-study)

Posters are in clear view throughout the school and hung in every classroom, stating the academic expectations for all students. However, most teachers have not yet made clear to students how these school-wide academic expectations apply to their courses or how the students will be assessed on achieving them. Students are not aware of the importance of the academic expectations and their aligned rubrics. There are school-wide rubrics for the twelve academic expectations for learning but, most teachers are not using these rubrics to assess student learning. Because teachers do not use uniformly or consistently the school-wide rubrics they can not monitor ongoing student progress. Many departments have developed course-specific rubrics, but they are not being widely used. Some teachers have clearly identified course-specific learning goals and are developing various types of rubrics to assess students on their achievement of those learning goals. However, checklists and/or rating scales that simply list the components of a given assignment do not adequately describe the qualities of varied levels of

performance which should make up a rubric. When the qualities of work expected at various levels of performance are described, it is clearer what needs to be changed in a student's work to achieve a higher level of performance. Faculty members and students need to understand how to use rubrics for qualitative assessment of work and to understand discrete differences in levels of performance in order to assess student progress in meeting school-wide academic expectations for learning. When the school-wide rubrics are used, then the assessment results can be used to improve curriculum and instruction. It may be necessary to provide professional development in the creation and use of rubrics to benefit both students and teachers. (teachers, observations, students, student work).

For the most part, teachers use traditional strategies to assess student learning that include daily quizzes, homework assignments, power point presentations, laboratory reports, and projects presented both orally and in writing. Some teachers have developed individual grading rubrics to accompany specific projects and assignments. Students have commented, however, that the majority of their learning assessments are in the form of multiple-choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer types of tests. They further reported that few assessments are multi-page essays and that writing assignments were not weighted as heavily as tests. Little constructive feedback was provided to students on the student work samples made available to the visiting team. Without providing varied and/or authentic assessment students as well as feedback on how to improve, all students do not have sufficient opportunities to demonstrate fully what they have learned in classes or how to think about what they learned. Thus, some professional development in creating and using varying methods of assessment may be necessary for teachers. (students, teachers, observations, student work)

While there has been some initial professional development training on collaboratively assessing student work teachers rarely have the time to meet collaboratively to discuss and share student work and the results of student assessments. Teachers report a lack of common planning time as a hindrance to discussing student work in a more formal way. When the school schedule went from an 8 period to a 7 period day, some common planning time was lost and while there are ten half days for professional development, that time has been used to prepare for the accreditation visit, developing departmental common assessments, learning about Understanding By Design, and creating and revising curriculum and little time has been made available to share and discuss student work. Sufficient professional development time has not been allocated for teachers to collaborate on the results of the newly required common assessments. Examination of student work, therefore, does not have a significant effect on curriculum revision and the improvement of instructional practices. Many teachers collaborate informally for many reasons including the development of common assessments. Collaboration during department time has helped to create course-specific goals as when the English department members produced a course-wide assignment and accompanying rubric for all sophomores on reading and response to literature. Health education teachers have worked collaboratively to create common assessments in the group advocacy project in which every Simsbury High School student participates. Art teachers have a common-assessment with accompanying rubrics for all Art I students. The push to create departmental common assessments across all levels should provide the results needed to begin to make necessary curricular revisions and improve instruction. However, this is also the

purpose for an effective school-wide rubric used and understood by all teachers and students. (teachers, students, observations, student work, self-study)

For the 2006-07 school years two full and ten half-days for professional development are built into the school calendar providing time for teachers to address the needed changes to the school's educational program. However, in the past, the professional development sessions have been focused on a number of initiatives, inhibiting the teachers from a focused and well planned program of activities that would accomplish at least one of the initiatives; For example, using the school's academic expectations as the focus for common departmental assessments is an important step in making those expectations and their aligned rubrics a reality in lesson design and instructional strategies. Results from the common assessments could guide curricular development and future instructionally-based professional development devoted to the creation of common assessments and the evaluation of course-specific rubrics. (teachers, observations, department leaders)

Information about the school and its educational program is found on the school's web site. Simsbury High School communicates often to parents and the community on the status of student achievement, but this communication is not connected to school-wide academic and civic and social expectations. Methods of communication about student progress include required interim reports for all students, quarterly report cards, and telephone and e-mail messages. While course syllabi, grading policies, and class expectations are given to parents at the open house in the fall of each school year, these documents do not yet include the school's academic expectations nor explain how they are integrated into the course and will be assessed. Many parents and students speak positively about the open communication to and from teachers and guidance counselors and are eager to praise the helpful attitude of all Simsbury High School faculty members and staff. School-wide academic expectations will become familiar to parents and community members when their presence in school publications and their importance as guiding principles become part of the communications from teachers to students and/or parents. (students, teachers, self-study, school leadership, parents, school support staff)

Commendations

1. Teacher use of their own time to collaborate on lesson design and assessments
2. The development and use of a social and civic database to track student achievement of social expectations
3. The development and use of common departmental assessments of student learning across all three levels
4. The increase in professional development time for the 2006-2007 school year to develop common assessments and to learn about Understanding By Design
5. Development of draft rubrics to assess student achievement of the school's academic expectations
6. Teachers who developed their own rubrics to assess the achievement of course goals
7. The use of student surveys on curriculum and instruction at the end of each course

Recommendations

1. Use the school-wide rubrics to assess student performance in achieving the mission and expectations for learning
2. Demonstrate that the academic expectations for which each department has taken responsibility become the focus of learning and assessment in all the department's courses
3. Insure that all students know and understand the school's academic expectations, the aligned rubrics, and how they will be assessed on their achievement of those expectations
4. Insure that departmental common assessments incorporate the school's academic expectations and the aligned rubrics
5. Develop and implement a plan that assesses the results of student achievement of the school's academic expectations to use in developing and revising curriculum and adjusting instruction
6. Develop and use a broad range of assessment strategies and practices to address the varied learning styles of students and to allow students varied opportunities to apply and demonstrate more effectively what they have learned
7. Expand the assessment of achieving civic expectations beyond the simple completion of required courses and completed surveys
8. Provide additional training for teachers to improve their understanding of the development and use of rubrics that describe the varied qualities of different levels of performance
9. Report student progress on school-wide expectations to parents and community on a regular basis with information that will make it meaningful to them.

SUPPORT STANDARDS

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

V. Leadership and Organization

The way in which a school organizes learning for students, fosters leadership, and engages its members has a profound effect on teaching and learning. The professional culture of the school must be characterized by thoughtful, reflective, and constructive discourse about decision-making and practices, which supports student learning and well-being.

1. The school board and superintendent shall ensure that the principal has sufficient autonomy and decision-making authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning.
2. The principal shall provide leadership in the school community by creating and maintaining a shared vision, direction, and focus for student learning.
3. Teachers as well as administrators other than the principal shall provide leadership essential to the improvement of the school.
4. The organization of the school and its educational programs shall promote the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
5. Student grouping patterns shall reflect the diversity of the student body, foster heterogeneity, reflect current research and best practices, and support the achievement of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
6. The schedule shall be driven by the school's mission and expectations for student learning and shall support the effective implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
7. Meaningful roles in the decision-making process shall be accorded to students, parents, and all members of the school staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
8. Each teacher shall have a student load that enables the teacher to meet the learning needs of individual students.
9. There shall be a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning.
10. The professional staff shall collaborate within and across departments in support of learning for all students.
11. All school staff shall be involved in promoting the well-being and learning of students.

12. Student success shall be regularly acknowledged, celebrated, and displayed.
13. The climate of the school shall be safe, positive, respectful, and supportive, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.
14. The school board shall support the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

Conclusions

The Simsbury High School principal has the authority to directly affect policy and budget development. He has the autonomy to create, prioritize, and advocate priorities for the budget, goal setting, and the curriculum, as well as for student safety. While some faculty members question whether, in fact, the principal has autonomy divisible from the direction of the superintendent, his leadership demonstrated by his role in actualizing the mission and expectations initiative, the budget, and the vision for a comprehensive high school, indicates that he has appropriate leadership autonomy. (self-study, panel presentation, teacher)

Most teachers believe that the principal is a “visible force” in the school and that his primary focus is on teaching and learning. Teachers, parents, and students clearly see him as the school’s leader, one who is at the forefront of implementing an emerging academic culture driven by the school’s mission and expectations for student learning. Some faculty members perceived the rapidity with which he and the administrative team have attempted to implement significant changes in leveling, curriculum, and assessment as too much too fast. Teachers have also expressed concern that class sizes vary too much across departments and that possible changes in the existing three levels should be analyzed with input from faculty members before they are adopted. Department supervisors have expressed a desire to be more involved in school-based decision-making, particularly in developing a more focused professional development plan to enable teachers to integrate the new academic expectations and assessment activities into departmental practice. With the principal’s strong leadership skills, focusing everyone’s efforts on the achievement of the school’s mission and academic expectations, Simsbury High School will be poised for the next stage to improve learning for all Simsbury students. (self-study, teacher, department leaders)

Many teachers play leadership roles throughout the school as club advisors, coaches, and committee advisors. Teachers participate in the vertical curriculum articulation teams in most curriculum areas and have the freedom to create their own courses for acceptance by the school board and administration. The addition of more courses and clubs to complement the already numerous offerings shows teacher leadership directed toward school improvement and meeting varied student needs. Teacher representation on school scheduling, school climate, teacher evaluation, and the K-12 vertical articulation committees is indicative of teacher involvement in school leadership. However, the number of school-wide and district-wide initiatives over the past two years compromises the teachers’ sense of being participants in shared decision-making. All administrators undertake leadership roles in numerous aspects of the school culture, both academic and organizational. The three assistant principals are perceived by most of faculty members as being extremely supportive, hard working, and effective leaders in the daily operations of the school. Thus, all of the administrators are respected as the leadership team in the school who facilitate necessary communication and build consensus to continue the forward progress of this excellent school. (teachers, school leadership team, Endicott survey)

The academic departments, in tandem with the house system, offers students many smaller, more personalized learning opportunities. The student population is divided into three smaller ‘houses’ that foster students’ feelings of support. To increase that sense of belonging, freshman

homerooms are kept smaller than those of the other grades. The board of education, the central office, and the school administration all strongly support the addition of teachers and staff members to better meet varied student needs and to insure that the board of education's class size guidelines are a reality in all areas. The high school leadership team has offered to the board of education and the entire community a blueprint for the future of what they believe to be a truly "comprehensive" Simsbury High School. Included in this study is a list of proposed outcomes that increases the number of shared experiences that all Simsbury High School students will have during their four years at Simsbury High School. In practice and in planning, Simsbury High School consistently demonstrates that it is truly a student-centered school. (department leaders, self-study, leadership team)

Driven by the data showing that the student composition of level four classes was possibly discriminatory, the school recently eliminated the fourth level of courses. The reduction of leveled classes promotes greater heterogeneity in the academic curriculum and tends to improve student self-perception while it also significantly reduces racial and ethnic student isolation. Recognizing that over 90% of Simsbury graduates consistently go on to four-year colleges has also raised the possibility of further reducing the number of levels to two. A reduction in leveling is consistent with the school's mission statement and expectations and aligns with current pedagogic research on student learning. If implemented, students of different skills and achievement levels would be in the same classrooms, creating a more heterogeneous mix in all classes. Such a change would bring a significantly enhanced opportunity for improved student learning for all students, but it would also bring a significant challenge to the talents of the dedicated Simsbury faculty. Any study of this initiative must include the input from department supervisors and faculty members and outlines of research and training on best instructional practices as well as clear information for teachers, students and parents about the impact of leveling on student self-perceptions and academic achievement. As a result of providing more flexibility in course selections, more students are taking advanced courses and differentiated instruction has begun to be utilized in more classrooms by more teachers. Many teachers believe they are not equipped with the requisite pedagogical skills to be effective at teaching more heterogeneous classes. However, encouraging students to take more demanding courses affords the opportunity for *all* students to challenge themselves and to be better prepared for college. The elective programs at Simsbury High School are all heterogeneously grouped. Students with individualized education plans (IEP) are fully integrated into all levels of the academic curriculum as well as all extra-curricular activities. Students with more significant disabilities are also channeled into the main fabric of the school culture and curriculum as can be seen in the extra-curricular Unified Sports program. The proud student-centered tradition of Simsbury High School has been enhanced by its efforts to open the doors of opportunity for those students who wish to take on a higher challenge. (department leaders, teachers, school leadership team)

The current seven-period schedule has been essentially the same for over thirty years. Thus, it may reflect the intent of the mission statement, but it is not a consequence of it. Following the implementation of an eight-period schedule put in place to accommodate the building and renovation project, the school has, this year, re-implemented a seven-period schedule that allows flexible choice of core courses but offers limited opportunities for students to explore the many

elective offerings. Faculty members have suggested that a re-designed eight-period schedule would provide more flexibility and learning opportunities for students as well as collaboration and cross-disciplinary planning for teachers. One fruitful aspect of last year's eight-period schedule that supported interdisciplinary work was that some teachers were accorded the same planning period, allowing them to meet, both with teachers in their own department and across disciplines to compare and develop pedagogical strategies as well as curriculum. This co-planning option has disappeared this year under the seven-period schedule, even though many teachers do meet informally during and after the school day to discuss pedagogy and curriculum. It is also clear that one of the limiting factors in designing a schedule that serves the teaching and learning mission of the school is the limited seating capacity of the school's cafeteria. Without another egress, the fire code limits the number of students who can be present at one time. Thus, some way of serving lunch to larger number of students at one time must be found so the existing condition will not continue to have such a significant and negative impact on teaching and learning time. One of the assistant principals is currently chairing a scheduling committee to look at possible variations to the seven-period schedule to address these issues. (teacher, administrators, department leaders)

At Simsbury High School, there is a large number of committees where faculty and staff members, students, and parents can discuss issues, advise the principal, and vote on decisions that impact policy. Examples of these are the curriculum council, the vertical articulation committees, the faculty advisory council, the school leadership team, and the student, parent, teacher council, (SPTC). The school's self-study report states that students feel the most disenfranchised in the decision-making processes at Simsbury High School. However, students were part of the recent decision-making that led to the use of cell phones in the cafeteria during lunch and they are almost universal in their love of their high school. Thus, it appears that there are opportunities to participate in decision-making for all stakeholders. (self-study, students, teachers)

Most teachers have a student load that enables them to meet the learning needs of individual students. Class sizes differ from level to level, and teachers' class loads differ across some departments. In the science department, many teachers have five classes with an average of three additional lab periods per week, thus teaching twenty-eight periods per week. Other science teachers do not have that teaching load. English teachers, on the other hand, have four classes in twenty periods per week so they can meet for a minimum of two yearly writing conferences with each their students. Social studies teachers teach five classes, twenty-five per week. In the music department, the growth in student enrollment in the major ensembles has meant that teachers in both the choral and instrumental programs have so many students that it hampers their ability to meet their students' individual needs. Beyond these exceptions and some larger classes in the core academics, the board of education is dedicated to providing enough teachers to insure that its class size guidelines are met. (teachers, department leaders, self-study)

Simsbury High School does not yet have a formal, ongoing mentoring program. In these programs, each student has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor who personalizes each student's educational experience, knows the student well, and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning.

When the faculty was offered the opportunity to keep the eight period schedule if they would also take on an advisory program, not knowing what that would entail, many faculty members inaccurately believed they needed to be trained to be ‘mentors’. The school also has a committee that is looking into an advisory program to better meet students’ needs but not be an additional preparation for the teachers and that might be able to replace the daily homeroom with a weekly meeting time. While there is no formal mentoring program at Simsbury High School, there is a number of ways in which students are connected to adults who get to know them in a different setting than that of the classroom. In an effort to make the transition to the high school a more inclusive and welcoming experience, freshman homerooms were reduced in size beginning in the 2005-06 school year. Administrators, including the principal, have taken on home rooms alongside faculty members. The house system breaks down the large school into three smaller administrative units. The three vice-principals act in both disciplinary and advocacy roles with the students in their houses. They support those students who are struggling with the academic and/or social demands of being young adults. They also share communication about students with departments, teachers, and individuals in support of individual student needs. Also, English teachers hold at least two writing conferences per student per year, providing all members of the student body an opportunity to spend meaningful contact time with an adult in a venue that specifically encourages self-reflection and self-expression. (leadership team, self-study, department leaders)

Most teachers agree that a collaborative spirit exists within their own departments as well as in curriculum groups. The self-study committee’s survey indicated that over two-thirds of faculty members believes that the administration has provided appropriate professional development time to exercise collaborative behavior. There is also a common recognition that there is very little opportunity for cross-departmental sharing and collaboration that is the consequence of limited time, the number of recent initiatives, and the physical isolation of departments in the school building. Co-departmental offices or large faculty work rooms might reduce the physical isolation and facilitate cross-departmental collaboration. (self-study, teachers, department leaders)

There is a welcoming and positive atmosphere throughout the school. Students and faculty members interact easily, both in formal and informal settings. All departments have inviting activities in place that support the students each day. Many spaces have an open door policy, and classroom doors are often open during class session, inviting observation. The support staff members recognize the quality of the academic and extra-curricular opportunities that students at Simsbury High School are afforded. The para-professionals, members of the support staff, custodians, and food service workers, all make outstanding contributions to the well-being and success of students at Simsbury High School. (teachers, students, tours, support staff)

Simsbury High School recognizes student successes in a number of ways. Homeroom announcements, display cases, awards night, concerts, plays, and the regular posting of the honor role are all examples of student recognition. While only 27% of seniors believe that all student accomplishments are supported equally, 42 % of freshmen think there is equitable recognition. Data gathered from a random sample of students from all four grades indicate that the display and recognition of student successes are perceived to be different across gender, extra-curricular

activities, and academic achievement. The administration believes that all extra-curricular activities are equitably supported and/or attended by members of the administrative team. Whereas the celebration of sports teams and individual athletes, students involved in the performing arts, and those who achieve high academic status are celebrated, it is incumbent on the school to find opportunities to celebrate the contributions of all students to the culture of the school. Sixty percent of teachers say they post examples of student work in their classrooms. Very little student work, art, or academic work is posted outside of the classrooms. The new building does not yet provide an appropriate number of notice boards for faculty members and students alike to post materials. Recognizing student work and success increases student pride and the motivation to learn. (parents, administrators, self-study, tour)

Students and faculty members feel generally safe within the building. The new facility provides significantly enlarged space, thus easing congestion. It also provides well secured doors that allow a monitored, single entrance to the whole building. The installation of cameras in the renovation has been a positive tool in reducing the incidence of theft. Most faculty members feel that students are well-behaved in school and at school-sponsored events. Interviews with a cross section of the support personnel indicated that they feel respected professionally as well as constructively involved in the main culture of the school. Most faculty members perceive Simsbury High School to be a great school and a desirable place to work. While 93 % of students have no disciplinary record at all, some faculty cite a lack of consistency in the ways with which individual students are dealt, but they also recognize that they are inconsistent in the ways they respond to student behavior and use the disciplinary measures available to them that are mandated in the student handbook. This student behavioral record is clearly indicative of a school that is being successful at getting the majority of its student body to achieve within the social and civic expectations of the institution. (teacher interviews, teachers, self-study, administrators)

Commendations

1. The leadership of the high school principal in moving toward implementation of complex and systemically significant changes in curriculum and assessment
2. The leadership team for eliminating Level IV
3. An authentic team approach of the administrators as it moves toward enhancing the academic climate of Simsbury High School
4. The development of a shared vision for Simsbury High School as a truly comprehensive high school
5. The extensive professional development calendar that provides time for teachers to learn about, deepen their understanding, and begin to apply their learning about common assessments and Understanding By Design
6. The evident pride of the student body in the school, the teachers, and the administrators
7. The maintenance of a safe, physical environment as well as a school culture in which students are respectful of people and the physical plant

Recommendations

1. Increase the active involvement of department leaders in the school's decision-making process
2. Report on the impact of grouping practices on student self-perceptions and academic performance as one part of a process of assessing the effectiveness of three levels of course offerings for a student population over 90% of which will be going on to four-year colleges
3. Implement a professional development program that focuses on differentiated instruction as a means to address the varied student needs in the heterogeneous classroom
4. Develop and implement a student mentoring program
5. Research and visit schools to assess alternative daily schedules that can better support the educational program and facilitate professional collaboration
6. Develop and implement a plan to maximize the seating capacity of the cafeteria so it minimizes the negative impact on scheduling and student learning opportunities

VI. School Resources for Learning

Student learning and well-being are dependant upon adequate and appropriate support programs and services. The school is responsible for providing an effective range of integrated resources to enhance and improve student learning and well-being and to support the school's mission and expectations.

All Student Support Services

1. The school's student support services shall be consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
2. The school shall allocate resources, programs, and services so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for student learning.
3. Student support personnel shall enhance student learning by interacting and working cooperatively with professional and other staff and by utilizing community resources to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.
4. All student support services shall be regularly evaluated and revised to support improved student learning.
5. There shall be a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel, designed to keep them informed about the types of available student support services and identified student needs.
6. Student records, including health and immunization records, shall be maintained in a confidential and secure manner consistent with federal and state law.
7. There shall be sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective counseling, health, special education, and library media services.

Guidance Services

8. The school shall provide a full range of comprehensive guidance services, including:
 - individual and group meetings with counseling personnel;
 - personal, career, and college counseling;
 - student course selection assistance;
 - collaborative outreach to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers;
 - appropriate support in the delivery of special education services for students.

Health Services

9. The school's health services shall provide:
 - preventive health services and direct intervention services;
 - appropriate referrals;
 - mandated services;
 - emergency response mechanisms;

- ongoing student health assessments

Library Information Services

10. The library/information services program and materials shall be fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program.
11. Library/information services personnel shall be knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation.
12. A wide range of materials, technologies, and other library/information services that are responsive to the school's student population shall be available to students and faculty and utilized to improve teaching and learning.
13. Students, faculty, and support staff shall have regular and frequent access to library/information services, facilities, and programs as an integral part of their educational experience before, during, and after the school day.
14. The library/information services program shall foster independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty to use various school and community information resources and technologies.
15. Policies shall be in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet.

Special Education Services

16. The school shall provide special education services related to the identification, monitoring, and referral of students in accordance with local, state, and federal laws.

Conclusions

The support services at Simsbury High School are aligned with the school's mission and expectations for student learning. All support service programs participated in developing the mission statement. The school makes concerted efforts to engage students in the educational program and services of Simsbury High School. While the responsibility to students and families vary, the library/media, health, guidance, and special education services all focus on those students who need resources in order to meet the academic, social, and civic expectations of the school. Student surveys and parent feedback indicate that the school's support services positively impact student progress toward academic excellence. (self-study, student shadowing, panel presentation, parents)

The school allocates resources, programs, and services so that students have an opportunity to achieve the school's expectations for student learning. Students select courses based on their long-term goals and interests. With the seven period schedule and the courses students need to fulfill graduation requirements, there remains limited flexibility for students to explore electives of their choosing. The school's resources, varied programs, and support services encourage students to achieve academic excellence as well as civic and social involvement in developing well-rounded students. A variety of resources such as the Phoenix School for students who have problems succeeding in the traditional school setting, the student assistance team, reading and study skills tutor and the math lab, and a world language lab provide opportunities for students to achieve academic success. Simsbury High School offers a range of academic programs and student activities that allow students to achieve the school's civic and social expectations. The school involves students in real world experiences such as classes in family and consumer science that provide students with authentic application of learning. The school store and the Future Business Leaders of America Club provide opportunities for application of business skills and showcasing talents. Technology classes such as Manufacturing Enterprise, Digital Video Production, and Computer Aided Drafting offer opportunities for students to engage in real world learning. The Gay Straight Alliance, peer advocates, and multicultural club support tolerance and acceptance. All of the above help to prepare students to succeed in a diverse and technologically global economic society. Students have opportunities to demonstrate social and civic expectations through school-based community service activities such as the Turkey Trot, Circle of Friends and the Interact Club. While guidance counselors regularly meet with students and welcome them to drop in, there is a concern on the part of some parents and students about the consistency in the delivery of guidance services. Guidance counselors assist students in developing skills to increase academic success as well as the selection of courses based on achievement, interests, and personal goals. They also provide direction to students with regard to post secondary plans. Support professionals provide personal counseling and refer students to community agencies when necessary. The school nurse contributes to a healthy, trusting, and safe environment. All of these support efforts create a favorable environment that facilitates positive relationships between students and faculty members and to the overall academic and personal well-being of students. (self-study, school support faculty, parents, students, panel presentation, teachers)

To address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students, school support personnel interact and work cooperatively with faculty and other staff members as well as connecting students with appropriate community resources. However, not all faculty members and staff are aware of or fully understand the range of student support services that are available to meet the varied student needs. Through the planning and placement team process, special education personnel work cooperatively with other staff to address academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students. While there is some co-teaching that helps students achieve academic success in the regular classroom, the lack of adequate staffing limits the effectiveness of this excellent support strategy. When needed, counselors and nurses refer students to community resources including the Farmington Valley Diagnostic Center, Simsbury Juvenile Review Board, family therapy referrals, and the Salvation Army. Again, all these concerted efforts provide the needed support so students may achieve academic success and healthy personal development. (self-study, teachers, support staff, parents, students)

Annual surveys given to graduating students and staff members are used to gain feedback and gather suggestions as well as assess general programming and service delivery. Based on these survey results, additional school support staff members have recently been added to address students' needs. These surveys, however, do not constitute a formal on-going process which is needed to ensure a complete evaluation of support services' efforts to support and enhance student learning. (parents, teachers, school support staff)

There is a system for effective and ongoing communication with students, parents, and school personnel to keep them informed of the types student support services and identified student needs. The bimonthly newsletter, "Simsbury High School Spirit", is distributed to staff members, students, and parents. Additionally, information is communicated through the school website, library pamphlets, and nurses' notes. The program of studies, the Simsbury High School Guide for Students and Parents on the Comprehensive Counseling Program, and the Simsbury High School Guidance Department Resource Booklet are also evidence of ongoing communication. The newly developed listserv, an electronic distribution list, is cited by students and parents as an excellent form of communication. The school also uses community television broadcasts to inform the larger community of school activities. These communication vehicles maintain an informed school community and support a positive school climate and improved student learning. (parents, teachers, self-study)

Student records, including health and immunization records are maintained in a confidential and secure manner. Staff and faculty members demonstrate an understanding as well as compliance with the procedures that address confidentiality and the maintenance of student records. Those authorized to view student records use a sign-out system monitored by the secretary. File cabinets containing health, academic, and special education records are maintained in compliance with state and federal law. (self-study, facility tour, support staff)

Most of the support service programs, such as counseling, health, and library media services have sufficient certified/licensed personnel to provide effective services. There is an additional tutoring center and math lab available to support student academic achievement. Currently, about thirty students are assigned to the tutoring center and students "drop-in" to the math lab.

While the self-study states that more health service staffing is needed, support staff members do not substantiate this need. (observations, support staff, parents, students)

The school provides a comprehensive guidance program including individual and group meetings with students; personal, career, and college counseling; student course selection assistance; and collaborative outreach with area mental health and social service providers. Guidance services also include a developmental guidance curriculum, the development of individual career portfolios, and numerous informational workshops for parents and students. Personal, career, and college counseling are provided by the guidance department, and the career center as well as the social worker and school psychologists. The school also has a continuum of support services for students in special education depending on student need and in compliance with state and federal law. (self-study, support staff, parents, student shadowing)

The health services facility, supplies, personnel, and staff schedules are appropriate for the level of student need as evidenced in the self-study and confirmed through various sources. The school provides preventive health services, direct interventions, appropriate referral, mandated services, emergency response mechanisms, and ongoing student health assessments. These supports provide a supportive climate that is conducive to improved student learning. (support staff members, parents, students)

The library media services and materials are integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program. Library media personnel and teaching staff members help students improve their information literacy skills using varied learning activities that accommodate varied skill and achievement levels. The variety of instructional methods used in this effort enable students with diverse learning styles to use technology effectively, to access information, and thus, to increase their knowledge in all content areas. Collaborative lesson planning is just beginning with the library media specialists and the teachers of social studies, science, English, world languages, health, and technology education. Staff and students are able to e-mail requests for the selection of materials including those related to curriculum, and the library resources are available on-line from school and home twenty-four hours a day. Thus, the library/media center not only makes the materials available but also enables students to more effectively use them. (self-study, teachers, students)

The library media center personnel are knowledgeable about the curriculum and support its implementation. The library media specialists attend meetings focused on curriculum and have a working knowledge of the resources needed to supplement the teachers' lessons. The library media specialists co-teach library literacy and technology skills with many teachers, especially those in the world language and social studies departments. Teachers use the library media center resources for lessons, assignments, and student research. Increased collaboration and integration of library media resources greatly enrich the instructional program. (support staff, department leaders, teacher)

A wide range of materials, technologies, and library information services is available to students and faculty members and are used to improve teaching and learning. The variety of reading materials, such as DVDs and CDs, electronic databases, audio books, video tapes, laser discs, and subscription data bases insure a substantial supportive learning environment. The

materials and services are used to enhance teaching and enrich student learning. (self-study, support staff, facility tour)

Faculty members and support staff members have regular access to library information services, facilities, and programs before, during and after the school day. The library is open from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm and the librarians often keep the library open beyond regular hours to meet the needs of students and staff members. However, students complained that new restrictions on their access and use of the library, especially during the lunch waves, limited their use of the excellent resources in the library/media center. The new and expanded library has two sophisticated computer-video laboratories available to classes of students as well as an open computer lab for student use. There is also a small conference room that is used by groups of students working on joint projects. The library/media center maintains a quiet learning environment that allows concentrated learning efforts. Teachers are able to schedule time and hold classes in the library media center. Students and teachers can access all of the library's information resources on-line, twenty-four hours a day. Such an inviting area with varied resources and easy access does much to support the academic efforts of teachers and students. (support staff, self-study, school publications)

The library information service program fosters independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty members to use various school and community information resources and technologies both in and out of school. Several school informational resources, such as data bases, the Internet, e-mails, and websites allow students and faculty members to work independently. The library has several leaflets, pamphlets, documents, forms, and flyers that contain information about additional community resources that enhance student learning. There is a variety of technologies, including smart boards, power point, and digital projectors that are available in the library media center. The school community is aware of these resources through the school's website, the 9th grade "Assured Experiences", library media center visits, and faculty meetings. The easy availability of school and community information resources and technologies allow for self-directed learning by students. (self-study, school website, support staff)

Policies are in place for the selection and removal of information resources and the use of technologies and the Internet. The policy for selection and removal of materials is delineated in the board of education policy. Appropriate technology use, including the Internet, is outlined in the board of education policy and made available in student and parent handbooks. These policies ensure that students be informed and skilled in meeting the demands of an information-based, technology-drive world. (self-study, teacher, facility tour)

The school provides special education services related to the identification, monitoring and referral of students in accordance with local, state and federal laws. In conjunction with the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Simsbury Public School Department of Special Services has created "A Parent and Student Guide to Special Education in the Simsbury Public Schools". This allows for informed, active parent and student participation in the special education process. In an initiative that demonstrates proactive measures, high school special education teachers and support staff attend transition meetings at the middle school to provide a

continuation of services for identified students entering the high school. Once at the high school, as student concerns arise, referrals are made to the student intervention team by teachers, staff members, administrators, parents, and other sources. Once a case is reviewed, appropriate action is taken. For the identified students with special needs, case managers provide “tip sheets” to regular education teachers and monitor student progress. Support staff personnel complete the PPT and/or 504 documents in compliance with state and federal laws. To increase student contact time and compliance with documentation requirements, web-based software for individual education plans has been initiated by the central office and adapted by the school. The school offers a continuum of special education services and programs that provide support for identified students in meeting the school’s academic, social, and civic expectations for learning. These services include Excel, Intensive 1 and Intensive 2, resource room, co-taught classrooms, vocational training, and the post high school graduate program at the University of Hartford. “A Guide for Regular Classroom Educators in Special Education and 504” supports the regular educator in understanding the needs of the diverse population of identified students. However, additional professional development on inclusive practices for the regular educator is essential for successful student learning. (teacher, self-study, support staff)

Commendations

1. All the school’s support services align with and strongly support the achievement of the school’s mission and expectations
2. The extensive school support services available to students who need assistance in meeting the school’s academic, civic, and social expectations
3. The use of varied communications techniques, including Internet distribution lists and community access television, to inform students, parents, and the larger community about school activities and programs
4. The aesthetically pleasing, expanded library media center with sophisticated technology, abundant resources, twenty-four hour on-line access, and dedicated personnel
5. The new career resource center and its expanding programs
6. The guidance counselors who foster knowledgeable interpersonal relationships with their students
7. The varied guidance programs that seek to inform and guide both students and parents throughout the four years of high school and to enable them to plan for careers and college
8. The extensive continuum of services provided by special education department
9. The efforts of the special education program to inform students, parents, and teachers of the available services, required procedures, and the overall federal and state requirements
10. The school’s collaborative outreach to area support services so serious student needs can be more effectively met

Recommendation

1. Develop a more formal and on-going process to evaluate the effectiveness of all of the school’s support services
2. Increase the co-teaching opportunities

3. Assess the content and delivery of guidance services to insure equity for all students and parents
4. Develop and implement a plan that provides students in the upper grades with more flexible access to the library/media center

VII. Community Resources for Learning

Active community and parent participation, facilities which support school programs and services, and dependable and adequate funding are necessary for the school to achieve its mission and expectations for student learning.

1. The school shall engage parents and families as partners in each student's education and shall encourage their participation in school programs and parent support groups.
2. The school shall foster productive business/community/higher education partnerships that support student learning.
3. The school site and plant shall support and enhance all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning.
4. The physical plant and facilities shall meet all applicable federal and state laws and be in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.
5. Equipment shall be adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate.
6. A planned and adequately funded program of building and site management shall ensure the appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school plant.
7. There shall be ongoing planning to address future programs, enrollment changes, staffing, facility, and technology needs as well as capital improvements.
8. The community and the district's governing body shall ensure an adequate and dependable source of revenue to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, personnel, services, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning.
9. Faculty and building administrators shall have active involvement in the budgetary process, including its development and implementation.

Conclusions

Simsbury High School actively engages parents as partners in student education and encourages their participation in school programs. Parents are engaged in each student's education beginning with attendance at Simsbury High School's Freshmen Orientation Night and continuing throughout four years with various other school sponsored events. Parents' strongest support group is the Simsbury High School's Student-Parent-Teacher Council (SPTC) which promotes the welfare of the high school community through the cooperative efforts of the students, faculty members, administrators, and parents. Parent involvement in their children's education includes participation in the Simsbury Friends for Music and Performing Arts and the Symphony in Simsbury project. Parents have taken leadership roles in the Anti-Defamation League's high school sponsored NAMES Program. The principal encourages parental participation through his newsletter, the school website, and by special invitation. The high level of parent involvement and enthusiasm creates a working partnership and fosters an authentic relationship between families and the school. (self-study, parents, school board)

Simsbury High School fosters business, community, and higher education partnerships. Students have the opportunity to acquire hands-on experience to help them in the future in entrepreneurial programs and a more limited opportunity in culinary arts. National Job Shadow Day and College Fair are indicative of the partnerships with business, community, and higher education that support student learning. The Hartford Symphony Orchestra partners with student musicians and vocalists to perform during the Symphony in Simsbury program. Students with special needs have opportunities to participate in career vocational counseling, school supervised work experience, and other transition activities. Strong affiliations with the Simsbury Chamber of Commerce and Simsbury Rotary Club enhance student education through work-based learning, giving students employability skills, career exploration, and expanded knowledge of today's workplace. The Turkey Trot, National Honor Society/American Red Cross blood drive, The Holiday Cabaret, Simsbury Police/Explorers Program, and Cans Helping Kids are all community partnerships created with Simsbury High School students. The potential to earn college credit is provided to students in advanced placement courses and the vocational culinary arts program. The Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford offers a collaborative experience with Simsbury High School students. In addition, seven institutions of higher learning offer programs to Simsbury High School students. These business, community, and higher education opportunities greatly enhance the educational experiences available to Simsbury students. The community use of the Simsbury High School facilities, often seven days a week, reinforces the status of Simsbury High School as a community center. (self-study, support staff, parents, school board)

The recently renovated and expanded school plant supports all aspects of the educational program and the support services for student learning. The renovation has provided the Simsbury High School community with additional space, highlighted by significant improvements to the media center, guidance suite, and physical education facilities as well as the creation of eighteen science laboratories and four well-equipped art studios. Renovations are in progress on the auditorium. These improvements have increased opportunities to provide a positive atmosphere for learning. While not a code violation, limited accessibility by

handicapped students in wheelchairs through two of the lunch lines is a concern. Despite significant improvements, including the addition of a lighted, turf field and a new track, on-site athletic facilities are still not fully adequate for the number of teams and students who participate in athletics. Staff and students report the lack of air conditioning throughout the building as a concern. A major concern is the limited seating capacity of the cafeteria which was not expanded during the renovation project. The limited size of the cafeteria has had an impact on scheduling options being considered by the school. However, on the whole the present facility has significantly improved the quality and variety of services provided by Simsbury High School. (self-study, teachers, facility tour)

The physical plant and facilities are in compliance with local and state fire, health, and safety regulations. Documentation is maintained at the board of education office and submitted to local agencies on an as-needed basis. The ventilation, temperature, and air quality systems were updated as part of the renovation, and 80% of the system is monitored by a digital system accessible by key personnel from remote locations. The supervisor of buildings and grounds reports that all systems are maintained to code requirements that were approved by state and local officials at the time of installation. With a fifty percent increase in the square footage of the facility, there is a need for additional custodial staff. Staff consensus is that repairs are addressed in a timely manner. Diligent compliance with local and state safety regulations ensures a safe learning environment for students and staff. (facility tour, teachers, students, self-study, school support staff)

The equipment is generally adequate, properly maintained, catalogued, and replaced when appropriate. The new construction contains largely new furniture. In general, faculty and student furniture is adequately maintained and replaced. Teachers express concern that their technology equipment is not maintained or replaced on a regular basis, however, and make particular note of the location and inadequate number of copy machines available for teacher use. The construction and renovation project produced fifteen computer labs and a total of 670 computers, but the technical support staff of one person is inadequate in light of the amount of technical equipment that has to be maintained, serviced, and replaced. Currently, the technology equipment is inventoried, and a new program for inventory and maintenance is in development. There is no formal procedure in place for the cataloging of physical plant equipment, but the supervisor of building and grounds monitors wear and determines the service and replacement cycles. Although a shortage of technological support can prevent timely maintenance and, therefore, affect instruction, the overall availability and condition of equipment enhances the educational environment. (self-study, support staff, teachers)

Simsbury High School's planned and adequately funded program of building and site management ensures the appropriate maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the school. Building and site management is coordinated by the building and grounds supervisor and an on-site high school custodial supervisor in conjunction with an assistant principal. According to the Endicott survey, staff, students, and parents are satisfied that the school is clean and well-maintained and the facility is safe and healthy. The renovation has resulted in a fifty percent increase in square footage of the building, taxing the existent custodial staff. The principal and supervisor of custodians strongly emphasize the need for an additional custodian on the day shift and an additional custodian on the night shift. There are well-defined work assignments for each member of the custodial staff,

and the building is inspected regularly by the building and grounds supervisor and an assistant principal. The maintenance budget is adequately funded every year with increases as necessary. The maintenance, repair, and cleanliness of the building and site contribute to the pride Simsbury students, teachers, and administrators have in their school. (Endicott survey, support staff, self-study, facility tour).

The Simsbury High School administration in conjunction with central office personnel has designed long-range plans to address programs, staffing, enrollment, technology, and facility needs. The Simsbury High School Continuous Improvement Plan addresses district goals, school goals, and school priorities. Budget projections account for enrollment increases. Student demographics, grades, transcripts, and schedules are managed through a SASI database software package. Department chairs and teachers express the need for increased technology equipment, specifically SmartBoards and LCD projectors with audio capabilities. They also want more scheduled training on the varied equipment that is provided to them. The Simsbury School District has a technology plan that has been approved by the Schools and Libraries Division Universal Service Program and the Connecticut State Department of Education. The plan is a three-year plan effective through June 30, 2009. The technology plan includes eight system-wide goals to be implemented by the end of the three-year window of approval. The high school renovations have increased the number of labs to twelve stationary labs, including a language lab, and two mobile labs of twenty-five laptops each. There are also twelve computers located in the new career center for student use. Approximately 85% of instructional spaces have ceiling mounted projectors although many do not have audio capability, which is a concern of many staff members. Science classrooms have SmartBoards with multimedia computers and some also have document cameras. Other parts of the building do not have these resources causing a serious lack of equity regarding placement of technology equipment throughout the building and subsequent training in the use of the equipment. Also, as a result of the large infusion of technology in the renovation and expansion project, there is a need for a technology replacement plan based on the 'life-cycle' of the new equipment. Thorough, effective long-range planning will continue to support the educational process in Simsbury. (self-study, school leadership, school support staff, teachers)

The community and the district's governing body ensure a dependable if somewhat limited source of revenue to provide and maintain school programs, personnel, services, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning. The community supports the education budget by approving the budget annually. The superintendent's positive working relationship with the board of finance and board of selectmen has increased the high school's ability to address the educational needs of the students through increased budget allotments to the board of education. The 4.5% budget cap previously instituted by the board of finance has been lifted, and the 2006-2007 budget was approved with a 5.6% increase. Continuance of school programs and services as well as the maintenance of staffing do not seem to be affected by a lack of funding. However, Simsbury High School does rely on parking fees and student fund-raising to create revenue in some cases. Student athletes must pay \$150 'pay-to-play' fee per sport as a subsidy for the large athletic program. While the recent infusion of technology indicates sufficient funding for technology, the same cannot be said for the funding levels of supplies, specifically text books. Distribution of funding for texts is inequitable, and students and teachers both report that the quality

of text books in many classes is poor and the availability is insufficient. Students and teachers alike speak of books missing covers and pages. Clearly, the allocation of funds for supplies and equipment replacement has been insufficient or unbalanced. Parents have expressed a concern that many community stakeholders who are taxpayers and who do not have children in the school system are not sufficiently knowledgeable of the educational needs of the schools and are, as a result, sometimes resistant to approve funding. Insufficient funding or inequitable allocation of funding for textbooks, supplies, and equipment maintenance and replacement adversely affect student learning in some educational programs. (self-study, school board, central office)

Faculty members, department supervisors, and administrators work collectively to develop and implement budgetary requests following a well-defined procedure and timeline. The principal solicits budget requests from department supervisors, who, in turn, determine budgetary needs from the members of their department. Final budget requests are then referred to central office and the board of education. Budget requests from non-teaching staff members are the result of collaboration with the principal and the assistant principals. Some department supervisors say that their needs are met; however, there is a general understanding among other department supervisors and faculty members that budget requests should be kept to a minimum because the board of finance has been known to place significant restrictions on budgets. However, the 5.6% increase for the 2006-2007 school years is encouraging. The clear, collaborative approach to budgetary planning allows teachers a voice in this essential decision-making process. (self-study, department supervisors, teachers)

Commendations

1. The involvement and support of Simsbury High School parents in a large number of areas that support student involvement and learning
2. The professional partnerships with the community, businesses, and institutions of higher learning that provide opportunities for real-world learning
3. The availability of Simsbury High School for use by the community
4. The completed renovation and expansion of Simsbury High School
5. The active and overwhelming support of the community for the renovation project
6. The significant improvements to or creation of the guidance suite, the media center, the eighteen science labs, the twelve computer labs, the art studios, and the physical education facilities
7. The enhanced athletic facilities, including the lighted, turf field and the new track
8. The building and grounds supervisor, the custodial coordinator and supervisor, and the custodial staff for their diligent maintenance of the facility
9. The infusion of technology at Simsbury High School
10. The efforts of the superintendent to unite the board of education, board of finance, and board of selectmen to ensure appropriate funding

Recommendations

1. Increase staffing in core academic areas to keep enrollment within the 21-25 student standard established by the board of education

2. Increase funding for textbooks to insure that all students have up-to-date texts in all curriculum areas
3. Increase the technological support staff to facilitate timely maintenance
4. Consider the institution of regularly scheduled training sessions for existing classroom technologies
5. Reassess existing custodial staffing and take appropriate action to ensure that the expanded physical plant can be sufficiently maintained
6. Evaluate the impact of 'pay-to-play' fees on student participation and insure that these fees do not inhibit student participation because of a lack of family financial resources

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 Simsbury 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 Simsbury High School submit routine Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports documenting the current status of all evaluation report recommendations, with particular detail provided for any recommendation which may have been rejected or those items on which no action has been taken. In addition, responses must be detailed on all recommendations highlighted by the Commission in its notification letters to the school. School officials are expected to have completed or be in the final stages of completion of all valid visiting committee recommendations by the time the Five-Year Progress Report is submitted. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards are not being met in a satisfactory manner or if additional information is needed on matters relating to evaluation report recommendations or substantive changes in the school.

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change 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 CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix on page 60. 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 team greatly appreciates the excellent hospitality demonstrated by the entire Simsbury High School community. Its conscientious efforts in preparing the self-study and its openness and honesty in responding to the team's questions were a significant testament to the outstanding personnel at Simsbury High School.

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
- 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
- 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
- identification by the state as an underperforming school
- takeover by the state
- inordinate user fees

**Simsbury High School Visiting Team
November 12 – 15, 2006**

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Charlene Sentero	Hartford Public HS	Hartford	CT	06105
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