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Dr. Pamela Gray-Bennett, Director
Commission on Public Secondary Schools
New England Association of Schools & Colleges
209 Burlington Road, Bedford, MA 01730-1433

December 6, 2007

Dr. Gray-Bennett:

In response to the Commission's request for a Special Progress Report from South Hadley High School, we present the following information to address each of the highlighted areas of concern.

Clarify how teachers are using the school-wide rubrics to assess achievement of every student of each of the academic expectations.

Currently, we are implementing two school-wide rubrics to assess the achievement of every student. The first, our school-wide Citizenship Rubric, is designed to provide feedback to parents and students about student behavior in class. Beginning in January of last year and continuing into this year, students are provided a Citizenship Rubric rating on their progress reports and report cards (eight total). The Citizenship Rubric is printed on the back of each report card/progress report for parent/student reference.

The second, our school-wide Writing Rubric, is being implemented this year. We began last May by exploring our school's writing practices. We gathered information about the strengths and weaknesses of our student writing school-wide, we examined the research on student writing, and we examined our existing data on writing. Next, our Administrative Team representing all departments, examined a number of writing rubrics, and agreed to use a six trait analytic rubric published by Advanced Learning Press in their "Writing to Know" series.

Beginning with our September Faculty Meeting and continuing on our November Workshop Day, we provided staff four opportunities to "calibrate" themselves to the rubric. We used student writing samples from Social Studies and Science and worked in small cross-departmental groups.

It is interesting to note that we've had considerable discussions and are still working through a number of issues with regard to school-wide writing. First, we've had to dispel the notion that only English teachers should require students to write. Along with that challenge, we've had to work hard to develop the concept that all teachers can and should give students feedback about the writing they do complete in subject areas other than English.

Since the start of the school year, teachers have been encouraged to use the school-wide writing rubric to evaluate student writing in the classroom setting. In addition, we plan to have students complete three writing samples, the first of which happened on November 28th. We will be scoring the writing samples and analyzing the results during our December Workshop Day. Not only will we be able to disaggregate the data school-wide, students will receive individual scores on the rubric for their review.

In addition to working with teachers in implementing the school-wide Writing Rubric, we've discussed the initiative in our parent newsletters and have created a sense of urgency with the students by using our in-school TV broadcasting system. We plan to discuss our disaggregated results in much the same way.

Provide an update on the status of the advisory program development.

An Advisory Program proposal was developed last year by a small team of committed educators. The proposal was reviewed and was found to need further development in three areas: (1) indication that staff supported the program and would be eager to participate; (2) the draft curriculum needed further development to encompass a full year's program; and (3) the curriculum needed to expand beyond a guidance focus. To address the first issue, a survey has gone out to determine staff interest. To address the second and third issues, the small team of educators invested in this program plan to expand their working group and then go back to the curriculum drawing board.

That being said, we have not been without student involvement over the last year and a half. Several staff members developed a set of meetings with a selected group of students last year to discuss our learning climate. The group, known as the Climate Change Committee (CCC) originally began with a small number of students identified by participating teachers as having leadership potential. At the next level, these students each invited a friend. Meetings held during the school day centered on how we could create a more effective learning environment. The CCC recommended we remove our homeroom and instead, take the time and create a morning break period. As a school, we accepted this proposal and have implemented the change this year. To date, most consider it an effective change. The CCC also recommended we re-institute the Senior-Freshman Buddy Program. This program partners willing seniors/juniors with freshmen so as to provide a personal support for each freshman student as they navigate the opening days at a new school. By most accounts, this was also a successful addition.

Provide an update on the funding for long and short range equipment, technology, maintenance, and repair needs of the school.

Our school district has made significant strides with regard to funding technology and now has an ongoing expectation that funding of equipment and technology purchases and repairs need to be part of the yearly budget. Over the last three years, the School District's spending on technology has averaged approximately \$70,000 per year. These funds have been used to purchase new and replacement technology at each of the District's four schools.

At South Hadley High School, we were able to replace the technology in one of our computer labs, replace one third of the teacher work stations, and add additional laptops to our two existing laptop carts bringing them up to "classroom size" (24). In addition, a site license was purchased for software that allows us to manage student computers in each lab and when using the laptop carts.

In addition to these exciting developments, our Parent/Teacher Organization raised over \$3000 to support the development of yet another computer lab, bringing our total to four. Funds from the PTO supported the purchase of tables and chairs for the new lab and for the infrastructure costs. For computers, we are currently using the computers that were replaced in the other computer lab and from the replaced teacher work stations. While not state of the art, these computers are in excellent condition for writing and internet researching.

Clearly our School District has demonstrated a strong commitment to funding technology, both for new and replacement equipment. Our next challenge is to find a way to support the ongoing need for personnel to maintain and support the technology and infrastructure. This may take the form of reallocating our technician duties across the district and/or looking to hire additional technical support staff.

With regard to the maintenance and repair needs of the school, we are in relatively good shape thanks to the hiring of a district-wide Facilities Director working closely with our Head Custodian and the entire custodial staff. Problems with our boilers and HVAC system in general have been where our problems tend to arise and they are immediately addressed. We are approximately seven years from our renovation project and several needs are starting to emerge. Student lockers that weren't replaced during the renovation are beginning to show their age. Additionally, we have had continual problems with the floor tiles replaced during the renovation project due to excessive moisture in the concrete underneath. Approximately 50% of the flooring is affected. Both replacement of the lockers and replacement flooring have been placed on the capital funding list.

In summary, we believe we have made substantial progress in a few of these areas and incremental improvement in others. Implementing two of our school-wide rubrics have taken a substantial amount of our effort and professional development time but provide a model for implementing the remaining school-wide rubrics. Expanding our use of technology and maintaining the technology we have has been recognized by our school district as an important part of our instructional program – not simply an add-on. Finally, the addition of a Facilities Director has expanded our capacity to address facilities issues in a timely fashion.

Respectfully,

Mr. Dan Smith
Principal

Mr. Mitch Koziol
Chair, NEASC Follow-Up Committee