

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



Committee on Public Secondary Schools

## **Report of the Visiting Committee for Rockport Middle/High School**

**Rockport, Massachusetts**

October 6 - October 9, 2013

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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 Rockport Middle/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 days (60) 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 Rockport Middle/High School in terms of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting committee.

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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 schools which is comprised of the Committee on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS), the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI), 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 Committee. Those Standards are:

- Teaching and Learning Standards
  - Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations
  - Curriculum
  - Instruction
  - Assessment of and for Student Learning
- Support of Teaching and Learning Standards
  - School Culture and Leadership
  - School Resources for Learning
  - Community Resources for Learning.

The accreditation program for public schools involves a threefold process: the self-study conducted by the local professional staff, the on-site evaluation conducted by the Committee'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 Committee 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 Rockport Middle/High School, a committee of seven 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 parents, students, and members of the RMHS support staff

The self-study of Rockport Middle/High School extended over a period of 26 school months from October 2010 to December 2012. The visiting committee was pleased to note that parents, students, and members of the Board of Education joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations.

Public schools evaluated by the Committee 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 Committee, Rockport Middle/High School also used questionnaires developed by The Research Center at Endicott College to reflect the concepts contained in the Standards for Accreditation. These materials provided discussion items for a comprehensive assessment of the school by the professional staff during the self-study.

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

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

A visiting committee of 15 evaluators was assigned by the Committee on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Rockport Middle/High School. The visiting committee members spent four days in Rockport, 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 Committee's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented public schools and central office administrators, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Rockport Middle/High School.

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

- review of the school's self-study materials
- 20 hours shadowing 18 students for a half day
- a total of 15 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 34 teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning

- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers
- the examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

Each conclusion on the report was agreed to by visiting committee consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting committee appear in parenthesis in the Standards sections of the report. The seven Standards for Accreditation reports include commendations and recommendations that in the visiting committee's judgment will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and to better meet Committee Standards.

This report of the findings of the visiting committee will be forwarded to the Committee on Public Secondary Schools which will make a decision on the accreditation of Rockport Middle/High School.

### **SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SUMMARY**

Rockport Middle/High School (RM/HS), serving students in grades 6 through 12, is located in Rockport, Massachusetts. Rockport, a small seaside village on Cape Ann is known for its artists, shops, fishing, and Motif #1, the red fishing shack known as one of the most frequently painted buildings in America. Located about 40 miles northeast of Boston, Rockport is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean on three sides and the city of Gloucester on the fourth. There are currently 7,303 year-round residents and 3,490 households, out of which 24.4% had children under the age of 18. Two thousand twenty-seven families reside in Rockport. The average household size is 2.20 and the average family size is 2.93. The summer population increases to about 12,000 people. The largest industry in the town is tourism and accounts for 7% of its residents' employment. Of the remaining 47% employed, 29% work at professional jobs, including administration, health, and education. The median household income is \$50,661 and the median income for families in the town is \$69,263. In Rockport, 3.7% of the population and 2.5% of families were below the poverty line. The median house value in the town is \$385,000. The racial make-up of the town is 97.7% white, 1.1% Hispanic or Latino of any race, and 1.2 % all other racial groups. This differs from the student population which is 92.5 % white and 2.9% Hispanic. English is the primary language spoken by 99% of the residents.

The Rockport Public School District is comprised of three schools: Rockport Elementary School (Pre K- 5), Rockport Middle School (6-8), and Rockport High School (9-12). All three schools share the same campus and the latter two are in the same building and share some resources and staff, including the administration. There are currently 525 students in the 6-12 middle/high school building: 293 high school students and 232 middle school students. The elementary school population is 399 students. Approximately 18% of the student population at RM/HS reside in Gloucester and attend RM/HS as part of the state's school choice program.

Rockport sends an average of 25 students to its regional technical high school, North Shore Technical High School and to its regional agricultural school, Essex Agricultural High School. The school population at RM/HS is stable with a mobility rate at 95.9. The total expenditure per pupil assigned to the district is \$13,067, which is \$12 higher than the state expenditure per pupil. The town allocates 43% of its local resources for its schools. The school choice program nets about 5.8% of that allocation.

There are 48 teachers at RM/HS creating an 11:1 student-to-teacher ratio. All middle school students take 4 core classes: English, math, science and social studies, and 3 elective/exploratory classes which include world language/specialized skills, technology, health, physical education, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, art, and music during a 4-day, 7-block rotating schedule. At the high school, students must accumulate 120 credits in order to meet graduation requirements and pass 4 years of both English and social studies and 3 years of both math and science. They also take world language, physical education, health, technology, and fine arts. The non-rotating schedule consists of 5 days: 2 days of 4 long blocks in which 4 out of 8 courses meet on alternating days, and 3 days of 6 shorter blocks in which 6 out of 8 courses meet. During the 2011-2012 school year, RHS offered the following Advanced Placement courses: Literature & Composition, US History, Modern European History, Biology, Physics B, Calculus AB, Statistics, French and Spanish.

Coursework and other learning opportunities have been extended beyond the traditional courses offered at Rockport High School (RHS). The Professional Outreach Program for Seniors (PROPS) provides seniors with an opportunity to expand their learning by participating in internships, externships, and community service with local businesses, charities, and the Rockport Elementary School. Thirty RHS students take advantage of Virtual High School (VHS) classes online through the guidance department; this program is sponsored by a grant from the Educational Foundation for Rockport, our local education foundation. Some high school students choose to take on dual enrollment by taking courses at North Shore Community College for credit towards graduation, while others participate in short term educational ventures. High school girls take seminars at Northeastern University at its Women in Engineering program. Rockport Middle School (RMS) girls participate in a similar program, Girls in Math, Science and Technology, at Salem State University.

The two-year average dropout rate for RHS was 1.4%, which is well below the state average of 2.9%. In 2009-2010, the graduation rate was 87.6% and the RM/HS student attendance rate was 94.7%. Students' post-secondary placements in 2011 were varied. Sixty-nine percent attend 4 -year colleges, 24% attend 2-year colleges, 6% enter the work force, while 1% join the military. Teachers' attendance rate (including professional days) was 97%.

RM/HS students avail themselves to an abundance of school/business partnership experiences. RMS students volunteer regularly to participate in activities with seniors at Den Mar Nursing home. RHS students have a strong DECA program. DECA students connect to local businesses for mentorship and other resources. Students participate in SALADD (Students and Leaders Against Destructive Decisions), which is facilitated by the local YMCA. The YMCA also conducted the Rebuilding New Orleans leadership project with a group of RHS girls who spent their vacation assisting a New Orleans homeowner in the rebuilding of his home. The Rockport Rotary sponsors and organizes a Foreign Student Exchange Program for RHS

students. The Rotary Club of Rockport also assisted the school district with a grant for bullying prevention and awareness training. A Business/ Education Collaborative was formed for the purpose of determining and supporting non-monetary educational resources for the students at RHS. Local businesses provide speakers for whole school Career Day, the Rockport National Bank brings Financial Literacy Seminars to the school for all RHS seniors and students have the opportunity to shadow at the local Gloucester hospital, Addison Gilbert. RM/HS students participate in a number of events for local charities such as food drives, walks for hunger, and blood drives. Viking Corner Store, the school store run by DECA students, partners for mentorship with Jungle, a custom apparel retailer, which is a Rockport resident owned store. The new Shalin Lui Performance Center, home to Rockport Music, a local music oriented non-profit, offers annual programs to RM/HS students that feature curriculum tie-ins between music and other academic subjects. Professional musicians give interactive programs to small groups of students, hold workshops for student performers, give lunchtime concerts and provide trips off Cape Ann for them and their parents. There are also opportunities for students to perform in this newly constructed state of the art concert hall. National Honor Society helps the Red Cross run a blood drive at the school. A longtime relationship exists between the Rockport Art Association and RM/HS students. Some students take summer art courses at the Association that are taught by local artists and many students exhibit their school artwork at the association during the annual K-12 student art show held each spring.

Student recognition programs at RM/HS abound. There are three athletic awards nights for middle and high school athletes who play high school sports and several daytime ceremonies for middle school sports participation. Both schools have honor and high honor rolls each term and many students at both schools receive Presidential Awards for their high grades at end of the year awards assemblies. Effort and achievement awards in each content area, along with citizenship awards, are also given at those assemblies. Students receive certificates for their participation in co-curricular activities such as school plays and musicals, art club, yearbook, and current events club. One student per grade each month at RMS is recognized as the Student of the Month for exemplifying the core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations of the school while the National Honor Society at RHS has a process of nominating members each year who also regularly demonstrate these values. To add to this type of recognition, a new program, Viking Valor, was created in 2011. The staff commends students who show civic responsibility during or after school hours. Morning announcements are another avenue that the administration and staff use to commend students for their efforts and accomplishments such as winning a soccer game or placing high at a math meet. High achieving seniors are recognized at the North Shore Honors Scholar dinner and at Senior Awards Night.

**Note: The School and Community Summary was prepared by the staff of Rockport Middle/High School.**

**CORE VALUES, BELIEFS AND LEARNING EXPECTATIONS  
ROCKPORT MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL**

**Statement of Core Values, Beliefs, and Expectations**

Rockport Middle / High School, in partnership with families and the community, provides a safe environment that fosters integrity, respect, and success. We promote intellectual curiosity and pride in achievement. We challenge all students to pursue academic excellence, develop interpersonal skills, and value civic responsibility. Students learn 21st Century skills in order to fully participate in a diverse and ever-changing world.

The Children of Rockport Schools will

1. Think critically and creatively
2. Communicate effectively
3. Respect self and others
4. Serve society responsibly



## Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations

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

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

### CONCLUSIONS

The school community regularly engages in a dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process informed by current research-based practices to identify and commit to its core values and beliefs about learning. A group including students, parents, administrators, teachers and central office staff participated in the Core Values & Beliefs (CV&B) committee, meeting eighteen times from October 2010 through December 2012, resulting in several revisions. Administration provided several articles, books, and ongoing professional development workshops for faculty and staff. Rockport Middle/High School (RMHS) has published posters of their CV&B and learning expectations that hang in every classroom and hallway. Additionally, this information is printed in their student handbook and on the school's web page. An acronym was created around the learning expectations: **The Children of Rockport Schools (TCRS)** which represents Thinking critically, Communicating effectively, Respect for self and others, and Serving society. Teachers and administrators are well versed in both the CV&B and the learning expectations. For example, the physical education teachers use the

CV&B and learning expectations as a guide when training their athletic captains on leadership skills. The administration uses the core values on the disciplinary referral form, guiding discussion on behavioral violations. Middle school students report they understand, through direct teacher reference, each of the learning expectations. Observations of middle school classrooms consistently illustrate the use and understanding of the learning expectations. Although the faculty and staff are knowledgeable on the CV&B, some high school students and parents were not able to clearly articulate the level of impact of the CV&B on student learning. Because the school engaged in an inclusive process informed by current research the school's core values and beliefs function as explicit foundational commitments to students and the community. (panel presentation, school committee, classroom observation)

RMHS has identified challenging and, in most cases, measurable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for all students that address academic, social and civic competencies and are defined by school-wide rubrics that categorize targeted levels of achievement. RMHS has identified and lists in every classroom the learning expectations for students, being broad enough to cover academic, civic and social competencies. The Endicott survey, conducted two years ago, showed only 48 percent of students felt the expectations were challenging, compared to 71 percent of parents and 61 percent of staff feeling the same. However, a majority of students interviewed now report that they are adequately challenged and prepared with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Teachers indicate that the learning expectations are challenging and rigorous. Classroom observations demonstrated alignment with CV&B and learning expectations especially in the area of collaboration, peer review, group work and TCRS. Rubrics are in place, with specific criteria and clear expectations about how students can be successful within each learning expectation. However, some teachers report frustration in using common terminology applicable to all students from grade 6 to grade 12 and in the rubric's organic implementation. The school's measurable analytic rubrics provide a basis to assess the school achievement of their 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (Endicott survey, student shadowing, student work, classroom observation)

The school's core values, beliefs and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are actively reflected in the culture of the school, guide school policy, procedures, resource allocations, drive curriculum and instruction, but is less evident in the area of assessment. There are numerous examples of the RMHS school culture reflective of the CV&B and learning expectations. For example, 71 percent of staff members identified programs like "Seniors Helping Seniors" as exemplifying the CV&B. The building tour revealed a safe environment in which students feel comfortable leaving lockers, musical instruments and athletic equipment unsecured. Motivational quotes that exemplify the RMHS culture of "Respect of self and others" are displayed as posters throughout the building. RMHS faculty and students consistently demonstrate a mutual respect in which academic challenge is valued and student input is encouraged. Curriculum was most affected by the implementation of *Understanding By Design (UbD)*. *UbD* promotes critical thinking, problem solving, intellectual curiosity and personal reflection through the use of essential questions. According to the self-study, incorporating technology like Clickers and Mimeo boards allows teachers to formatively assess students and then to adjust instructional practices. A significant adaptation to school policy enforcement is evident in the discipline referral form. Core values and learning expectations are now integrated into the discipline form guiding conversation and reflection regarding the infraction. Teacher interviews and surveys point to a more flexible approach regarding the use of personal

electronic devices being able to assist in student learning. Resources were allocated for professional development on *UbD*, 21<sup>st</sup> century Learning Skills, and Differentiated Instruction. Additionally, substitute teachers were also provided to curriculum coordinators to allow time for curriculum writing. Assessment rubrics are in place that reflect the CV&B; however, they are inconsistently utilized at this time. Consequently, rubrics do not drive assessments in all departments. (Survey Monkey survey, teacher interviews, student interviews, facility tour, self-study)

RMHS has recently reviewed and revised its core values, beliefs and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Significantly, the school district has adopted the CV&B as part of their District Improvement Plan. RMHS used models from other schools, multiple sources of research, and community and faculty feedback from several staff meetings. A plan exists for regular review at two-and five-year cycles. Curriculum coordinators will collect and examine data from teachers' use of rubrics as it relates to CV&B. Data from standardized testing along with college placement rate will also be reviewed. The continuation of a formal review process will provide a gauge by which to measure whether the CV&B and learning expectations are consistently implemented throughout the school culture. (panel presentation, self-study, teacher interviews)

### **Commendations**

1. The extensive research used in developing the core values, beliefs and learning expectations
2. The commitment of teachers in the middle school to embedding the values, beliefs and learning expectations into everyday learning
3. The positive school culture displayed throughout the building on posters and reflected in student behavior
4. The mutual respect between students and staff
5. The commitment to a formal review process of CV&B and learning expectations

### **Recommendations**

1. Develop and implement a plan to ensure all parents are aware and understand the school's core values, beliefs and learning expectations
2. Ensure that all constituent groups are included in the school's planned reviews of its core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
3. Provide the opportunity for parents to be more engaged in the development of core values, beliefs and learning expectations
4. Provide ongoing professional development to assist in the revision and review of rubrics
5. Develop and implement a plan to ensure the school's analytic rubrics are used to drive the assessment of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations in every classroom

## 2

## Curriculum

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

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

## CONCLUSIONS

The curriculum at Rockport Middle/High School (RMHS) is purposefully designed to ensure that all students practice and achieve each of the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The program of studies reflects a focus on the needs of all students related to the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations: Think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, Respect self and others, and Serve society responsibly. Rubrics connected to the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are visible throughout the building. In the Endicott survey 81.4 percent of staff members and 78 percent of students reported familiarity with the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Because of the building-wide focus on the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, all students at RMHS will have the opportunity to practice and achieve these learner expectations. (teacher interviews, curriculum documents, Endicott survey).

The teachers and administrators at Rockport Middle/High School currently are in the process of designing curricula that include units of study framed by enduring understandings and essential questions; school-wide 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations; and assessment practices that include the use of school-wide analytic and course-specific rubrics. In the fall of 2009, as part of the Tower Grant, middle school teachers began professional development in the theory and application of *Understanding by Design (UbD)*. Subsequently, the middle school teachers have implemented the practices they developed through the professional development process. At the high school level, teachers in several disciplines have begun the process of writing and implementing curricula based on the *UbD* model. However, because the Tower Grant focus excluded them from the professional development that the middle school teachers had, many high school teachers admit to having limited familiarity with the *UbD* scope and sequence. Nevertheless, high school teachers and administrators have demonstrated significant interest in further developing their potential to fully adopt the *UbD* model at the high school. Over the past year the teachers and administration have attempted to implement school-wide rubrics for learning expectations with admittedly limited desirable outcomes. Consequently, they have decided to reconsider the implementation process and build further consensus about appropriate use of the rubrics before proceeding. Because of the current inconsistencies associated with the implementation of the curriculum model and the school-wide analytic rubrics, teachers are not yet delivering a unified curriculum with all the essential components. Therefore, not all students have the same experiences in all of their courses. (teacher interviews, student interviews, panel presentation)

The curriculum at RMHS emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem solving; higher order thinking; cross-disciplinary learning; authentic learning opportunities both in and out of school; and, informed and ethical use of technology. In recent years, as part of the Tower Grant, middle school teachers have received training from Bob Schwartz on "Skillful Thinking", a critical thinking framework. Some high school teachers were invited to participate in some of the workshops with the middle school teachers. Based on their extensive training and experience with implementing the practices learned in the "Skillful Thinking" workshops, middle school teachers indicate a willingness to serve as resources to their high school counterparts. The "Skillful Thinking" focus complements the recently adopted *UbD* process that most teachers have started to implement. Sixty-four percent of students surveyed perceive the presence of cross-disciplinary connections. Teachers reported that despite limited common planning time, some cross-

disciplinary connections do occur, but the process is informal. While a majority of teachers, parents, and students agreed that the curricula present opportunities for students to experience authentic learning, some teachers reported that they would like to further clarify the role that authentic experiences play in student learning. Eighty-eight percent of parents, 81 percent of students, and 86 percent of teachers believe that the ethical use of technology is emphasized in the curriculum. When all of the students at RMHS consistently have the opportunity to improve their critical thinking skills, experience authentic learning, draw connections between and among disciplines, and demonstrate ethical use of technology, they will increase their capacity for achievement. (Endicott survey, teacher interviews, curriculum committee)

While there is no formal policy or protocol to ensure conformity, the curriculum that is taught at RMHS is mostly aligned to the written curriculum. Teachers report that they are the writers of the curriculum and that this helps to ensure that the written curriculum is what is taught, an assertion that is supported by the principal. Endicott survey results show that nearly three quarters of the faculty agree that there is clear alignment between the written and the taught curriculum. Core departments meet monthly with their curriculum coordinators, and curriculum is among the topics that are discussed. While some teachers develop common assessments, there is no formal process to use assessment data to inform curriculum design. In the middle school, grade team members and subject-area teachers meet frequently and use the curriculum for planning purposes, thus informally ensuring that the taught curriculum is closely aligned to the written documents. The use of Galileo assessments to measure student success with the curriculum is in place at the middle school and is being implemented at the high school further ensuring that the written curriculum is aligned with what is being taught. The alignment of written and taught curricula positively affects the consistent delivery of the curriculum to all students. (teacher interviews, principal interview, curriculum documents, curriculum committee)

At RMHS effective curricular coordination and vertical articulation does not exist between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district. Teachers at RMHS informally work together with other teachers and administrators to collaborate on curriculum development with some focus on alignment throughout the scope and sequence of the student experience. However, currently, no formal process exists for teachers and administrators to ensure effective development and implementation of a district-wide articulation of curriculum. The superintendent and student services director report that there is no one currently in place to oversee a district-wide vertical curriculum articulation, and they indicate a need for staffing at the district level to facilitate the process. The superintendent, the student services director, and the building principal and assistant principals all recognize the importance of vertically aligning all curricula and formally drawing connections between disciplines. The principal and assistant principals report that middle school teachers who are fully trained in the *UbD* model and in “Skillful Thinking” practices will be able to serve as building-level resources for the articulation process. When the vertical articulation process is formally developed and implemented, teachers and administrators will have mechanisms in place to further inform the teaching and learning process, and all students will benefit from enhanced engagement. (curriculum documents, curriculum committee, interviews with central office staff and principal, teacher interviews)

Staffing levels, instructional materials, technology, supplies, facilities and the resources of the library/media center are generally sufficient to implement the curriculum and co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities, although there are some exceptions. Despite being a relatively small school, RMHS offers a wide variety of academic, co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities to its students. Staffing levels are such that the student-to-teacher ratio is 11:1 with most class sizes well under 20 students. However, there are several examples of unusually large classes (in excess of 30 students) due to the inability to schedule more than one section, and there are a number of cases of multiple levels of instruction at the same time in the same classroom. The bulk of the students and a narrow majority of teachers reported in the Endicott survey that instructional materials and supplies to support the curriculum are sufficient, though not abundant in most cases, and this sentiment was confirmed by interviews with faculty and students. Outside grant funding (for example the Biotech grant to purchase equipment and supplies for biotechnology) has served to support the curriculum in a number of instances, and the faculty has expressed some unease about the maintenance of stable funding due to the conclusion of the Tower Foundation Grant. Recent investments have greatly expanded student and teacher access to educational technology, including interactive white boards and laptop computers, although the availability of computer labs and portable computing devices is still limited. The library/media center has minimal funds with which to remain current, particularly in the use of electronic databases and online research tools, and teacher interviews indicate that staffing limitations in the media center greatly diminish the capacity of the media specialist to engage in curriculum support. By far the largest concern expressed by the faculty is the shortage of space resulting from the desire to offer a wide range of opportunities to students in a small school setting. Aside from limited computer lab space, it is not unusual for music or drama classes to meet in stairwells or whatever classroom space is available at that time or for a science class to meet in a classroom without laboratory facilities. Because the resources at RMHS are generally adequate to support the curriculum, students experience the consistent delivery of the written curriculum with varying but minimal degrees of inconvenience. (teacher interviews, student interviews, Endicott survey, interview with media specialist)

The provision of personnel, time and financial resources for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation and revision related to the curriculum has not been consistently applied for all professional staff. While some teachers report benefitting from thorough training related to *UbD* through funding by the Tower Grant, other teachers indicate less exposure to this training due to a lack of available funds. High school inclusion in the training has been limited leading to variable degrees of implementation of *UbD* practices. Curriculum documents from the high school reflect the varied training that these teachers have received. While core curriculum subjects (English, math, social studies and science) have curriculum coordinators who oversee the development of curriculum for their departments at the middle and high school levels, this is not true for non-core departments such as world languages, art and music. As confirmed by interviews with faculty and administrators, and by the self-study, 30 percent of the faculty does not have curriculum coordinators. As a result of inconsistencies in funding, personnel and time, the development and revision of curriculum has proceeded at different rates and with different levels of success in the middle and high schools. Consequently, students may have more difficulty in consistently achieving the learning expectations. (teacher interviews, curriculum committee, curriculum documents, self-study, student work)

## **Commendations**

1. The commitment of teachers to professional development that impacts curriculum design and implementation
2. The adoption of a curriculum model that emphasizes critical thinking and other 21<sup>st</sup> century skills
3. The commitment to further tailoring the school-wide rubrics for student learning expectations to meet the needs of all students
4. The informal efforts of teachers to make cross-disciplinary connections to enhance curriculum development
5. The embedding of authentic learning experiences within the curricula
6. The pursuit of alternate funding sources to support the development and delivery of curriculum

## **Recommendations**

1. Ensure the integration of the adopted common curriculum format into all courses at the middle and high school levels
2. Build a consensus on the implementation of school-wide rubrics as they relate to curriculum design
3. Develop and implement a process to ensure the curriculum emphasizes inquiry, problem-solving and higher order thinking.
4. Establish a formal process to use assessment data to inform curriculum design
5. Implement a formal process to ensure the alignment between the written and taught curricula
6. Develop and implement a vertically articulated curriculum
7. Design strategies to oversee school-wide curriculum development and implementation

**3**

**Instruction**

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

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

## CONCLUSIONS

The vast majority of teachers at Rockport Middle/High School (RMHS) extensively examine their instructional practices to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Students are clearly familiar with the school's identified beliefs about learning not only because the RMHS Core Values and Beliefs as well as the Expectations for Student Learning are posted in common areas and on the school's website, but they are also frequently embedded within assignments and included with recorded phone calls home from the principal. In addition, the core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are clearly part of faculty meetings and common planning time. As a result, Rockport's core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are prominent in both high school and middle school classrooms. For the expectations for student learning, the thoughtful use of the mnemonic device "The Children of Rockport Schools" encourages all members of the Rockport community to keep in mind the school's core beliefs. RMHS has clearly defined its 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, with a positive impact on the effectiveness of instruction and student learning that has unified the RMHS community. (classroom observations, student interviews, panel presentation, teacher interviews)

In some areas, teachers' instructional practices support the achievement of RMHS's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations that emphasize inquiry, problem-solving and higher order thinking. The faculty has challenged itself to develop specific criteria that must be met in their entirety to support authentic instruction. Not only must the lesson meet real-world criteria, but teachers have also identified the essential elements of the capabilities that must exist for students to not only generate and direct their learning, but also to apply their knowledge in a variety of possible outcomes. Although teachers at RMHS have received some professional development in differentiated instruction, there is inconsistent understanding and implementation. While teachers do meet individually with students to address academic concerns, and they are especially generous in their willingness to extend extra help after school, regular classroom practices do not always individualize lesson planning. In fact there is still some confusion and inconsistent implementation about what constitutes strategically differentiated instruction. Middle school teachers employ across the school thematic units in an array of disciplines and often include topics from other content areas. Due to their extensive training middle school teachers also consistently post and present essential questions from the curriculum that effectively allow the students to connect learning and to think globally. While high school teachers engage the students in cross-disciplinary learning from their own personal knowledge of a variety of disciplines, rarely is the cross-disciplinary learning a result of a formal process involving more than one teacher. High school teachers do occasionally include essential questions. Teachers also ask students to reflect on their own work and to indicate how they would make improvements. In multiple classes students built upon their self-evaluations by seeking feedback initially from their peers then in further consultation with their teachers. Taking into account the constructive suggestions, they repeated or revised the activity with a higher level of proficiency. This process was particularly effective for written compositions and the application of mathematical concepts. The Tower Grant, dedicated to professional development and technology up through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, has provided a dramatic increase in the technology available to the teachers along with the training and time necessary to integrate it into their instruction. However, at the high school, while there has been an increase in the technology available, there has not been the associated training nor the time made available to

integrate that technology. Students report that there is a dramatic decrease in the use of technology in high school classrooms when compared to the middle school. As a result of a lack of understanding of differentiated instruction, some students are not receiving personalized instruction. Consequently, there is limited emphasis on instruction that demonstrates inquiry, problem-solving and higher order thinking which impacts Rockport High School's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (classroom observations, student shadowing, teacher interviews, student interviews, Endicott survey, self-study)

Although many teachers adjust their instructional practices by purposefully organizing group learning and alternative strategies to incorporate higher order thinking, cross-disciplinary learning and informed and ethical use of technology to meet the needs of each student, there is a large divergence between the middle school and the high school. At the middle school, there has been a significant amount of time and resources dedicated to the implementation of formative assessment, which is both systematic and frequent. For example, there is the widespread use of classroom response systems in core courses. At the high school, formative assessment takes place on a class-by-class basis. For example, in some classrooms, personal size white boards, personal response cards, "bell work," and "tickets to leave" are used as part of a formative self-assessment where the students indicate their level of understanding of a certain topic or perform tasks. However, there has not been time for professional development for the widespread and consistent use of formative assessment, therefore effectiveness of teaching and learning is impacted. (student interview, teacher interviews, classroom observations, self-study)

Most teachers at RMHS contribute to a culture that values individual and collaborative improvements to instructional practices in a variety of ways. The results of the Endicott survey indicate that 67.1 percent of the teaching faculty uses student achievement data to improve their instructional practices. Teachers are in the process of refining their understanding of what constitutes personalized and authentic instruction. The Tower Grant has been instrumental for innovative reforms. Teachers at grades 6 through 8 are more aware of the benefits of ongoing formative assessments through focused professional development and examination of relevant pedagogical literature. Although some of the high school teachers have benefited from this professional development, it has not been consistent across all grade levels. Middle school teachers especially make use of technology such as classroom response systems to receive immediate feedback on student understanding and use that feedback to shape instruction. Many RMHS faculty take individual initiative in seeking out mutually supportive feedback from students, colleagues, parents, and supervisors to improve their instructional practices. Increasingly, some teachers utilize both final course evaluations and surveys to determine the effectiveness of their instructional practices for a particular course. In some cases, teachers consider both expressed interest of student preferences for texts and teaching styles, making decisions based on the results of the classroom surveys that teachers administer at the end of each course. Occasionally teachers examine data on standardized assessments for struggling students. The school's small size makes collegial collaboration around course design less feasible due to the fact that there are many singleton course offerings. The principal provides articles to the staff that engender school-wide professional discourse on relevant topics. Some faculty members have taken advantage of the district's willingness to defray some of the costs associated with enrolling in graduate level education courses offered by surrounding colleges, often attending with a group of colleagues. Within the last two years the entire faculty has

undergone professional development to align instruction and assessment among multiple sections of the same course. The lack of sufficient opportunities for teachers in grades 6 through 12 to engage in professional collaboration focused on examining student work and reviewing formative assessments, hinders the development of best practices commensurate with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (Endicott survey, teacher interviews, classroom observations, self-study)

Teachers at RMHS are adult learners and reflective practitioners. The teachers regularly read content-specific literature designed to help them improve instruction in their subject area. For example, the social studies departments of both the middle school and the high school have started a book club which the district supports with professional development points (PDPs). In order to receive the PDPs, the teachers not only are required to discuss the book as a joint social studies department, but also are required to write a lesson plan in which an aspect of the book had been integrated into their curriculum. A strong commitment to collegial collaboration at RMHS has significantly enhanced the quality of instruction. (teacher interviews, teacher panel, self-study, Endicott survey)

### **Commendations**

1. The middle school's collaboration regarding cross-disciplinary learning
2. The middle school's integration of technology to enhance curriculum
3. The high school teachers extensive support of students in after-school extra-help sessions
4. The middle school and high school faculties' successful implementation of authentic instruction

### **Recommendations**

1. Develop and implement a process to ensure teachers' instructional practices include actively engaging students in cross-disciplinary learning, emphasizing inquiry, problem-solving and higher order thinking
2. Ensure teachers adjust their instructional practices by strategically differentiating and using formative assessments
3. Provide opportunities for teachers to collaboratively engage in professional discourse focused on instructional practices



## Assessment of and for Student Learning

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

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

- individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
  - standardized assessments
  - data from sending schools, receiving schools, and post-secondary institutions
  - survey data from current students and alumni.
11. Grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

The professional staff of Rockport Middle/High School has worked tirelessly to employ a formal process based on school-wide rubrics to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. However, teachers report that this process has not been as successful as initially anticipated. In assessing student work, the staff addressed three of the four expectations for student learning but had varied success. Student work indicates that teachers tried to incorporate one or two of the expectations effectively, but attempts to address more than that were less successful. The intention of the administration was for faculty to receive professional development in the area of rubric writing, but the program presented was actually around standards-based assessments. While the professional development was not what teachers had expected, the program was very beneficial. After the presentation, teachers determined that they had created the rubrics before they completely understood standards-based assessment. The conclusion of the professional staff was to abandon the use of these original rubrics and begin the process of creating them again after more individual research and professional development. This rewriting of rubrics was initiated at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. As a result, the assessment of whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations using a school-wide rubric has been delayed. (teacher interviews, panel presentation, student work, self-study)

The school's professional staff acknowledges that because the internal implementation of the school-wide rubrics was unsuccessful, communicating individual student progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to students and their families failed to occur. Although some students know that the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are to "Think critically and creatively," to "Communicate effectively," to "Respect self and others," and to "Serve society responsibly," they do not always connect those expectations with their individual learning. Similarly, student progress in achieving these expectations has not been disseminated to the wider school community. Until all teachers have received professional development with regard to creating the rubrics for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations, the school's progress cannot yet be accurately reported to the community. (student interviews, teacher interviews, panel presentations, student work, self-study)

The professional staff's collection and analysis of data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement is inadequate. This is due to insufficient time to collaborate, the lack of shared curriculum coordinators in the middle school and high school, and the lack of curriculum coordinators in the specialty areas. Use of disaggregated data is particularly

limited. The Endicott survey, taken by the Rockport professional staff in 2011, indicated that slightly more than half of the staff reported that they collect, disaggregate, and analyze data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement. In both the high school and middle school, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results are examined to identify equity gaps between special education students and others; there is an acknowledgment, however, that RMHS's student cohort is quite small and that equity gaps are not significant in terms of students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), low income students, and high needs students. The MCAS data of high school students who are on a state-mandated Education Proficiency Plan (EPP) are disaggregated to a greater extent because these students' weaknesses must be addressed before they graduate. Both the middle and high school teachers and administrators use data from the MCAS to gauge areas in which student achievement needs improvement. Another tool used by middle school teachers is the Galileo K-12 Online Instructional Improvement and Instructional Effectiveness System from Assessment Technology Incorporated. Galileo is used at the middle school to create department assessments and benchmark assessments. At this point there is a plan to expand the use of Galileo into the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Although pervasive in the middle school, common planning time within the high school and between the high school and middle school staff is non-existent. This is primarily due to the complex weekly schedule at the high school level and the differences between the weekly schedules of the high school and the middle school. Consequently, the lack of time to collaborate and the lack of shared curriculum coordinators are detrimental to the staff's ability to collect and disaggregate data which limits the teachers' ability to respond to inequities in student learning. (teacher interviews, administrator interviews, Endicott survey, Galileo assessment data, self-study)

There is evidence that prior to each unit of study, many teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed. The school's learning expectations are prominently displayed on walls in hallways and in classrooms. Some students state that their teachers are clear about the goals and the expected outcomes of lessons. Over the past four years, middle school teachers have been integrating *Understanding by Design (UbD)* into their curricula. It is apparent that using the *UbD* model has been very effective in making explicit these 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and unit-specific learning goals. At the high school level, this practice is not as widely employed. The Endicott survey indicates that 56 percent of teachers is currently communicating the school's applicable 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed. Although there is evidence that supports this observation, it is clear that this is not common practice across all grades and throughout the disciplines; therefore, not all students have a clear understanding of how 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations apply to their learning goals. (student work, Endicott survey, classroom observation, self-study)

At RMHS, there is significant evidence that students receive rubrics prior to summative assessments. Teacher-generated rubrics are used throughout the school curriculum. In addition, more than 75 percent of the students surveyed at the middle and high school say they understand the rubrics their teachers use. In the rubrics examined, specific learning goals are clearly assessed by some teachers, but 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations are inconsistently assessed. Although teachers struggle with the content of rubrics for school-wide expectations, they consistently provide content-based rubrics for summative assessments. Therefore, it is

clear that when students are provided with rubrics they are more effectively able to understand teachers' expectations. (Endicott survey, self-study, classroom observation, evidence review, student interviews, teacher interviews)

Many RMHS teachers employ a range of assessment strategies. Teachers revealed that using *UbD* units has enabled them to devise a wide range of formative and summative assessments that appeal to diverse student interests and abilities. Assessments include, but are not limited to tests, quizzes, portfolios, exit slips, clicker responses and web-based electronic polling devices, board games, business proposals, videos, blogs, journals, artwork, performances, presentations, posters, reports, essays, wiki spaces, and poetry. For each of these assessments, teachers work in conjunction with the special education department to ensure that each student is accurately assessed and that all Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 accommodations are met.

Although not prevalent, there is evidence that a variety of formative assessment strategies are employed. However, summative assessment strategies are pervasive at RMHS. As a result of the wide variety and range of assessments, students at RMHS are able to demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills in numerous, engaging, and authentic ways. (student work, teacher interviews, student interviews, classroom observations, self-study)

To a great degree in the middle school and to a more limited degree in the high school, teachers collaborate in formal ways to create, analyze, and revise common formative and summative assessments. Common summative assessments have been created at the high school level in the core departments (mathematics, English, social studies, and science) wherever possible. Based on student results, revisions are made to those summative assessments. This applies to formative assessments as well. For example, the high school social studies department indicates that freshman and sophomore students complete an identical formative assessment at the beginning of the year. This enables teachers to track student progress more accurately and uniformly. At the middle school level, collaboration among teachers around assessment has resulted in "Computation Check." This is both a formative and summative assessment that is administered to each student in grades 6, 7, and 8 at the beginning and end of each school year. Notes from department meetings indicate that meeting time is occasionally devoted to reviewing assessments. However, the lack of curriculum coordinators in some departments hinders the process of creating, revising, and analyzing student formative and summative assessment. (teacher interviews, administrative interviews, department meeting notes, self-study)

Teachers are providing timely and corrective feedback to assist students in revising and improving their work. Nearly 70 percent of parents and students on the Endicott survey substantiate that teachers assess and comment on student work in a reasonable amount of time and that they offer suggestions to help improve student work. English teachers indicate that they regularly allow students to revise and improve their writing. Teachers will often provide feedback for students on first and second drafts, allowing them to improve their work prior to the final version of an assignment being collected. Students report that they are given the opportunity to correct their mistakes and to receive additional credit if it is clear that they understand the process for resolving those mistakes. For example, in a music class, students were observed repeating a performance quiz. They were then given immediate feedback on

their strengths and weaknesses. In a theater class, student pantomimes were videotaped, viewed, and critiqued by the teacher, fellow students, and the students themselves. The rubric for an English essay clearly indicates that students were given the opportunity to revise their work and resubmit for an improved grade. Teachers adapt their instruction based on the level of student understanding evident from the formative assessments. In one instance, a high school science teacher returned tests and his students used their notes to make corrections on that test. The students then submitted these test corrections as a quiz grade. Students at RMHS are able to achieve mastery of understanding as a result of timely feedback and their ability to revise and improve their work. (student work, teacher observation, Endicott survey)

The majority of middle school and some high school teachers regularly use formative assessments to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning. Formative assessments include the use of clickers (Galileo) and web-based electronic polling devices, exit tickets, journals, discussions, games, and quick checks. Struggling students are required to complete extra practice and show that they have made progress toward mastering a skill prior to taking a summative assessment. Thus, the regular use of formative assessments allows teachers to tailor their instruction to meet student needs. (teacher interviews common , student interviews, classroom observations)

At the time of the Endicott survey, fewer than half of the staff agreed that teachers and administrators examined a wide range of student work, common course assessments, common grade level assessments, and standardized assessments to revise and improve curriculum and instructional practices. Currently, teachers report that they, individually and collaboratively, examine a range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practices; however, they also report that there is little collaboration with administrators in terms of examining this evidence. Through the Tower Grant, Rockport Middle School has been using Galileo to implement educator effectiveness initiatives. Each core department has used benchmark tests created in Galileo for the purpose of revising curriculum and instructional practices. Without access to Galileo, high school departments have created course and grade-level assessments and have collaborated for the purpose of revising curriculum. Curriculum coordinators and administrators collaboratively review standardized assessments. Curriculum coordinators then work with their departments to review the standardized assessments and to discuss revisions in curriculum and instructional practices. For departments without coordinators, it is more difficult for teachers and administrators to work collaboratively. Additionally, the guidance department reports that individual teachers request Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and Advanced Placement (AP) data to analyze results, to revise curriculum, and to improve instruction for their students. Galileo enables middle school teachers to access data that allow them to more easily adjust curriculum and instruction to improve student learning. Additional data including feedback from surveys of alumni and current students led teachers to adjust instruction resulting in improved student performance. While teachers have worked diligently to examine a wide range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practice, there is limited collaboration in some disciplines and grade levels. There is also limited evidence of collaboration for this process between teachers and administrators. Consequently, there are infrequent opportunities to review multiple assessment measures that revise curriculum and improve instructional practice. (Galileo data sheets, teacher interviews, department meeting notes, alumni survey, self-study)

At this time, RMHS does not have grading and reporting practices that are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning. Although the school provides ways of tracking grades via the Internet Parental Access Support System (IPASS), the school has not aligned its core values and beliefs with course assessments. The school attempted to pilot new grading and reporting practices, but the attempt was not successful. Consequently, the school has examined the reasons for this failure and is working to revise the rubrics. As a result of this, the school has been unable to establish grading and reporting practices that are aligned with the school's core values and beliefs about learning. (self-study, panel presentation, teacher interviews)

### **Commendations**

1. The clearly articulated school-wide 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for student learning
2. The ongoing engagement in the development of school-wide analytic rubrics that reflect the school-wide expectations
3. The implementation and use of Galileo at the middle school for data analysis and assessment creation
4. The variety of assessments used by faculty
5. The regular collaboration at the middle school level for purposes of improving assessments and student performance
6. The provision of timely and corrective feedback to students by faculty
7. The use of technology in middle school classrooms that aids in assessment and feedback

### **Recommendations**

1. Establish effective school-wide analytic rubrics to measure 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
2. Report individual student's progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to those students and their families
3. Communicate the school's progress in achieving the school's learning expectations to the school's community
4. Develop and implement a process for curriculum coordination for non-core departments to improve assessment outcomes
5. Provide formal opportunities for common collaboration time for teachers and administrators to examine a wide range of student work to improve assessment outcomes
6. Initiate and collect feedback from current students and graduates for the purpose of improving assessment outcomes
7. Develop and implement a process to ensure all teachers regularly use formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improved student learning
8. Develop and implement a process to regularly review and revise grading and reporting practices to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning

# 5

## School Culture and Leadership

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

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

9. Teachers, students, and parents are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership.
10. Teachers exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning.
11. The school committee, superintendent, and principal are collaborative, reflective, and constructive in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.
12. The school committee and superintendent provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school.

## CONCLUSIONS

Rockport Middle/High School has built a positive, respectful, and supportive culture that fosters school pride. Students reported feeling safe and that a positive learning environment is created throughout the school. Expectations are clearly outlined in both the faculty and student handbooks. Strong student culture is evident throughout the building by displaying student work, art, and achievements. Programs such as academic awards, athletic awards, honor roll, student of the month and Viking Valor recognize a sense of pride and ownership amongst students. Discipline procedures are clear and hold students to a high standard. Teachers and students both report high expectations regarding academics and behaviors. Consequently, RMHS demonstrates significant effort and success in creating a positive culture that results in pride and student responsibility. (classroom observations, self-study, panel presentation, teachers, students, parents, school leadership)

Student grouping patterns at RMHS foster some heterogeneity. Every student over the course of his or her middle and high school experience is enrolled in at least one heterogeneously grouped core course. The middle school offers heterogeneous groupings in all core classes except math. The high school offers heterogeneous grouping in grade 9 world history, world language levels 1 through 3, physical education, and all elective courses. Heterogeneous course offerings are identified in the high school program of studies. The school principal also communicated the change in groupings through a mailing. As a result of course requirements, all students are enrolled in at least one heterogeneous class. (self-study, teachers, department leaders, program of studies)

In addition, to the school counselor, there is a formal, ongoing program at RMHS through which each student is assigned an adult in the school who knows the student well and assists in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The RMHS advisory program was partially implemented in 2012-2013 and was fully implemented in 2013-2014. Advisory meets eight times per year with students grouped by homeroom. High school student interviews indicate strong connections with adults but not through the advisory program. Middle school students state they meet formally through Teachers and Students Connecting (TASC). The TASC program is effective in creating relationships for all students, specifically those new to the district. It has also helped students incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, improve academic risk taking, and address school-wide issues. Teachers also develop positive

relationships with students by being actively involved in extracurricular activities such as clubs, sports, music, and drama. Therefore, while the current advisory program allows time for students to begin to personalize their educational experience, connect with an adult, and develop adult relationships, additional work needs to be done so that students fully utilize the program. (students, school leadership, self-study, teachers)

The principal and professional staff at RMHS regularly engages in professional discourse in a variety of formats including reflection, inquiry, and analysis of teaching and learning. Through the funding of the Tower Grant, middle school staff has received training in *Understanding by Design (UbD)* presented by outside consultant Jay McTighe, as well as “Skillful Thinking” and differentiated instruction by Robert Schwartz. More than half of the faculty has attended the MassCue annual conference, which focuses on improving technology in the classroom. A full-day professional development workshop was presented to staff regarding the new Massachusetts teacher evaluation system. High school teachers have received limited training on using data to drive curriculum and instruction. RMHS has a clear and focused plan for professional development centered on *UbD*, differentiated instruction, and data-driven curriculum design. While it is clear that the principal and faculty are committed to improving student learning, there are inconsistent opportunities for professional development across both the middle and high school, which limits the ability to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (self-study, panel presentation, teacher interview, school committee, school leadership)

School administrators regularly use research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improved student learning. RMHS has implemented the Massachusetts teacher evaluation system beginning in the 2013-2014 school year. Staff received professional development over two days at the start of the school year. The administrative team has focused on providing ample feedback regarding student learning. The performance review is comprised of four areas: goals, classroom observations, summary statements, and review. Additionally, an improvement plan may be implemented if required. The evaluation process consists of a one-year cycle for non-professional status teachers and a two-year cycle for professional status teachers. New teachers are also paired with a mentor and meet on a regular basis to discuss issues, concerns, and progress. Therefore, the administrative team has consciously implemented a clear model of evaluation focusing on student learning outcomes. (self-study, teacher, school leadership)

The organization of time attempts to support research-based instruction, professional collaboration among teachers, and the learning needs of all students, but differs at the high school and middle school levels. The middle school schedule provides teachers with daily time for professional collaboration among grade level teams. The use of a four-day rotating schedule allows teachers to meet with students at various times throughout the academic day. The middle school schedule meets the needs of the majority of students, but may limit the ability of some special education students to access the whole array of elective courses. The high school schedule provides a mix of rotating block scheduling and traditional period lengths. The current high school schedule does not allow for common planning time among core subject teachers. Teachers reported concerns about not seeing students on a consistent basis. A scheduling committee is being formulated at RMHS to address current scheduling issues. Consequently, the RMHS schedule offers limited time for formal collaboration at the high school level and does not always support student learning needs. (self-study, classroom

observations, student shadowing, teachers, school leadership, students)

Student load and class size at RMHS enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students. Specific subject areas are structured to have lower ratios because of student learning needs, safety, and other criteria. In core academic area classes, the average class size is approximately 23 students, but individual class sizes fluctuate. Reasonable class size allows teachers to meet most students' needs. Inclusive practices are incorporated throughout RMHS, with a special education liaison assigned to each grade level. Higher-level courses such as Advanced Placement are the exception to the average class size. Consequently, students, teachers, and parents identify that the student-to-teacher ratio at RMHS supports student learning. (self-study, students, classroom observations, school leadership, teacher interview)

The principal, working with other building leaders, provides instructional leadership that is rooted in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. The principal embodies the school's learning expectations: **T**hink critically and creatively, **C**ommunicate effectively, **R**espect self and others, and **S**erve society responsibly (TCRS). The principal has led the implementation of school-wide core values and integration of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. The school values are exhibited throughout RMHS, visually displayed and integrated into classroom curriculum. Teachers and students have adopted these values as their own. Staff at RMHS focus academic instruction based on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning including creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication. The principal effectively communicates to all stakeholders RMHS's school-wide learning expectations. As a result, the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations are extensively embedded in all aspects of the school community. (self-study, panel presentation, classroom observation, student shadowing, facility tour, student work, teachers, students, parents, school committee, school leadership, school support staff)

Teachers, students, and parents are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision making that promote responsibility and ownership. The administration consistently communicates with parents and provides opportunities for parents to be involved in multiple committees. The principal shares relevant school information and asks for parental involvement through the use of weekly email blasts and social media (Twitter). Parents are provided an opportunity to voice ideas during Rockport PTO, School Council, individual conferences with the principal, and a monthly open forum meeting with the principal (Coffee with Conrad). Students are provided the opportunity to take part in student government, student council, and class officer meetings. Students are actively engaged when making class-level decisions. When appropriate, students are involved with decision making at the building level. Teachers are regularly given the opportunity to express ideas and suggestions regarding school-wide issues. According to the Endicott Survey, teachers believe school administration is accessible and responsive to teacher concerns. Meeting opportunities between administration and teachers occur during bi-monthly meetings as well as with various committees focusing on curriculum, scheduling, and new hires. With the transparent decision-making processes that are regularly used, all stakeholder groups continue to be involved and invested in decision making which creates an atmosphere of ownership. (self-study, teacher interviews, students, parents, panel presentation, school leadership)

Teachers at RMHS exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning. Staff members take an active role in extracurricular activities including athletics, theater, and clubs. The Endicott survey reports 81 percent of teachers is involved with extracurricular organizations. Middle school faculty and some high school staff members have been provided a range of professional development opportunities focusing on differentiated instruction, "Skillful Thinking", *UbD*, and Core 21. Some teachers have taken leadership in training fellow teachers regarding information and skills acquired through professional development. Staff members have participated in committees to create core content curriculum. Teachers articulate a collaborative spirit with administration to address school-wide issues. Teacher-driven, cross-curricular activities have been implemented within the curriculum. It is clear that the staff is strongly vested in the students' engagement in learning and assumes leadership roles that provide a variety of learning opportunities for the students. (self-study, Endicott survey, teacher interview, school leadership)

The school committee, superintendent, and principal regularly collaborate in making decisions that directly impact students' abilities to achieve RMHS's learning expectations. The school committee reports a collaborative relationship with the superintendent and principal, which is demonstrated in the development of RMHS's core values. The superintendent and administrative team meet weekly to discuss issues related to student achievement. These include, but are not limited to, the development of school budget, teacher evaluation, and MCAS results. The superintendent works closely with the finance committee in the development of the school budget. Collaboration between and among the school committee, superintendent, and principal occurs in the development of school handbooks, the school improvement plan, and curriculum review. As a result, collaboration among all stakeholders has resulted in the enhancement of programs at RMHS. (self-study, school leadership, school committee, school support staff)

The school committee and superintendent provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school. There are hierarchies of decision-making and defined roles throughout the district and school. When staff members have attempted to circumvent this system, they are redirected to the proper level. Communication is clear between and among the school committee, superintendent, and school-based administration. As noted in the Endicott Survey, teachers report the principal is provided autonomy to make school-wide decisions. Additionally, the principal has the responsibility to hire, supervise, and evaluate staff members. The principal also develops the school budget, provides professional development, and maintains school facilities. Consequently, the school committee and superintendent have provided the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school. (self-study, Endicott survey, teachers, school leadership, school committee, school support staff)

## **Commendations**

1. The pride that the students and staff take in Rockport Middle/High School
2. The high standards and expectations for students both academic and behavioral
3. The effective integration of the TASC program at the middle school

4. The meaningful and appropriate feedback of student learning provided by administration
5. The class size that allows teachers to meet most students' needs
6. The core values and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills exhibited and implemented throughout RMHS
7. The active involvement of teachers in extracurricular activities
8. The inclusive, collaborative leadership provided by the building principal

### **Recommendations**

1. Evaluate the current schedule to better meet student learning needs and provide time for formal collaboration among all staff
2. Implement formal professional development across all grade levels for the purposes of improved student learning
3. Review the advisory program at the high school to determine its effectiveness in having another adult in the school who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and institute any necessary changes



## School Resources for Learning

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

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

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

## CONCLUSIONS

Rockport Middle/High School provides a number of planned, timely, coordinated and directed strategies that promote each individual student in achieving 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The middle school students are scheduled into a Teachers' and Students' Connecting class (TASC) which fosters personalization and exposes students to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. High school students connect with their advisor in a recently created and implemented abbreviated version of TASC to engage in activities to foster 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. Students at the high school have a Peer Leader program to foster relationships within the student body and to develop respect for self and others. Middle school team teachers all have daily common planning time with the purpose of discussing student issues and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning standards. The school has several vehicles to identify at-risk students such as Student Assistance Team (SAT), Caregivers Team and the Community-Based Justice Initiative. The Caregivers Team meets weekly to discuss and identify students at-risk due to social-emotional concerns. SAT meets at least monthly to address students at risk due to academic and behavioral concerns. The Community-Based Justice Initiative brings school and community law and social service representatives together monthly to identify and discuss the needs of at-risk youth. As a result of coordinated and directed intervention strategies, the students and staff of Rockport Middle/High School have adopted a culture in which students are respected, supported and provided opportunities to help them meet the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, teacher interviews, student interviews, panel presentation)

The school regularly provides information to families, especially to those most in need, about available student support services. According to the Endicott survey most parents and guardians strongly feel the school communicates information about school and student support services available. Parents and guardians receive information via the school's website, E-mail blasts, standard U.S. Postal mail, packets sent home with students and Connect-Ed phone calls. During common planning time, middle school teams discuss at-risk students. Parents and

guardians are contacted for further information and are notified about strategies designed to support their child. In addition to electronic bi-weekly reports, special education teachers call parents and guardians with concerns as they arise. Parents and guardians have access to high school students' grades and attendance records through Internet Parental Access Support System (IPASS) accounts. Additionally, high school guidance counselors contact and arrange parent-teacher conferences to address student concerns. These multiple forms of communication have allowed Rockport Middle High School to be in contact with parents regarding grading, support services, student progress, and important information about the school which support student achievement. (self-study, teacher interviews, parent interviews, school committee interviews)

The Rockport Middle/High School support services staff uses technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student. The guidance staff at RMHS utilizes Naviance to provide students with college and career planning. The school utilizes IPASS as its student information system to communicate grades and attendance with teachers, students and families. Middle school core classroom teachers use the Galileo database to monitor student academic skills and achievement. Teachers employ clicker technology as a formative assessment tool and share resulting data with students' special education liaisons. Teachers and students have access to three computer labs. The Tower Grant provided all grades 6 through 8 teachers with a laptop and LCD projector to assist staff in meeting the needs of students. All classrooms have been equipped with white board and Mimeo technology. Additionally, special education teachers utilize technology such as Kurzweil, Dragon Speak, and iPad applications to mitigate student-learning challenges. The library provides access to state library information databases, e-resources, noodle tools and glogster. Although teachers and students have access to a wide array of technology at RMHS, limited access to computer labs impedes student progress. (self-study, student, teacher and support staff interviews)

The Rockport Middle/High School's counseling services has an adequate number of certified and licensed personnel and support staff to ensure that each student achieves the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The middle school has one guidance counselor and one support person for 256 students. The high school has two guidance counselors for 319 students and shares with the district a full-time school psychologist and a grant-funded part-time student assistance counselor. The middle and high school guidance departments have written curricula that align with the Association of School Counselors Standards to address the developmental needs of students. Counselors meet individually with freshmen to review course selection for the following year. In addition to classroom visits, the high school guidance counselors see juniors individually to follow up on their sophomore college and career class and have multiple individual meetings with seniors to discuss college and career options. The counselors survey students at the end of the class to evaluate effectiveness and to make future improvements. In addition to this they also collaborate with outside agencies such as the Department of Children and Families and Children's Friend and Family Services to assist students. The guidance counselors invited outside counselors and agencies to meet in order to identify counselor expertise and to learn the accepted insurance plans to facilitate the referral process when needed by families. Outside therapists are allowed to meet with students on school grounds. High school guidance staff has established programs such as Junior and Senior College Planning and Financial Aid night to prepare students and families for the college application process. Additionally the guidance department conducts numerous and ongoing

surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. In response to analysis of school Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) data, the guidance department facilitated the creation of an SAT preparation class. Middle school students attended a workshop on bullying presented by the guidance department. The school counseling program consistently delivers a wide range of academic and social support services which allow students to pursue a course of action that meets their personal learning needs. (self-study, guidance counselors, parent interviews, student interviews)

The school's health services have an adequate number of certified and licensed personnel and support staff that provide direct and preventative health services, and conduct ongoing student health assessments. A part-time nurse funded by the Essential School Health Services Grant, assists the full time nurse in conducting vision, hearing, body mass index and posture screenings per state mandates. The nurse works with the Rockport teen center and the YMCA to exchange information about students in order to provide programs. The nurse refers students to 84.org to provide educational information about tobacco use. The school's health services have adequate space. Teachers report issues to the nurse as they see the need in their classrooms. Students state that the nurse is approachable and they don't have to wait long to be seen. The nurse attends Friday Caregivers meetings, working closely with the school psychologist and counselors to discuss at-risk students and plan solutions to support them. She also attends and consults at Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) and 504 meetings. The nurse uses data from surveys to get feedback on the health services department. As a result, evening programs on smoking cessation and Internet safety programs were conducted. In addition, the nurse teaches the basic principles of health promotion and disease prevention to the students and staff during individual visits and upon request by classroom teachers and administrators. Health services utilize research-based assessment tools and information gathered at Student Assistance Team (SAT) meetings and Community Collaborative Initiative (CCI) meetings. Students at-risk for self-harm, pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, etc., are identified. Health services also provide appropriate support to Rockport Middle/High School's students, and interface with other supportive agencies in the community. (self-study, student and teacher interviews, nurse interview)

Library/media services at Rockport Middle/High School are only sporadically integrated into the curriculum and instructional practices. Without additional support staff the librarian is frequently unable to attend team meetings or to meet with teachers in order to understand their curricula needs or to be actively engaged in the implementation of the school's curriculum. The librarian relies on emails at the end of the school year to help her plan what she needs to order. The librarian provides a range of material and technologies and other information services in support of the school's curriculum. The library is not staffed before and after school for students and staff to adequately access its materials and resources. However, students and staff concur that the librarian is responsive to their interests and needs. Furthermore, the librarian culled out-of-date books and used the resulting space to provide a comfortable, welcoming environment to encourage student use. The library's staffing limitations reduce the number and timeliness of services available to RMHS students. (self - study, teacher and student interviews, librarian interview)

The Rockport Middle/High School support services for identified students has an adequate number of certified and licensed personnel and support staff who promote

opportunities and guidance to assist students as they strive to attain the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. The middle school has a full-time special education liaison for each grade, a reading specialist, a writing specialist and a substantially separate special education teacher. This group of educators shares five paraprofessionals who work as classroom aides or 1:1 with students. The high school has a liaison for each grade, a reading specialist and paraprofessionals to meet student needs. Some special education teachers also teach one or two classes. The middle and high schools share a school psychologist and a special education chairperson. The team chairperson, speech pathologist and assistant principals coordinate to meet Section 504 needs. Middle school liaisons collaborate with teachers in daily team meetings and with counselors and other support staff as needed. Although high school liaisons make concerted efforts to regularly consult with students' teachers and other support personnel, lack of common collaboration time limits regular communication.

All students at RMHS participate in inclusive learning opportunities, including the two students in the substantially separate program. High school students attend regular education classes and receive IEP identified services in place of Directed Learning. Middle school students in grades 7 and 8 who require specialized services may have limited access to the whole array of elective classes. In response to assessment data, all sixth grade students participate in a reading class, and the high school has hired a reading specialist to fulfill this need. A writing specialist serves students with identified needs and assists those recommended by teachers and parents. Services for identified students adequately support students' ability to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations. (self-study, teacher and special education chairperson interviews)

### **Commendations**

1. The various methods used to identify at-risk students
2. The numerous ways the school communicates with and informs families about school programs and student needs
3. The use of assessment and survey data by the guidance department to design and conduct effective programs
4. The commitment of the nursing staff to serve the health needs of staff and students
5. The inclusion of all students with disabilities in the regular classroom environment

### **Recommendations**

1. Increase access to computer labs and additional technology for all students
2. Provide adequate library staffing to ensure active participation that supports the RMHS curriculum
3. Increase student and staff access to library/media services before, during, and after school



## Community Resources for Learning

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

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

## CONCLUSIONS

At this time, the community and the district's governing body provide dependable, yet level funding for a wide range of school programs and services, sufficient professional and support staff, ongoing professional development and curriculum revision, a full range of technological support, sufficient equipment, instructional materials and supplies. In the past, Rockport voters approved several overrides to fund the proposed budget, resulting in the prevention of many cuts to student programming. District wide, twenty percent of the student population is school choice students. School-choice revenue is an integral part of the budget. Organizations, such as the Rockport Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), Friends of Rockport Athletics (FRA), the Rockport Education Foundation (REF), and the Rotary Club help fund programs and many other student services. In addition to core subjects, school programs include a number of varied music, art, technology, and specialized skills classes. Professional and support staff are sufficient, as evidenced by the 11:1 average student-to-teacher ratio. One exception is the lack of additional support for the librarian. During the past four years, the Tower Grant (k through 8) has provided funding for ongoing professional development and instructional materials for teachers at the middle school. Additional workshops, including *Understanding by Design (UbD)*, Differentiated Instruction (DI), and Standards Based Report Cards have been provided for all staff. The high school staff has not had the same access to professional development for technology as the middle school staff. Although the finance committee has consistently made an effort to fund technology, the amounts budgeted for equipment and software have been at the same level since 2009. However, the 2013 budget did have an \$80,000 increase for classroom hardware. Instructional materials and supplies have been level-funded over the past few years and textbooks are outdated in several academic areas. As a result of continued level funding for instructional materials, including textbooks, student outcomes will be affected adversely. (self-study, school budget, teacher interviews, students)

Rockport Middle/High School develops, plans, and funds programs to ensure the maintenance and repair of the building and school plant, to properly maintain, catalogue and replace equipment and to keep the school clean on a daily basis. The director of facilities and grounds has a regular schedule for daily, seasonal, and yearly maintenance of the school. The small staff of one daytime custodian and four night custodians, along with the director and one maintenance person keep the school reasonably clean and address school repairs in a timely manner. Staff can use email or the office mailbox of the director to request repairs or replacement of classroom items. The director of facilities and grounds addresses individual teacher classroom needs as they arise. The smoke alarms are checked quarterly, while the boilers, water heaters, and elevators are checked yearly. Both hot water heaters have recently been replaced. As a result, the Rockport Middle/High School is well maintained and provides a clean, safe, healthy environment for students and staff. (director of facilities, director of technology, interviews, secretaries, teachers, students)

The community funds and the school implements a long-range plan that addresses programs and services, enrollment changes and staffing needs, facility needs, technology, and capital improvements. Programs, services, and staffing needs are addressed annually through meetings with the curriculum coordinators and building principals for the proposed budgets. Anticipated enrollment changes and staffing needs are based on the enrollment numbers in the lower grades. Long-range facility needs and capital improvements are addressed in meetings

with the director of facilities and grounds and the superintendent. The community is committed to providing technology improvements throughout the school by funding a capital needs line item in technology upgrades on a yearly basis. For example, in the FY2014 budget, monies have been allocated to fund phase one of the school network. Additionally, monies have been allocated to fund a new school phone system, security, and fire upgrades and facility improvements, including stair treads, landings and ramps, carpeting, kitchen equipment, bathroom upgrades, and exterior door replacements. The roof, hot water heaters, and the bleachers and gymnasium floor have all been replaced. Because the new roof continues to leak in a few spots, the director of facilities and grounds will have the roof inspected prior to developing a plan to address the problem. Additionally, the heating system needs to be upgraded to provide consistent heat throughout the building. As a result of having a long-range plan in place, costly expenditures can be anticipated and budgeted accordingly. (budget, department supervisors, building principal, director of facilities and grounds)

Building administrators are actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget. The general budget cycle begins in late October and culminates at the April Town Meeting. After receiving input from teachers of core subjects, curriculum coordinators then submit their requests to the principal. The principal sends the budget to the superintendent for approval. Special education teachers can submit requests through the director of student services. The director of facilities and grounds meets annually with the superintendent to discuss the budget for facilities. Teachers without curriculum coordinators have limited access to the budget process and are usually allocated a set amount of funds. It should be noted that curriculum coordinators for grades 6 through 12 for all non-core subjects are scheduled to be in place for the 2014-2015 school year. As a result, all staff at Rockport Middle/High School will have input into the development of the budget. (self-study, teachers, director of facilities, curriculum coordinators)

The school site and plant support the delivery of high quality school programs and services; however, space is limited in some areas of the building. Many classroom teachers share classroom space with other instructors during the course of the day. Occasionally, town and special events displace teachers using the auditorium. Parking is limited for students and is consequently assigned to seniors on a first-come, first-served basis. There is, however, adequate and suitable space for cafeteria services, administrative offices, conference rooms, guidance, and health services. The science labs are sufficient and adequately equipped to deliver a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum. There are three computer labs with over 100 computers and a portable laptop cart with 30 laptops for use in the classroom. Students are also encouraged to bring their own devices and WiFi is readily available throughout the building. The gym floor has recently been resurfaced with funding from the Friends of Rockport Athletics and new bleachers have been installed. Although many classrooms, hallways, the gym and cafeteria have recently been painted, overall cleanliness of the building remains an issue. A new sound system was installed in the auditorium and a sound proofing system in the cafeteria. All classrooms have whiteboards and a mimeo and middle school teachers have iPads. As a result, the school site supports quality programs and services which enhance the learning environment for all students. (self-study, teachers, teacher assistants, secretaries)

Rockport Middle/High School maintains up-to-date documentation that the physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with fire, health

and safety regulations. However, one of the fire doors does not close automatically and needs to be repaired. The director of facilities and grounds is aware of the issue. The inspection certificates are clearly posted on each level of the building or on the equipment itself. Other pertinent documentation is located in the superintendent's office. The building is completely handicap accessible, as required by law. Consequently, Rockport Middle/High School has a physical plant and facility that is safe and enables teachers to deliver a quality education to students. (director of facilities and grounds, self-study, building inspection)

The professional staff at Rockport Middle/High School engages most parents and families as partners in each student's education and reaches out specifically to those families who have been less connected with the school. Approximately 72 percent of parents believe that the school effectively engaged parents and families. Rockport Middle/High School holds an open house at the start of the year during which parents are given the course expectations and syllabus, along with the teachers' contact information. The high school hosts a curriculum night and a course selection night to inform parents about their child's curriculum options. Rockport Middle/High School has recently improved its communication to parents through various technological venues. All parents have access to Internet Parental Access Support System (IPASS), where they can view their child's grades online. In the middle school, IPASS is open to parents at each quarter's midterm and at the end of each quarter. Parents can also request a bi-weekly progress report. In the high school, IPASS is open to parents throughout the year. During the 2012-2013 school year, Rockport switched to a new user-friendly website system. All teachers and students now have an email address and teachers have an individual website. Parents have a username and password that allows them access to their child's class and teacher expectations. The Rockport Middle/High School principal updates a blog to keep parents informed on school events, achievements, fundraisers and other relevant information. The principal also has a school Twitter account that provides updates on school events. A monthly "Coffee with Conrad" gives parents an opportunity to meet with the principal and to discuss school issues informally. Email blasts and Connect Ed are both used to send urgent messages to parents and to promote school events. School publications also keep parents involved. In the middle school, communication envelopes are sent to parents every Thursday to inform them of upcoming events. The daily announcements and the school newsletter are both available on the website. Parents are actively involved as members of multiple committees. Rockport Middle/High School has two school management councils that meet once a month. Parent volunteers are also included on hiring committees for potential incoming staff members. Many parents are also involved in local community organizations that work closely with the school. Teachers, guidance counselors, and secretarial staff reach out to parents who are less connected by email through phone calls. As a result, parents are continually included and engaged in their child's education at Rockport Middle/High School. (self-study, parents, teachers, secretaries)

The school develops many productive parent, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support student learning. Formal parent partnerships include the school management council and hiring committees. Community partnerships include the Rotary Club, REF, PTO, and FRA. The Education Foundation for Rockport (EFR) funds in-school fieldtrips, the interactive classroom program, day trips to area colleges and universities, and Virtual High School (VHS) online courses. The PTO raises money for classroom projects and activities. FRA funds the athletic programs and the improvement of athletic facilities,

including the refinishing of the gymnasium floor. Rockport Music supports collaboration between music students at Rockport Middle/High School and visiting or resident musicians. Many of the musicians come into the school to teach students and to perform free concerts within the building. Students use the Shalin Liu Music Hall free of charge. In addition, students are also given free tickets for most performances at the Shalin Liu. Many local businesses provide support to Rockport Middle High School in the form of scholarships, donations, and internship programs. The Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce also works with students to provide internship opportunities. Students may take courses at Salem State University and North Shore Community College under the dual enrollment program. Consequently, there are many productive partnerships between Rockport Middle/High School and the community that support and enrich student learning. (self-study, parents, teachers, students)

### **Commendations**

1. The ongoing building maintenance
2. The parent involvement in the school that supports a strong home and school partnership
3. The community commitment to continued expansion of technology through capital needs funding
4. The varied methods of parent communications
5. The multiple community and business partnerships

### **Recommendations**

1. Provide additional professional development for all staff in the area of technology and technology support to ensure the delivery of curriculum, instruction and programs for students to achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
2. Initiate and implement a plan to ensure that all departments have input into the budget development process
3. Ensure that the heating system provides more consistent temperature levels throughout the building
4. Improve general cleanliness throughout the building

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

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty days (60) of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts on the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact which the change has had on the school's ability to meet the Standards for Accreditation. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix on page 15. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two-Year 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.

In closing, the members of the Rockport Middle/High School Visiting Team wish to express their appreciation to the entire school staff, students, and community of Rockport Middle/High School for the hospitality that was extended to the team during its visit to the school. The team found all members of the school community welcoming and eager to participate in the work of the visiting team and unified by their common goal to improve Rockport Middle/High School.

**Rockport Middle/High School  
NEASC Accreditation Visit  
October 6-9, 2013**

**Visiting Committee**

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| <p>Paul Daigle, Chair<br/>Retired Superintendent<br/>New England Association of School &amp; Colleges<br/>North Falmouth, MA 02556</p> <p>Paul Vieira, Assistant Chair<br/>Principal<br/>East Bridgewater High School<br/>East Bridgewater, MA 02333</p> <p>Matt Simms, Social Studies<br/>Ipswich High School<br/>Ipswich, MA 01938</p> <p>Jeffrey Ogden, Assistant Principal<br/>Tyngsboro High School<br/>Tyngsboro, MA 01879</p> <p>Cindy Clark, Math<br/>Narragansett Regional High School<br/>Baldwinville, MA 01436</p> <p>Patrick Kelley, Social Studies<br/>Sharon High School<br/>Sharon, MA 02067</p> <p>Lindsay Roumelis, Visual Arts<br/>Tahanto Regional Middle High School<br/>Boylston, MA 01505</p> <p>Susie Eriole, Guidance<br/>Shrewsbury High School<br/>Shrewsbury, MA 01545</p> | <p>Erik Juergens, World language<br/>Springfield Central High School<br/>Springfield, MA 01109</p> <p>Hugh Morrison, Math<br/>Haverhill High School<br/>Haverhill, MA</p> <p>Marylou Sambatakos, Math<br/>Lynnfield High School<br/>Lynnfield, MA 01940</p> <p>Kate Messmer, English<br/>Hampshire Regional High School<br/>West Hampton, MA 01027</p> <p>Karen Russell, English<br/>Lexington High School<br/>Lexington, MA 02421</p> <p>Peter Bangs, Science<br/>Dartmouth High School<br/>Dartmouth, MA 02748</p> <p>Janice Howard, Special Education<br/>Triton Regional High School<br/>Byfield, MA 01922</p> |
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## NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

### Commission on Public Secondary Schools

#### SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

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

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

# NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

## Commission on Public Secondary Schools

### List of Commendations and Recommendations

#### Commendations

##### Core Values, Beliefs and Learning Expectations

1. The extensive research used in developing the core values, beliefs and learning expectations
2. The commitment of teachers in the middle school to embedding the values, beliefs and learning expectations into everyday learning
3. The positive school culture displayed throughout the building on posters and reflected in student behavior
4. The mutual respect between students and staff
5. The commitment to a formal review process of CV&B and learning expectations

##### Curriculum

1. The commitment of teachers to professional development that impacts curriculum design and implementation
2. The adoption of a curriculum model that emphasizes critical thinking and other 21<sup>st</sup> century skills
3. The commitment to further tailoring the school-wide rubrics for student learning expectations to meet the needs of all students
4. The informal efforts of teachers to make cross-disciplinary connections to enhance curriculum development
5. The embedding of authentic learning experiences within the curricula
6. The pursuit of alternate funding sources to support the development and delivery of curriculum

##### Instruction

1. The middle school's collaboration regarding cross-disciplinary learning
2. The middle school's integration of technology to enhance curriculum
3. The high school teachers extensive support of students in after-school extra-help sessions
4. The middle school and high school faculties' successful implementation of authentic instruction

##### Assessment of and for Student Learning

1. The clearly articulated school-wide 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations for student learning

2. The ongoing engagement in the development of school-wide analytic rubrics that reflect the school-wide expectations
3. The implementation and use of Galileo at the middle school for data analysis and assessment creation
4. The variety of assessments used by faculty
5. The regular collaboration at the middle school level for purposes of improving assessments and student performance
6. The provision of timely and corrective feedback to students by faculty
7. The use of technology in middle school classrooms that aids in assessment and feedback

### **School Culture and Leadership**

1. The pride that the students and staff take in Rockport Middle High School
2. The high standards and expectations for students both academic and behavioral
3. The effective integration of the TASC program at the middle school
4. The meaningful and appropriate feedback of student learning provided by administration
5. The class size that allows teachers to meet most students' needs
6. The core values and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills exhibited and implemented throughout RMHS
7. The active involvement of teachers in extracurricular activities
8. The inclusive, collaborative leadership provided by the building principal

### **School Resources for Learning**

1. The various methods used to identify at-risk students
2. The numerous ways the school communicates with and informs families about school programs and student needs
3. The use of assessment and survey data by the guidance department to design and conduct effective programs
4. The commitment of the nursing staff to serve the health needs of staff and students
5. The inclusion of all students with disabilities in the regular classroom environment

### **Community Resources for Learning**

1. The ongoing building maintenance
2. The parent involvement in the school that supports a strong home and school partnership
3. The community commitment to continued expansion of technology through capital needs funding
4. The varied methods of parent communications
5. The multiple community and business partnerships

## **Recommendations**

### **Core Values, Beliefs and Learning Expectations**

1. Develop and implement a plan to ensure all parents are aware and understand the school's core values, beliefs and learning expectations
2. Ensure that all constituent groups are included in the school's planned reviews of its core values, beliefs, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
3. Provide the opportunity for parents to be more engaged in the development of core values, beliefs and learning expectations
4. Provide ongoing professional development to assist in the revision and review of rubrics
5. Develop and implement a plan to ensure the school's analytic rubrics are used to drive the assessment of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations in every classroom

### **Curriculum**

1. Ensure the integration of the adopted common curriculum format into all courses at the middle and high school levels
2. Build a consensus on the implementation of school-wide rubrics as they relate to curriculum design
3. Develop and implement a process to ensure the curriculum emphasizes inquiry, problem-solving and higher order thinking.
4. Establish a formal process to use assessment data to inform curriculum design
5. Implement a formal process to ensure the alignment between the written and taught curricula
6. Develop and implement a vertically articulated curriculum
7. Design strategies to oversee school-wide curriculum development and implementation

### **Instruction**

1. Develop and implement a process to ensure teachers' instructional practices include actively engaging students in cross-disciplinary learning, emphasizing inquiry, problem-solving and higher order thinking
2. Ensure teachers adjust their instructional practices by strategically differentiating and using formative assessments
3. Provide opportunities for teachers to collaboratively engage in professional discourse focused on instructional practices

### **Assessment of and for Student Learning**

1. Establish effective school-wide analytic rubrics to measure 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
2. Report individual student's progress in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations to those students and their families
3. Communicate the school's progress in achieving the school's learning expectations to the school's community

4. Develop and implement a process for curriculum coordination for non-core departments to improve assessment outcomes
5. Provide formal opportunities for common collaboration time for teachers and administrators to examine a wide range of student work to improve assessment outcomes
6. Initiate and collect feedback from current students and graduates for the purpose of improving assessment outcomes
7. Develop and implement a process to ensure all teachers regularly use formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improved student learning
8. Develop and implement a process to regularly review and revise grading and reporting practices to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning

### **School Culture and Leadership**

1. Evaluate the current schedule to better meet student learning needs and provide time for formal collaboration among all staff
2. Implement formal professional development across all grade levels for the purposes of improved student learning
3. Review the advisory program at the high school to determine its effectiveness in having another adult in the school who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and institute any necessary changes

### **School Resources for Learning**

1. Increase access to computer labs and additional technology for all students
2. Provide adequate library staffing to ensure active participation that supports the RMHS curriculum
3. Increase student and staff access to library/media services before, during, and after school

### **Community Resources for Learning**

1. Provide additional professional development for all staff in the area of technology and technology support to ensure the delivery of curriculum, instruction and programs for students to achieve the school's 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations
2. Initiate and implement a plan to ensure that all departments have input into the budget development process
3. Ensure that the heating system provides more consistent temperature levels throughout the building
4. Improve general cleanliness throughout the building