

Summary of District Review
Conducted by Center for District & School Accountability
Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education
January 21-24, 2014

Review Findings submitted to School Committee September, 10, 2014

Strengths

1. The superintendent is open, transparent, and collaborative with his administrative team, the school committee, town officials, the teachers' association and parents.
2. Norwood has curriculum documents and materials for all content areas, which are easily accessible on the district's shared drive.
3. Review team members found a high incidence of some characteristics of positive classroom environments in their observations of the district's classrooms. Interactions between teachers and students were positive and respectful with established standards of behavior.
4. The district has in its elementary language arts program a model of an effective system of integrated curriculum, instruction and assessment. As a result of this effective integration of complementary elements of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the district provides students with a language arts program that promotes and supports their literacy learning. This program can serve as a model for the district for the effective integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
5. The Norwood Public Schools have adopted a new educator evaluation system and at the time of the onsite review were on track in implementing Massachusetts' new educator evaluation regulations.
6. The district offers a range of instructional services and supports for students with disabilities. The district provides instruction and supplemental services for students with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms as well as in self-contained programs. These various programs serve the district's students well, with programming for students with severe disabilities reducing the need for students to be placed out of district.
7. The budget development process includes district and school leaders, the school committee, and the town finance commission. The process is open and transparent with comprehensive and clear documentation, and it has created a climate of trust and cooperation between the school and town leaders.
8. The district has made a priority of updating and expanding its infrastructure for instructional technology and its use. The increased availability of technology for instruction creates opportunities for reaching students in new and effective ways, for providing for varied learning styles, and for informing parents promptly about their child's schoolwork and progress.

Challenges and Areas for Growth

9. The superintendent had not completed annual performance evaluations for district administrators for the past four years before the onsite review.

Response- The superintendent acknowledges this deficit and will be presenting the school committee with evidence of comprehensive evaluations in place with monthly status reports of his progress with his staff. Evaluation conferences while not written were conducted orally and feedback provided especially during the School Improvement plan process. The administrative team received feedback from the superintendent in private conferences, group meetings and during critical incidents. Mr. Hayden manages on his feet by checking in with key staff members daily coupled with frequent school visits.

10. Though the district had a District Improvement Plan 2013-2015 aligned to the broad goals of its Strategic Goals 2012-2015 document, the DIP was incomplete and did not appear to be in use.

Response – The District Improvement Plan was in use with quantifiable targets. These targets were discussed at the school committee meetings when the MCAS results were presented each year. The Strategic Goals and the District Improvement Plan will be consolidated into one simplified plan to provide greater ease of use and reporting to all stakeholders.

11. In observed classes, team members found a low incidence of some characteristics of effective standards-based instruction specifically mentioning the need for increased student engagement, greater use of higher order thinking questions and a more robust use of the technology in place in the classrooms.

Response – These observations took place on two days of the school year. To be fair to our teachers observations need to be done over a longer period of time. The items noted by the District Review Team are vital to our success and so in response we are committed as a school system to examining and increasing the use of higher order questioning and assignments, improving student engagement through active learning strategies and a greater use of technology to achieve our instructional objectives.

12. The district does not ensure that assessment results are consistently analyzed across the district and the analysis used to make appropriate changes in instruction.

Response – School based teams at each school spend time analyzing assessment results as mentioned in Strength #4 of the elementary English language arts program. Those teams include MCAS results for each child and all other available data when forming instructional plans. These plans were carried out by staff members in each department and we acknowledge that we can bring our district to the next level of excellence by formalizing this process in writing, supervising the outcomes and monitoring the re-teaching plans in our classrooms and departments.

13. There is inadequate time for professional development in the district: insufficient common planning and meeting time is embedded within the district calendar and individual teacher and school schedules.

Response – We acknowledge this need for increased time for professional development

and have added some time through increasing in-service half days in the elementary and middle schools, added early dismissal days at the high school and negotiated an additional after-school meeting each month for the entire staff. We will be putting together a plan for embedded regularly scheduled common planning across the district that will include time and budget commitments for the school committee to consider.

14. Before implementing its new educator evaluation system, the district had a less meaningful evaluation process.

Response – Our evaluation culture is improving through the use of the new evaluation system which includes increased contact with evaluators through focused observations, principals and teachers using student and professional practice goals and an emphasis of each administrator to focus on student outcomes and the teacher's effect on student success.

15. Apart from budget development, some day to day district financial management and reporting practices are inefficient because of the outdated accounting software in use by the town and district.

Response – We do all we can to fully utilize the Town Accounting package but improved automation for purchase orders, payroll and budget forecasting would improve efficiency and eliminate the need to maintain spreadsheets for various financial functions.

The Administrative Team together with the School Committee are in the process of revising the District Improvement Plan using feedback from all stakeholder groups and refining instructional strategies based on the release of 2014 MCAS results. In addition, a comprehensive vision for the Norwood Public Schools will be shared and developed in the coming month.