Steven C. Meyer, Principal
Athol High School
Athol, MA 01331

March 21, 2014

Dear Steve:

On behalf of the Committee on Public Secondary Schools, I am pleased to submit the final
version of the decennial evaluation report which you and I discussed in its draft form. As the
chair of the visiting committee, I am the one individual authorized to make changes. Therefore,
based on our mutual review of the draft, this final version includes all of the revisions that I
judged to be appropriate. The Committee has asked that I remind you that in accordance with its
policy, no further changes will be made to the report.

May I remind you of the Committee policy which requires that the evaluation report be sent to
the following persons or office within 60 days of its receipt from the chair of the visiting
committee:

- superintendent of schools
- school committee
- members of the faculty
- state department of education
- public library or town office
- appropriate news media

Following the official release of the evaluation report, please send a copy of the report to each
member of the visiting committee. In addition, I have sent two copies of the final evaluation
report to the Committee office as required.

Sincerely,

Howard J. Gilmore

cc: Anthony T. Polito, Superintendent of Schools
     Edward J. Gallagher III, Associate Director
     Nancy Melbourne, Chair, School Committee

New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Committee on Public Secondary Schools

Report of the Visiting Committee

Athol High School

Athol, Massachusetts

November 17 – November 20, 2013

Howard Gilmore, Chair

Barbara Fecteau, Assistant Chair

Steven Meyer, Principal

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 Athol 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 Athol 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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

APPENDICES

A. Roster of Visiting Committee Members

B. Commission Policy on Substantive Change

C. List of Commendations and Recommendations

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 four Commissions: the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), the Commission on American and International Schools Abroad (CAISA), and the Commission on Public Schools (CPS), which consists of the Commission on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS), the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI), and the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools (CPEMS).

As the responsible agency for matters of the evaluation and accreditation of public secondary school member institutions, CPSS requires visiting committees to assess the degree to which the evaluated schools meet the qualitative Standards for Accreditation of the Commission. Those Standards are:

> Teaching and Learning Standards
> > 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 Commission's visiting committee, and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own self-study and the valid recommendations of the visiting committee and those identified by the Commission in the Follow-Up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school be reevaluated at least once every ten years and that it show continued progress addressing identified needs.

Preparation for the Evaluation Visit - The School Self-Study

A steering committee of the professional staff was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Athol High School, a committee of five 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.

The self-study of Athol High School extended over a period of 26 school months from April 2011 to November 2013. The visiting committee was pleased to note that students, teachers, parents and community members joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations.

Public schools evaluated by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's mission, learning expectations, and unique student population. In addition to using the Self-Study Guides developed by a representative group of New England educators and approved by the Commission, Athol 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 it had been approved by the entire professional staff.

The Process Used by the Visiting Committee

A visiting committee of 16 evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Athol High School. The Committee members spent four days in Athol, reviewed the self-study documents which had been prepared for their examination, met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students and parents, shadowed students, visited classes, and interviewed teachers to determine the degree to which the school meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented public schools and central office administrators diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Athol High School.

The visiting committee built its professional judgment on evidence collected from the following sources:
- review of the school's self-study materials
- forty-eight hours shadowing 16 students for a half day
- numerous informal observations in and around the school
- tours of the facility
- individual meetings with 32 teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning
- individual and 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 Commission Standards.

This report of the findings of the visiting committee will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Secondary Schools, which will make a decision on the accreditation of Athol High School.

School and Community Summary

The Athol-Royalston Regional School District serves the towns of Athol and Royalston. Both towns are located in Northern Worcester County of Cenral Massachusetts. Together the towns comprise approximately 70 square miles and are located approximately 70 miles northwest of Boston and 40 miles north of Worcester. The location places the town within reasonable commuting distance of a number of urban areas, institutions of higher learning and a variety of cultural actiities. The population of Athol is 11,299 and the population of Royalston is 1,254.

Athol and Royalston can best be described as rural New England communities. Athol is a mill town where the L. S. Starrett Company remains the largest employer and a company that has given the town the nickname "Tool Town." Other major employers include Athol Memorial Hospital, the Athol Royalston Regional School District, and Hannaford Supermarkets. At the time of this report, retail employment oppportunities are expected to climb as a new plaza is being built in the town. In Royalston, a majority of residents are employed outside the town, with several families running homesteads and family farms.

Athol High School is located on the southeast side of Athol at the junction of routes 32 and 2A (Main Street) on the shores of Lake Ellis. The building and campus are adjacent to a Massachusetts State Police barracks. Just beyond the police barracks is a fire station and Athol Memorial Hospital. Most students in both communities are dependent on district-provided buses or private transportation to travel to and from school. A late bus is provided for both middle school and high school students on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays to allow students time to participate in some activities or to receive additional support or extra help.

A 10-member school committee, comprising seven members from Athol and three from Royalston, governs the Athol-Royalston Regional School District. Enrollment trends for both the district and the school have been in decline. In 2008, the district had an enrollment of 1,845 students and the high school had 523 students. The 2013 school year enrollment at Athol High School was 389 students. There were a total of 1,493 students K-12 enrolled in the Athol-Royalston Regional School District in 2013. Athol-Royalston Middle School has 429 students in grades five through eight. Students in grades K-4 attend one of four elementary schools in the district. Royalston Community school has 142 students. Riverbend School has an enrollment of 113 students. Sanders Street has 128 students, and the Pleasant Street School is the largest elementary school in the district with 275 students.

At Athol High School, the portion of students who receive free or reduced lunch is 52 percent. Twenty-four percent of Athol High School students receives special education services. The ethnic composition of Athol High School's student population is 90.7 percent White, 4.1 percent Hispanic, 2.8 percent African-American, .3 percent Native American, and 2.8 percent Multi-Racial.

The faculty and school administration have focused a great deal of improvement efforts on helping more students to achieve a diploma from Athol High School. Through a variety of credit recovery opportunities extended to students at-risk for failure or retention, Athol High School has improved its graduation rate from 60.2 percent to 76.3 percent in just two years. Guidance has expanded the partnership with Mount Wachusett Community College and the staff has expanded the number of

Advanced Placement courses. These efforts have increased opportunities for student to increase the number of challenging courses they take during high school.

These collaborative efforts to better prepare students to consider life after high school has resulted in an increase, from 80 percent in 2010 to 89 percent in 2012, in the number of students who have committed to educational opportunities after graduation. During that same time period, the socio-economic challenges of the student population, combined with a decrease in financial aid and private-school endowments in a tough economy, has resulted in an increase in the number of graduates choosing two-year public colleges from 31 percent to 53 percent. Many of these students were accepted to their first-choice public or private four year college, but were financially prohibited from being able to attend immediately after high school.

The district has worked with the community and the Massachusetts School Building Authority to promote the next phase of capital improvement for the district's schools. A new elementary school has been proposed and will be voted on by district voters in the near future. The plan is for the district to build the badly needed elementary facility to help reduce expenditures from students choosing to attend schools outside the district. In fiscal year 2011, the Athol-Royalston Regional School District paid $3.5 million dollars to other school districts in school choice funds and tuitions. This expense comprised 13.5 percent of a total district budget of $25.9 million dollars. Athol High School has significant facilities needs. The district has submitted Statements of Interest with the SMBA for a new roof and updates to the boys and girls locker rooms. However, those projects were not approved for financial support from the state and those facilities needs remain a priority for the high school.

The schools in the district and the communities of Athol and Royalston are poised to make a great leap forward. That progress will depend on the willingness of the towns and the schools to work collaboratively toward making financial and educational improvements to badly needed facilities. The school district has worked with the towns to craft a plan that will reduce school-choice-out expenditures. It is hoped that these efforts will keep more financial and educational resources in the Athol-Royalston schools and ultimately generate revenue through school choice.

ATHOL HIGH SCHOOL STATEMENT OF CORE VALUES

Athol High School is committed to providing the academic, civic and social foundation for students to become life-long learners and productive, creative and healthy citizens of a 21st century global society. We strive for students to understand the value of academic excellence, integrity, personal responsibility, self-discipline, and a strong work ethic.

ATHOL HIGH SCHOOL LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

Academic

Students will be able to:
Carefully and critically read for understanding and application.
Write effectively in a variety of forms.
Use a variety of technologies to appropriately retrieve, synthesize and communicate information.
Collaborate productively in a variety of learning environments.
Analyze, interpret, and evaluate problems using a variety of resources and strategies.

Civic/Social

Students will be able to:
Understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities as students and citizens.
Demonstrate growth of character through personal responsibility, ethical behavior, and personal health and fitness.

Beliefs About Student Learning

At Athol High School we believe learning happens best when students…
- Develop a strong work ethic and sense of academic integrity.
- Take risks to push beyond current knowledge.
- Develop self-confidence, self-respect and dignity.
- Engage in goal setting, self-assessment and reflection.

At Athol High School we believe learning happens best when Athol High School staff…
- Provide an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- Connect learning to the world beyond high school.
- Have clear expectations for student academic performance.
- Provide individual support in and beyond the class period.
- Connect learning between subjects, courses and content areas.
- Inspire students to learn, make learning interesting and engaging.
- Model behaviors, actions and thinking for students.

Teaching and Learning Standard

1   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 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, as well as district and school community priorities.

Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations

Conclusions

The Athol High School community worked to include the community, students, and staff in a collaborative and inclusive process to identify and commit to its core values and beliefs about learning. In the spring of 2011, Athol High School formed a steering committee and subcommittees focused on preparing for the NEASC visit. During the same school year, Athol High School's School Improvement Council looked for community input to develop new core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. The School Improvement Council used the Partnership for 21st Century Learning's website to guide community involvement in the development of the core values, beliefs, and learning expectations for the school. School leaders indicated that community members were actively encouraged to participate in the development of the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. On September 27, 2011, community leaders from a variety of local organizations, the school committee, and some community members attended an open house with the stated goal of contributing their ideas, thoughts, and concerns to the Athol High School staff. Meanwhile, the principal at the high school, using the research model provided by the 21st century learning website, created a Core Values Leadership Team and trained more than 40 students. These students facilitated meetings with community members regarding the development of core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. Based on the information gathered, the Core Values Leadership team developed a survey which was distributed to students and staff. The survey results became the basis for the core values and beliefs developed by the faculty. In the fall of 2011, the Athol High School faculty revisited its mission statement, core values, and learning expectations and reviewed similar documents from other schools. In January 2012, the Athol High School faculty approved the new statement on core values and beliefs. Because the school engaged the school community in a collaborative, inclusive process informed by some research they have developed a set of core values, beliefs, and learning expectations in which all constituents have ownership. (self-study, opening meeting, meeting with parents, evidence box, Core Values Subcommittee meeting, interviews with students, Athol High School 2014-2015: A Vision for a Tiered System of Support, Endicott survey)

Athol High School has 21st century learning expectations for all students that address academic, social, and civic competencies and the staff recently approved school-wide analytic rubrics that identify targeted high levels of achievements and are challenging and measurable. Athol High School staff has identified five academic learning expectations**:** reading, writing, technology, collaboration, and critical thinking - problem solving. The civic/social expectations focus on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and on the growth of personal character. In October 2013, the Athol High School staff approved analytic rubrics for all these expectations. Each rubric includes four levels of assessment including Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Deficient. Each rubric is broken into three and six subcategories. Although some teachers posted the new rubrics in their classrooms, very few have begun incorporating pieces of the rubrics into their assessments. At this point, there has been little discussion about how teachers will report, use, and analyze the rubrics.

Because the school has created challenging and measurable 21st century learning expectations along with corresponding analytic rubrics, there is great potential for teachers to assess student learning

using these rubrics. (self-study, information box, interviews with students, interviews with teachers, meeting with Core Values Subcommittee)

Although Athol High School spent significant time developing core values, beliefs, and learning expectations, they have not yet been fully implemented or internalized by the school in terms of driving curriculum, instruction, and assessment in every classroom, nor guiding the school's policies, procedures, decisions, and resource allocations. The core values, beliefs, and learning expectations and the corresponding rubrics are posted in many classrooms, but they are not consistently addressed during a class period. The core values and beliefs of the school do manifest themselves in the classroom in an informal way. For example, some teachers are giving assignments that encourage students to push beyond their current knowledge, develop self-confidence, and engage in goal setting. In some classes students are asked to self-assess or reflect on their work. However, teachers are not yet explaining the connection between the assignments in class and the learning expectations. As a result, students are not familiar with the core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. The majority of students who were asked about the school's core values could not identify them. There are inconsistencies in the school's major documents in regard to the core values and beliefs. The High School Curriculum Articulation Plan, which was approved in the spring of 2013, references the 21st century learning expectations at Athol High School, but it does not mention either the core values or beliefs of the school. However, the learning expectations that apply to each unit are listed. The 2013-2014 program of studies - both online at the school's website and in paper form - still lists the previous mission statement of the school. On the other hand, the student handbook and the Athol High School Accelerated Improvement Plan for 2013-2014, clearly indicate that the core values, beliefs, and learning expectations are starting to drive policy decisions. The Athol High School Accelerated Improvement Plan recognizes that the school curriculum, instruction, assessment and data analysis processes need significant work. The Athol High School Accelerated Improvement Plan for 2013-2014 also states that in the future a school-based assessment team will help implement school-wide rubrics. The Accelerated School Improvement Plan indicates that a variety of changes are planned for subsequent school years. Those plans include the creation of an inclusive school culture task force which will be involved in organizing a more effective advisory program. After the distribution of first quarter report cards in advisory, students for the first time reflected on their academic performance and subsequently met with their advisor. Teachers also hope that civic and social expectations will be incorporated into advisory. It is clear that Athol High School has been experimenting with change for years. However, those changes seemed abrupt and lacked direct correlation with the school's previous mission statement. In the past few years, there was a movement toward more college-preparatory classes and GPA moved to a 4.0 scale, but parents and students indicated that the movement toward Advanced Placement courses came at the expense of honors and practical skills classes. Furthermore, there is now evidence to suggest that those changes came as a consequence of the school's former mission statement. Also, three years ago, Athol High School experimented with a seven-period rotating schedule. Students indicated that the schedule was frustrating and that many students suffered academically. Shortly thereafter, the school returned to a rotating block schedule. In the meantime, a basic credit recovery program was instituted. Originally, the credit recovery program consisted of teachers developing packets of material for students to complete in order to receive credit for the course. At this point, however, research-based change is minimal at best. Although the school used an inclusive process to develop the core values and beliefs about learning, the school has not fully committed to them to drive the decision-making process as it relates to curriculum, instruction and assessment. (self-study, teachers interviews, evidence box, classroom observation, student shadowing, facilities tour, the

Athol High School Accelerated Improvement Plan for 2013-3014, the student handbook, school website)

Athol High School does not currently have a plan to review and revise its core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, as well as on district and school community priorities. The Athol High School Accelerated Improvement Plan for 2013-2014 indicates that a school culture task force will be in place by December 2013. This group will be instrumental in reviewing and revising the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations to ensure they reflect the Athol High School community. When the school develops a regular plan for the review and revision of its core values, beliefs and learning expectations based on research and the data generated from their school-wide data then they will be ensured that current school and district priorities focus on student learning. (self-study, evidence box, meeting with the Core Values Subcommittee, teacher interviews, Athol High School Accelerated Improvement Plan)

Commendations:

1. The core values, beliefs and learning expectations that were developed through a collaborative process

2. The core value statement is concise, allowing for clear interpretation and easy understanding

3. The analytic rubrics for each academic, social, and civic learning expectation

4. The Athol High School Accelerated Improvement Plan for 2013-2014

5. The credit recovery program

Recommendations:

1. Develop and implement a plan that includes all stake-holders in the process of regular evaluation and review of core values, learning beliefs and 21st century learning expectations that is informed in part by current research and student achievement data of its 21st century learning expectations

2. Ensure the school's core values are actively reflected in the culture of the school and that they drive decision-making as it relates to curriculum, instruction and assessment in every classroom, and also guide the school's procedures and resource allocations

3. Provide training and support to staff in using the school-wide rubrics

2 Curriculum

The written and taught curriculum is designed to result in all students achieving the school's 21st century expectations for student learning. The written curriculum is the framework within which a school aligns and personalizes the school's 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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.

<center>**Curriculum**</center>

Conclusions

Some of the curriculum at Athol High School is designed to ensure that all students practice and achieve each of the school's 21st century learning expectations. Although the High School Curriculum Articulation Plan has documents that contain 21st century learning expectations some of the units do not explicitly make reference to them. There is no evidence that the school has collected and reviewed data regarding the school's learning expectations for the purpose of making decisions to add or delete courses. In some units, it is clearly stated where students specifically practice 21st century learning expectations. Some teachers appear to understand the learning expectations that they are responsible for teaching. Most work samples viewed did not reflect that all students practice 21st century learning expectations. When the High School Articulation Plan is fully implemented and all curriculum identifies opportunities for students to practice and achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations then student learning will be positively impacted. (High School Curriculum Articulation Plan, teacher and administrative interviews, Curriculum Sub-committee, student work samples)

The curriculum documents are written in a format that includes units of study with essential questions, concepts, content, skills, the school's 21st century learning expectations, instructional strategies, and assessment practices. Most of these units clearly include essential questions, concepts, content, skills, 21st century learning expectations and instructional strategies. Some of the units include the use of school-wide rubrics. The High School Curriculum Articulation Plan has units for most subject areas. However, the mathematics units do not include many of the updated topics outlined in the 2011 Massachusetts State Frameworks. The types of assessments used for all subjects varied. As indicated in the Endicott survey, only 25 percent of the staff feels that the curriculum emphasizes cross-disciplinary learning. Although the High School CurriculumArticulation Plan exists, there is a need to update the lack of detail in suggested instrumental strategies, scope and sequence for each course and the inconsistent use of school-wide rubrics for assessment impact the consistency of content delivery and effects student learning of 21st century learning expectations. (High School Curriculum Articulation Plan, teacher and administration interviews, Curriculum Sub-committee interviews, student work)

On occasion, the written curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem-solving, higher order thinking, cross-disciplinary learning, authentic learning opportunities and informed and ethical use of technology. There was not evidence of any structure in place to ensure that the curriculum consistently emphasizes these instructional practices. In some written units there was evidence of cross-disciplinary teaching. In particular, a Spanish lesson demonstrated that the learning content was tied to music and history of the time period. Additionally, some units contain authentic learning activities. In the video viewed in the open panel presentation there was evidence of authentic learning when the students were working on the water testing in science. The integration of technology was noted in the unit 1 plan for AP Chemistry with online collaboration that include writing documents in Google Docs. The UBD unit plan for Ecology found in the curriculum box was designed for providing depth of understanding. A physics class provided opportunities for higher order thinking during a lab. However, these types of lessons were not seen frequently and consistently throughout the school and the written curriculum. Although a document exists, there is no avenue for reflection on whether or not the depth of understanding and higher ordered thinking skills are consistently found in all subjects, courses, and units and as a result student

learning is affected. (High School Curriculum Articulation Plan, teacher meetings, opening panel presentation, classroom observations, student work)

There is an absence of alignment of the written and taught curriculum. While some teachers were able to reference and cite where and how they might be using the written curriculum, there were very few examples of student work which showed a connection of content and skills along with the 21st century learning expectations. No formal process is in place by which the school validates that the taught curriculum is aligned with the written curriculum. The elimination of department chairs in the core subjects has eliminated teacher leadership whereby a content specialist checked to see if the curriculum was appropriate and aligned. Currently, individual teachers are responsible to make sure they are teaching the written curriculum. Although the documents exist, it is clear that there is inconsistent implementation from classroom to classroom and subject to subject and as a result, students do not have equitable and consistent opportunity to practice and achieve the learner expectations because the written and taught curriculum are not aligned. (teacher and administrative interviews, student work, classroom observations)

Curricular coordination and vertical articulation happens informally and infrequently between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district. Coordination exists among some academic areas or classes, but no evidence suggested that this occurs on a regular or formal basis. The High School Curriculum Articulation Plan was written and put into place four years ago. The assistant superintendent is the curriculum leader for the district. Common planning time is not available; however, departments do meet occasionally to discuss curriculum during faculty meetings or during school wide professional development days. Coordination does not exist between sending schools and the high school in terms of curriculum development. When curriculum is discussed and aligned between and among departments and with sending schools, students are more effectively able to achieve academic excellence. (High School Curriculum Articulation Plan, interview with Curriculum Sub-committee, interview with central office personnel, teacher interviews, self-study)

While the staffing levels are adequate and the resources of the library/media center are more than adequate, the limited instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, and facilities make it difficult to fully implement the curriculum, including the co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities. The staffing levels are adequate to run all of the core courses, but some students and staff feel that course selection is limited. One attempt to expand the course offerings is the opportunity to participate in Virtual High School courses. The improvements made for connectivity access to the Internet supports this and other curriculums. The average class size is 19.2 students. However, the size varies from class to class. The resources in the library have been updated recently to include more technology, an extensive online database, and access to a variety of e-Books. Students have the opportunity to use computers in the library and guidance office. The library /media center is open before and after school and teachers are also able to bring their classes to the library when needed for instructional purposes. While the majority of students (59.6 percent) feels that they are provided with the instructional materials, the staff overwhelmingly disagrees. Only 22.9 percent of the teachers feels that they have sufficient and appropriate materials. The English department does not have enough acceptable copies of required texts. The staff feels that the facilities do not support the implementation of the curriculum. Only 11 percent states that the facilities are adequate. The age of the facility hinders technological growth since many classrooms have only two electrical outlets. Insufficient instructional materials, equipment, supplies, and facilities lead to an incomplete implementation of curriculum for

both co-curricular and other learning opportunities. (data profile, self-study, Endicott survey, student and teacher interviews, facilities tour)

The district has not provided 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. Although the block schedule has sufficient time to plan there is no organizational coordination for staff to meet in order to work on curriculum or to connect with other discipline areas to infuse integration of standards. Department budgets are insufficient, particularly in providing text books and up-to-date technology for all staff. Some teachers feel that at times funds for basic instructional supplies are not available. It was suggested by some staff that professional development is needed to implement the school-wide rubrics. While the curriculum document has been distributed to all staff, there is no established, ongoing process for implementation, review and revision. As a result of the lack of a formal structure in place for curriculum review and revision using assessment results, the school is unable to ensure that the curriculum meets the academic needs of its students as stated in its core values, beliefs and 21st century learning expectations. (Curriculum Subcommittee, administrative meeting, teacher interview, self-study)

Commendations:

1. The High School Curriculum Articulation Plan

2. The updated school library /media center and its resources

3. The Virtual High School opportunity

Recommendations:

1. Ensure that opportunities for students to practice and achieve each of the schools 21st century learning expectations are clearly identified in curriculum documents

2. Ensure all curriculum is written in the school's common format and include units of study with essential questions, concepts, content, and skills, the school's 21st century learning expectations, instructional strategies, and assessment practices that include the use of school-wide analytic and course-specific rubrics

3. Develop and implement processes to ensure the written curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem-solving, higher order thinking, cross-disciplinary learning, authentic learning opportunities and informed and ethical use of technology

4. Develop and implement a plan to ensure there is clear alignment between the written and taught curriculum

5. Develop and implement a plan to vertically coordinate curriculum within departments at the high school and with sending schools in the district, as well as coordinate curricula among

departments at the high school

6. Provide adequate and appropriate instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies and facilities to implement the curriculum and for students to achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations

7. Develop and implement a plan to provide the school's professional staff with sufficient time and resources for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum using assessment results and current research.

3   **Instruction**

The quality of instruction is the single most important factor in students' achievement of the school's 21st 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 21st century learning expectations.

2. Teachers' instructional practices support the achievement of the school's 21st 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.

Instruction

Conclusions

Teachers' instructional practices are occasionally examined to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations. Many classrooms display the documents related to the core values, and most teachers can discuss components of them. Teachers, who helped author the documents, also produced lessons that may reflect them. However, the use of these to inform instruction is infrequent at this time. The only formal system in place that requires teachers or administrators to document how instructional practices reflect what is stated in the core values or the learning expectations is the new Massachusetts state teacher evaluation system, which is also only in the beginning stages of use at Athol High School. Examination of instructional reflection is dependent on the individual teacher and is sporadic. Teachers report that the lack of department leaders or department meetings leaves little time for reflecting on instruction collaboratively. The awareness among the faculty of the existence of the core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations demonstrates that the examination of them, which is currently at the nascent stage, will be valuable in informing and strengthening instructional practice and thus increase student learning. (classroom observation, student shadowing, teacher interviews, student work, self-study)

There are intermittent examples of personalizing instruction, engaging student 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, and integrating technology being incorporated into teachers' instructional practices to support teaching and learning at Athol High School; however Athol High School is at the beginning stages of establishing expectations for consistent use of strategies and creating accountability for assimilating the language and strategies for 21st century learning expectations into all teachers' instructional practices. There is some evidence that teachers are personalizing instruction and 53.9 percent of the parents surveyed in the Endicott survey feel teachers are personalizing instruction for their child. However, only 29.9 percent of students believes that their teachers personalize their instruction. There is limited and sporadic evidence of instruction that engages students in cross-disciplinary learning. When interviewed, teachers are able to articulate examples of informal collaborative and interdisciplinary work, however no formal time is provided in the daily schedule or the professional development schedule for teachers to develop cross-disciplinary work. Some evidence exists that students are being engaged as active and self-directed learners. For example, informal observations and discussions with teachers in science classes and English classes revealed this is particularly true. Evidence revealed insufficient and inconsistent application of inquiry, problem-solving and higher order thinking in use across the school. An interview with a teacher revealed that the students are beginning to recognize higher order thinking questions. In some areas, students are asked to apply knowledge and skills to authentic tasks. Student engagement in self-assessment and reflection is limited, but during advisory period after the first progress report, students were asked to write a self-reflection. Across the school, there were several examples of teachers trying to integrate technology into instruction in spite of the modest resources that are available. Some students participate in internships and other authentic learning experiences. Teachers are aware of 21st century learning expectations, and express a desire to incorporate them as part of individual instructional practice, however, currently they are only doing so informally. As use of the 21st century learning expectations increases and becomes more consistent, the 21st century learning expectations will become

the driving force to guide and improve instruction at Athol High School. (teacher and administrative interviews, student shadowing, Endicott survey)

Some teachers adjust their instructional practice to meet the needs of each student by using formative assessment, especially during instructional time. Strategically differentiating and purposefully organizing group learning activities is rare. Some teachers are providing additional support and alternative strategies within the regular classroom. There is limited evidence of implementation or sustained use of formative assessment of any kind, and evidence exists that not all faculty members can define and correctly identify what formative assessment is. As a result, formative assessment is being used in a limited way to inform instruction. All of the aforementioned changes are a result of the school's newly adopted core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations. However, while all of these factors provide a basis for future changes in instructional practices at Athol High School, the core values, beliefs and 21st century learning expectations have had minimal impact on instruction. There is limited evidence that teachers at Athol High School are strategically differentiating instruction, although there is evidence of a plan developed for implementing tiered support. Teachers are clearly committed to student success and many offer project work or assignments that allow for student choice. However, evidence was not present that teachers are using data to differentiate tasks and assessments. Classroom observations and discussions with teachers reveal that students are often asked to work as partners, peer tutor, and are even placed in groups in some classes. However, evidence was not provided of purposeful group work in which students are working collaboratively to accomplish higher order thinking tasks, nor was there ample evidence of assessments that demonstrate students working collaboratively. Additional classroom support is inconsistent in the classrooms at Athol High School. Paraprofessional support was observed in some classrooms where there were multiple students. However other classrooms had students, sometimes with as many as 15 students, identified as having either an IEP or a 504 plan present in the classroom without additional support. The Strive classroom was observed with a ratio of four adults to five students. Very little evidence was provided that teachers are using multiple and varied instructional strategies to reach all students in a classroom. Many classrooms were observed in which students engaged in social activity and disengaged from instruction. Teachers expressed concern that students are not eager to be engaged in learning and that some parents are not supportive of their efforts to support instructional engagement. There is some accord with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations seen in classroom instruction. As teachers continue to adjust their instructional practice by strategically differentiating, using formative assessment and purposefully organizing group learning activities, instructional practice will continue to change and reflect the school's core values, beliefs and learning expectations. (faculty interviews, self-study, administration meetings, evidence box)

Teachers at Athol High School individually, informally and sporadically improve their instructional practices by using student achievement data from a variety of summative assessments with little evidence of consistent formative assessment, looking at student work, and using feedback from a variety of sources. All teachers are required, through the language in their current contract, to examine research and obtain three credits or the equivalent every three years. The school leadership and the teachers have begun to collaboratively engage in professional discourse focused on instructional practice during their professional development meetings. The principal of Athol High School is the head of the district-wide data committee and indicated that he and his administrative team at Athol High School have held meetings to look at and to analyze school data, as has the school data team. Due to his short tenure as principal, the demands placed by the district-wide professional development schedule, and the preparation for the NEASC visit, the principal expressed a struggle to use data

results such as MCAS data to inform professional development and to guide instructional practice. As a result, although there is a wealth of student and school data available, there is currently limited evidence that data is used to inform instructional practice in the school or maximize student performance. While teachers interviewed expressed individual processes for looking at student work, there is not evidence of any formal process for teachers to do so collaboratively or consistently. Teachers expressed concern that the elimination of department heads, the current schedule, and in-service professional development priorities which are state-mandated results in limited opportunities for teachers to communicate with each other or with the school administrative team. Teachers interviewed also expressed that there is no natural conduit for teacher communication or for input from staff to administration. Teachers, administrators, and central office staff each individually noted use of a "green" book: *Instructional Practices that Maximize Student Achievement: For teachers, by teachers* as a means for looking at current research. The assistant superintendent expressed that use of the text is designed to horizontally and vertically align curriculum and instructional strategies across the district. Although a tremendous amount of data exists, there is not a formal mechanism in place for looking at data to see how it will inform instruction. When teachers, individually and collaboratively are provided formal opportunities to engage in professional discourse, examine current research, receive feedback from a variety of sources including students and parents as well as examine student work and student achievement data then instructional practice will develop a foundation for improvement. (meeting with central office personnel, meeting with Self-Study Instruction Committee, meeting with principal and school leadership, Endicott survey)

Most teachers, as adult learners and reflective practitioners, maintain expertise in their content area and in content-specific instructional practices. Staff reports that they maintain expertise in their content areas through coursework and reading content-specific professional journals. The school committee ties teacher step increases to approved credits in professional continuing education. In professional discussions with teachers it was evident that many are reflective practitioners with working knowledge of their subject areas. A large number of their students (72.8 percent) reports that teachers are "knowledgeable about the subjects they teach." However, content-specific instructional practices, while used in some areas, especially those informed by specific training (e.g. Massachusetts Mathematics and Science Initiative (MMSI) grant), are not consistently implemented across the school. While teachers have maintained expertise in their content, evidence was not available that teachers have been reflective and collaborative in improving their content-specific instructional practices. (self-study, evidence bins, classroom observations, interviews, Endicott survey)

Commendations:

1. The student reflective practice held during advisory time after report cards are issued

2. The increasing use of technology during instruction

3. The many content savvy, creative, caring teachers who have pride and passion for their own lessons

Recommendations:

1. Implement a plan to ensure all teachers' instructional practices reflect the use of school-wide rubrics to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs and 21st century learning expectations

2. Develop and implement a formal plan for collecting a variety of school and student data based on school-wide rubric use in order to examine instructional practices

3. Provide formal opportunities for teachers for collaborative reflection on instructional practices

4. Increase opportunities for student reflective practice and ensure reflection on their work connects to the 21st century learning expectations and to the use of school-wide rubrics

5. Develop and implement a plan to train all teachers to use data to inform instruction

6. Develop and implement a plan to increase professional development time for teachers to improve instructional practice to meet the 21st century learning expectations

7. Provide formal opportunities and protocols for teachers to collectively examine student work and to collectively review student assessment data to refine instructional practices

8. Develop and implement a plan to review the alignment of instructional practices with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations

4   Assessment of and for Student Learning

Assessment informs students and stakeholders of progress and growth toward meeting the school's 21st 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 21st century learning expectations.

2. The school's professional staff communicates:
   - individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to students and their families
   - the school's progress in achieving the school's 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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.

Assessment

Conclusions

The professional staff occasionally employs a formal process, based on school-wide rubrics, to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. Athol High School professional staff has approved the school-wide analytic rubrics for academic and civic/social learning expectations on September 25, 2013. In the spring of 2013, the staff was provided the High School Curriculum Articulation Plan. Although the grading rubrics have been developed, the implementation of rubrics is in the infantile stages. Some progress has been made toward creating a unified approach to the assessment of school and student progress in achievement of the school's learning expectations, but it is limited. Administration recognizes that currently no formal process is in place to assess students based on the school-wide analytic rubrics and to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. Some staff members see a need for professional development in order to incorporate the school-wide rubrics into their individual classroom. To date, there has been no formal professional development on using school-wide rubrics to assess individual student's progress and whole school's progress toward achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. Currently no process is in place for collecting, analyzing, and reporting both individual student and the school's progress in achieving its school-wide learning expectations, neither are there any indicators in place to measure the school's success in meeting its expectations. The implementation of a formal process to employ the use of school-wide rubrics will ensure that every student, no matter course, level, or teacher, will be regularly assessed using these rubrics, and the school will then be able to determine the individual student's progress as well as the school's progress in achieving of its 21st century learning expectations. (self-study, teachers, administrators, students)

The school's professional staff provides limited communication of individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to students and their families as well as limited communication on the school's achievement progress to the school community. Students receive a syllabus with content objectives at the beginning of major units, and are advised what types of assessments will be used. However, the connection to the school-wide learning expectations is not consistently identified prior to each unit of study. The professional staff at Athol High School has made some inroads in the level of communicating individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to students and their families. While 72.6 percent of parents who responded to the Endicott survey agrees that formal reports are regularly used in communicating information, concerns, or praises there is no evidence that supports that this communication relates directly to achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations. In the fall of 2012, Athol parents were formally advised by communication through the mail about the new accountability based on Progress and Performance Index (PPI) and Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act Waiver that highlighted what is needed to ensure that all students are demonstrating growth and strong academic performance in order to achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations. The report emphasized the need for significant improvement in mathematics; as a result, the school increased the number of math courses that students needed to successfully complete prior to taking the MCAS in 10th grade; also, it refined curriculum to include common course assessments, and initiated a tiered instruction program for special needs students who need more content mastery and improved problem-solving skills.

The Athol community also receives information regarding the Athol student learning and achieving process on a regular basis. Beyond the usual progress/report cards, parents receive regular newsletters, timely information is posted on the Athol website by several departments, and the "One Call" telephone system is used for important school events. The school's 21st century learning expectations are not yet fully communicated in the fabric of the school. Stakeholders in the community, including members of the school board, show little evidence of understanding the connection between the learning expectations and Athol High School's core values and beliefs. When students are informed of their progress and the school community is informed of the school's progress in achieving the 21st century learning expectations then a foundation for improved student learning is established. (classroom observations, student shadowing, community members, Endicott survey)

Some professional staff collects and analyzes data, but they do not disaggregate data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement. Currently, teachers collect and analyze MCAS English, math, and biology tests from the previous year. Recently, a school-wide data team was formed by the new principal to analyze MCAS questions based on the district-wide protocol for examination of MCAS results. The MCAS test scores are analyzed to gain insight into areas of weakness within the curriculum. After the district-wide protocol is used to analyze questions in which the school's percent correct is mostly below the state average, the teachers identify the skills and knowledge that needs to be incorporated into the curriculum and instructional practice to increase student learning. Changes in curriculum are made in order to improve the students' skills and knowledge.   Although the results are shared with the entire staff, the only courses that are affected are biology, mathematics and English through grade 10. Students who fail with very low grades for the term are placed in a credit recovery program which allows them to earn up to a grade of 55 percent for the term grade. This program puts them in a better position to pass the course and ensures that they are improving their performance and keeps them on track for graduation. The extended day and extended year programs have helped Athol High School raise graduation rates from 60 percent to 76 percent in two years with a corresponding reduction in Athol High School's dropout rate.   Although a majority of the teachers use rubrics, the newly developed school-wide rubrics have not been fully implemented. Some individual teachers review summative and standardized test results. Common final exams are currently in place in core subjects.   Discussions, collaboration, and review of final exam assessments have not taken place. Teachers have not discussed inequities in achievement based on ethnicity, socioeconomic factors, gender, or language. A few teachers use formative assessments to adjust student learning by offering additional class support and one-on-one support. The implementation of a system to collect, disaggregate, and analyze data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement will ensure that all students engage in higher order thinking processes. (self-study, teacher interview, students, parents, teachers)

Prior to each unit of study, some teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21st century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed. While there is administrative expectation that prior to all summative assessments teachers provide students with study guides, the practice is inconsistent. According to the Athol High School self-study report, only 40 percent of the teachers articulates to their students what they are expected to know and be able to do prior to each unit of study. According to the survey, 42 percent of staff is undecided as to whether communication of school's learning expectations and corresponding rubrics are communicated to students, while 59 percent of students responding to the survey believes teachers explain what the learning expectations are before each unit.   Students are informed of objectives at the beginning of major units and are advised as to what types of assessments will be used to determine their

understanding. However, the connection to the school-wide learning expectations is not consistently identified prior to each unit of study. Not all students receive information about the content objectives at the beginning of major units or are advised what types of assessments will be used to determine their understanding. The connection to the school-wide learning expectations is not consistently identified prior to each unit of study.   While Athol High School has a Curriculum Articulation Plan, it does not appear that all departments have separate curriculum binders that include all correlating syllabi, scope and sequence, and methods of assessments. According to several teacher interviews, staff have not reviewed or revised their documents in light of current best practices. The lack of consistent communication to students of either applicable 21st century learning expectations or specific subject learning objectives with major units, creates gaps in students' understanding and hinders students' opportunities to meet the 21st century learning expectations and course specific learning goals. (Endicott survey, classroom observations, school administration, teacher interviews)

The administration has mandated all teachers provide students with rubrics prior to administering summative assessments. The use of study guides to prepare for exams is widespread, and in many cases students say they feel prepared for tests. Some students reported that study guides do not correspond to what is expected on the exam.   According to the Endicott survey, 71.9 percent of all students feels that they understand in advance what is expected on exams. In some areas, students are provided rubrics for projects, PowerPoint presentations, and papers. Students acknowledged the value of the rubrics as a learning tool. According to interviewed students, rubrics are used extensively in Advance Placement courses, but not quite as much in the other courses. When rubrics are used, students are well informed of the expectations on summative assessments. As a result of teachers providing students with corresponding rubrics prior to summative assessments students are informed of the expectations on summative assessments. (Endicott survey, student interviews, teacher interviews)

In each unit of study, teachers employ a range of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessments. Based on the self-study some teachers are using various formative assessments, including one-to-three sentence summary statements of understanding, verbal questioning, "thumbs up-thumbs down" and "ticket to leave." Even though the self-study states that a wide variety of assessment strategies are used, very few examples were modeled during the classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, or student work samples. The assessment strategies that were observed or mentioned consisted of homework review, "dip-sticking," and quizzes. Some teachers allow students to revise and redo assignments to increase student learning. Some teachers appear to understand and implement the use of formative assessments, but appear to lack a combination of rigor and higher ordered thinking practices within their lessons. Student engagement appears to be limited to comprehension and review. A review of both formative and summative assessments, which will prepare students to meet the school's 21st century learning expectations, is not practiced currently. Some teachers do provide annotated corrections and/or constructive comments on tests and lab reports. However, catalogued student work prepared for the NEASC visit does not fully support that point of view. Feedback consisted of checkmarks and/or a grade without comment. Many samples lacked a rubric describing how the teacher arrived at the assessment grade. Little student work was provided that demonstrated extensive feedback. Increased self-correction, expanded course rigor, and relevant and specific feedback that aligns with both the 21st century learning expectations and school-wide rubrics should be provided and will enhance student learning. (student work, self-study, classroom observations)

Some teachers collaborate informally on the creation, analysis, and revision of formative, common, and summative assessments. In the past, minimal professional development time has been provided for teachers to collaborate on the development and implementation of formative and summative assessments. In the past two years, teachers were provided time to develop, to create, or to revise common final exams. One example is the math teachers who met informally to develop common pretests to assess student preparedness. Based on MCAS analysis, the biology teachers created a set of benchmarks to assist the students in increasing their understanding of biological concepts. The English department worked on developing a common exam format and writing benchmarks for each grade level. A professional development schedule has been created that provides a full day on January 17th for assessment and data analysis, two hours on tiered and differentiated instruction on February 5th, and two hours on March 12th for educator evaluation. By contract, four hours per month is for teachers to formally spend time collaborating, sharing best practices, implementing school-wide rubrics and revising common, summative, and formative assessments. The professional staff has developed school-wide analytic rubrics, but they have not been integrated into the curriculum. The professional staff does not consistently employ a formal process, based on school-wide rubrics, to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. The lack of a formal process at Athol High School in the use of school-wide rubrics, to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations impacts student learning. (teacher interviews, self-study, student work, administrative meeting, Endicott survey)

Some teachers provide timely feedback, but it does not necessarily ensure students revise and improve their work because of the lack of corrective feedback. Based on the self-study, 59 percent of students who responded to the survey agrees that their work is assessed and corrected in a reasonable amount of time.   In the student samples provided, grading consisted of checkmarks and/or a grade without comment. The district created a Data Team, led by the Athol High School principal, whose task it is to determine the most effective way to use the information. Some teachers use formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning. Teachers in most content areas use a variety of assessments, quizzes, tests, and writing prompts throughout units of study. Some teachers use the results of their formative assessments to adapt their instructional strategies to ensure that all students understand the assignment. Teachers have not been provided the opportunity to collaborate on a regular basis for the express purpose of using formative assessment results to determine appropriate, necessary changes in instructional practices. AP English and AP Chemistry provide students with an opportunity to edit and rewrite with excellent commentary from the teachers. As part of the extended school day program, some teachers request students remain after school to master skills or topics with which they are struggling. Although some Athol High School teachers make adjustments to their instructional practices, it will only be when all teachers regularly use formative and common assessments to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning that significant improvement in student learning and understanding will occur. (teacher interviews, students, self-study, student work)

Some teachers and administrators, individually and collaboratively, to varying degrees examine a range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practice, including some of the following: student work, common course and common grade-level assessments, individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations, standardized assessments, data from sending schools, receiving schools, and

post-secondary institutions, and survey data from current students and alumni.   According to the self-study, students, staff, and parents suggest that some teachers use a variety of methods, such as tests, oral presentations, and projects to assess student learning. Historically, teachers and administrators have infrequently examined a range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practice. As part of the NEASC self-study, some student work was collected and reviewed. In teacher interviews, time was given as the overarching reason why evidence to support current curriculum is not being reviewed. Thirty-six percent of the teachers who responded to the survey agrees that school-wide grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised. Further, only 18 percent of Athol High School staff acknowledges the regular use of the school-wide analytic rubrics when assessing student work.   Common course and common grade-level assessments are utilized for most mid-term exams, and all finals. However, common assessments for specific units of study in courses with more than one section are quite limited. The District Data Team is currently examining data from MCAS and reviewing information from the DESE Data Warehouse Early Warning System to highlight students who may need more support and assistance in meeting the learning expectations. Currently, the school does not analyze data from sending schools, receiving schools, post-secondary institutions, and surveys from current students and alumni. When a range of evidence of student learning such as student work, common course and common grade-level assessments, individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations, standardized assessments, data from sending schools, receiving schools, and post-secondary institutions, and survey data from current students and alumni are individually and collaboratively examined by teachers and administrators on a consistent basis, focused improvement of instructional practices and curriculum revision will occur. (Endicott survey, teacher interview, panel presentation)

Grading and reporting practices are infrequently collaboratively reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning. At this point in time, the school has no required uniform grading policies, except that grading on attendance has been eliminated in all classes except physical education, and participation is only graded in physical education, world languages, and music courses. These changes were instituted in conjunction with the administration and the Athol Regional School Committee. Currently, teachers are free to devise any grading system, but it must be presented in the course syllabus that is presented to students, parents, and administration. According to students, teachers, and parents, grading practices across curricular areas are inconsistent. As a result of student and parental complaints about weighting of college preparatory, honors, and Advanced Placement courses, Athol High School changed the course weighting system. The new system of weighting incorporates the Massachusetts State University System and was approved by the staff and adopted by the school committee. The infrequent review of grading and reporting practices to ensure the alignment with the school's core values and beliefs impacts improvement in student learning. (teacher interview, students, self-study, parents)

Commendations:

1. The development of school-wide rubrics

2. The course syllabi which outlines grading practice, learning expectations, and objective

3. The grade 9 through 12 High School Curriculum Articulation plan

4. The increased graduation rate

5. All core departments have common final exams

6. The establishment of district and school-wide data teams

7. The new system of weighting that incorporates the Massachusetts State University System

Recommendations:

1. Develop and implement a formal process, based on the school-wide analytic rubrics, to assess individual student progress toward achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations

2. Develop and implement a formal process, using aggregate individual student achievement, to access the school's progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations

3. Develop and implement a process to communicate individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to students and their families

4. Develop and implement a process to communicate the school's progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to the school community

5. Ensure that prior to each unit of study, teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21st century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed

6. Provide formal opportunities for teachers to collaborate regularly on the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments

7. Ensure all teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback for students to revise and improve their work

8. Ensure a range of evidence of student learning such as student work, common course and common grade-level assessments, individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations, standardized assessments, data from sending schools, receiving schools, and post-secondary institutions, and survey data from current students and alumni are individually and collaboratively examined by teachers and administrators on a consistent basis, to provide focused improvement of instructional practices and curriculum revision

9. Develop and implement a plan to ensure grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised 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).

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 21st 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 board, superintendent, and principal are collaborative, reflective, and constructive in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations.

12. The school board and superintendent provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school.

Conclusions

The school community has generally built a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture; however, this culture has fostered neither student responsibility for learning nor a comprehensive sense of shared ownership, pride, and high expectations for all students. The school community implements various strategies to build a safe culture. Both students and staff practice evacuations and lockdowns. There is also a concerted effort to educate students about personal health and safety choices. For example, students are encouraged to sign a commitment to not text while driving. Several extra-curricular activities also focus on student health and safety. Such as the 84 (student-athletes that committed to abstaining from tobacco use) and a SADD group. Students also have strong relationships with their teachers, coaches and other building staff members. These relationships help foster safety for all members of the school community and help to build a positive learning environment. It is evident that the teachers and administration are deeply passionate about the students. In addition to teaching, many of them commit time to supervise extra-curricular activities. Various members of the staff help to build a respectful culture. This is done through student clubs including Best Buddies, the Catalyst Group, a non-elected student council, TAB (Training Active Bystanders), the Gay Straight Alliance, and the athletic program. Each of these groups helps to promote acceptance of differences and forms alliances among different types of students. The school community is somewhat involved in developing a supportive culture. Some parents and townspeople are very invested in the high school's athletics program. The Athletics Boosters Club raises significant funds and support for the teams. Beyond athletics, support is somewhat limited. This was evidenced in a discussion with the Drama Club advisor who shared that the district provides no funding for the drama productions. The productions are supported by grants, outside donations and ticket sales. During parent discussions, it was also apparent that they are mainly focused on supporting athletics. Student responsibility for learning is not ubiquitous. Most classes do not incorporate self-reflection of academic progress and performance. Finally, "shared ownership, pride, and expectations for all" is not apparent for about 50 percent of the student population as indicated in the Endicott survey. A significant number of students seem disengaged in learning and participating in meaningful ways beyond the classroom. The school community has diligently worked to build a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture; yet, this culture has not successfully fostered student responsibility for learning and has not created shared ownership, pride, and expectations for all as stated in their values, goals and beliefs. (panel presentation, students, teachers, parents, school leadership, Endicott survey)

The academic program at Athol High School is designed to be equitable, inclusive, and to foster heterogeneity, but in practice, students are enrolled in classes that are frequently homogeneously grouped and inconsistently rigorous. With regard to class size, course options and availability, instruction time, and extra-curricular activities, the school is not equitable. Some classes have relatively large numbers (at least 30 students); however, many of the courses observed did not have an excessive number of students. As a result of the recently received Massachusetts Initiative for Math and Science Education (MIMSE) grant, the school has committed to offering a certain number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses each year. When enrollment has been low in particular subject areas and only two class levels can be offered, the AP level class has been taught and the Honors option has been cut. This bifurcates the distribution of students in any course that has an AP level, and discourages enrollment in certain subjects. This specific concern was brought up during conversations with parents, students and teachers. Additionally, each year students and parents are disappointed that elective

courses including Red Raiders Productions class (yearbook) and various art classes are oversubscribed. Some courses have twice as much instructional time as others. Struggling students and special education students have some courses that extend for the full academic year, whereas similar courses for other students are completed in a semester. AP classes also meet for the full school year. These differences in instruction time lead to inequity within the school. Support for extra-curricular activities is inequitable. Athletics receive adequate internal and external support. This is very different from what is provided for other extra-curricular activities. The school is socially inclusive. This is evidenced through various extra-curricular activities such as Best Buddies and TAB. However, the school struggles with academic inclusion. Many classes in which special education students are enrolled are composed of a majority of students with IEPs and 504s. Some of these classes lack paraprofessionals and many lack academic peer models. The school does not seem to foster heterogeneity in most of its core courses. Most students take integrated science during their freshman year. This appears to be the only core class that students take. Equity, inclusion, and heterogeneity are viewed as important values at Athol High School; however, current practices within and beyond the classroom do not adequately support these values. (classroom observations, student shadowing, panel presentation, teachers, students, self-study, parents)

There is not 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 21st century learning expectations. A fourteen-minute advisory period is part of the daily schedule but in practice this time is used for a wide variety of activities, such as club and class meetings and MCAS review. All seniors have advisory in the cafeteria. Because students are taken from advisory for other purposes on a regular basis, the implementation of authentic advisory opportunities for all students and the development of meaningful relationships between teachers and students is limited. Additionally, students are rarely assisted in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations through this program. Currently, there is not 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 21st learning expectations. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers, school leadership)

While the principal and professional staff are committed to improving student learning through professional development, they have engaged in limited high-quality, targeted programs. The last few years have been devoted to preparing the self-study for the re-accreditation visit and adopting the state-mandated educator evaluation system. Full faculty professional development opportunities were limited to achieving those objectives. In the Endicott survey, only 25.7 percent of staff feels that professional development programs enable teachers to acquire and use skills to improve instruction. Department meetings have been replaced by full faculty meetings, and common planning time is limited by the schedule, so teachers have little formal time to engage in discourse for inquiry, reflection, and analysis of teaching and learning. Teachers do independently pursue graduate school courses, conferences and workshops to secure or maintain their professional certification status. In response to Athol Regional School District's Accountability status of Level 4 (Athol High School achieved a Level 2), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has advised the district on steps to take to improve student learning as evidenced by MCAS performance. The resulting 2013-14 Accelerated Improvement Plan dictates specific objectives for professional development including the implementation of and training in research-based instructional techniques including higher order thinking strategies, tiered instruction and behavioral interventions. A second objective focuses on training teachers to review, develop, standardize and implement a system of formative, benchmark

and summative assessments. Plans for 2013-14 half-day professional development days include sessions on using assessments to inform instruction and to understand and implement tiered and differentiated instruction. In addition, the principal has initiated a school-based data team, which will employ MCAS data and attendance statistics to guide professional development to direct instructional plans for students.   Athol High School must provide opportunities to consistently emphasize professional discourse and professional development which enhance teaching and learning in order to significantly improve student learning. (Endicott survey, panel presentation, central office personnel, evidence box, school leadership, teachers)

School leaders have begun to use research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improved student learning. The new state-mandated educator evaluation system was adopted by Athol High School in the fall of 2013. In an effort to improve student learning, many teachers have established goals that incorporate the school's newly developed learning expectations; they are working toward embedding specific learning expectations and the rubrics into their curriculum, instruction and assessment. The principal and assistant principal have made announced and unannounced observations, providing feedback to teachers using Teach Point software. This is an appreciated departure from past practice where "observations were infrequent and (did) not provide much benefit to teachers." Faculty, however, are concerned that the new evaluation process that leaves supervision in the exclusive control of administrators may not provide teachers with subject-specific guidance. The new evaluation and supervision system has the potential, if enacted consistently and deliberately, to identify struggling teachers and to provide the coaching required enhancing classroom instruction. However, there is no formal process for evaluating the depth and appropriateness of the curriculum presented. School leaders have instituted research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improving student learning. (teachers, school administration, self-study)

The organization of time at Athol High School has the potential to support research-based instruction and the learning needs of all students. Some teachers and students value the four-by-four block schedule, which affords time to complete projects, incorporate technology, and conduct field studies. Students prefer the structure as they can focus on only four subjects and, given most schedules, manage homework for only three academic classes. Similarly, teachers enjoy having at most three preparations. Most courses last for a semester, which allows for "a fresh start" when the second term begins; teachers and students feel a new beginning is beneficial. For courses that stretch over two semesters like introductory/remedial courses or Advanced Placement courses, the organization of time allows for substantial time on learning.   Despite the attributes of a four-by-four schedule, Athol's organization of time presents challenges. The schedule is populated with courses in a way that limits teachers' opportunities to collaborate during the day. Teachers of like disciplines or grade levels do not share preparation time. While a number of teachers take advantage of the long blocks to incorporate meaningful project-based learning and authentic assessments, many do not consistently maximize the eighty-minute time blocks. Instead of providing rich opportunities for varied and differentiated instruction to address the many learning modalities, lecture and individual student work time seem to dominate the instructional approaches. Time to complete homework typically anchors the final segments of class periods. As a result, although teachers have sufficient instructional time with each class, not all have been able to manage it to enhance instruction and address the learning needs of all students. (students, panel presentation, self-study, teachers, evidence box, student shadowing)

While student load and class size are designed for teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students, the dynamics of the individual class sections and limited professional development opportunities for managing an eighty-minute block have not maximized this intention. Student loads seem to be reasonable for the staff at Athol High School. The block schedule format means that each teacher has three classes each day. Thus, teachers have a maximum of three different preps each semester. In terms of class size, there is a discrepancy in the data provided by the school. There are classes with enrollments of over thirty students, however, given rather significant attendance and enrollment fluctuations and uneven distribution of students, most classes seem to have relatively small numbers of eighteen to twenty-four students. This was in evidence during student shadowing and the building tour. Despite small sizes, a significant number of classes contain a high percentage of students on IEP's, 504's and DCAP's. Further, many of these classes appear not to be supported consistently by paraprofessionals. This makes it challenging for teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students. Compounding this issue is the current block schedule. Most teachers are not maximizing the eighty-minute class periods to meet the learning needs of all of their students and seem to struggle with effective classroom management strategies for the longer class periods. Student load and class size suggest that teachers should be able to meet the learning needs of individual students; however, this instructional goal is hindered by the dynamics of individual class sections and the minimal professional development opportunities focused on managing an eighty-minute block. (classroom observations, self-study, student shadowing, teachers, Endicott survey, administrative team)

While the principal meets frequently with the school leadership team on an individual basis, he has not yet had the opportunity to collaborate formally and regularly with all building leaders to provide instructional leadership rooted in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. This situation is complicated by developments at Athol High School. The school has only recently adopted its core values and rubrics for learning expectation assessments. Further, the principal just began his tenure in July 2013. The principal meets with the department heads of guidance and special education to solve challenges developed in their specific areas. In addition, he and the assistant principal meet multiple times daily to address student behavior, scheduling and staff issues. Discussions with faculty suggest that they feel that the elimination of department chairs for other departments has limited both participation in academic decision-making and reduced communication regarding administrative expectations. That said, weekly faculty meetings allow time for the principal to articulate his vision for implementing the core values and learning expectations and to provide professional development around instruction. At present, the principal has begun to work with building leaders to provide instructional leadership shaped by the school's core values, beliefs and learning expectations. (panel presentation, school leadership, self-study, central office personnel)

Many teachers and students are reasonably involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership; however, many parents do not fulfill similar obligations within the school community. Many teachers are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership. For example, several teachers are members of the School Improvement Council. The building administration seems open to providing teachers with these types of roles; however, they are not routinely advertised. Furthermore, teachers seem to devote much of their extra time to working directly with students. A significant number of staff members create, supervise, and assist with extracurricular activities. These teachers seem to be drawn to these direct student impact roles rather than to committees focused on improving and implementing school-wide policies and programs. Some students are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership. These opportunities

include student council, the Catalyst Group, teacher assistants, National Honor Society, school committee, and various hiring committees for school and district administrators. Typically, the same group of students participate in these opportunities. The school and district regularly invite parents to take on meaningful and defined roles in decision-making opportunities that promote responsibility and ownership. Parents of athletes and active members of extracurricular activities, such as Drama Club, respond enthusiastically. Another avenue for parent involvement is Parents Involved in Education (PIE) group. Numerous teachers and students are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership; conversely many parents do not fulfill similar roles at the high school. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers, students, parents, school leadership, Endicott survey)

Teachers exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning. The teachers at Athol High School have taken responsibility for programmatic changes regarding many extracurricular activities and some curricular opportunities. For example, a newer teacher started a color guard last year. Another teacher indicated that this club has been a prominent reason that one of her students comes to school each day. Additionally, the teachers of the Red Raiders Productions class (yearbook) have worked to raise school spirit and pride with increased course enrollment, yearbook sales, and the promotion of school and community events. These examples and many others indicate that the teachers are fiercely dedicated to and passionate about the students of Athol High School. Teachers have exercised some initiative and leadership essential to increasing students' engagement in learning. They have planned and implemented field trips to a variety of sites including the local pond, New York City, Honduras, and various European cities. These opportunities expand student learning and help to engage a greater number of students. Teachers demonstrate initiative and leadership necessary for school improvement and increasing students' engagement in learning. (self-study, student shadowing, panel presentation, teacher interview, teachers, students)

The school committee, superintendent and principal have yet to demonstrate collaborative, reflective and constructive efforts towards achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. The superintendent has established formal monthly meetings with the principal, and in practice meets with him more regularly during which they discuss a wide range of topics including building management, scheduling and state initiatives. The school committee assembles to address policy and goals for the district, but in practice the members collaborate with the superintendent exclusively, whom they expect to interact with the principal. The school committee is not particularly versed in the recent development of the school's core values, beliefs and learning expectations as evidenced during discussions with six of the ten-member board. Through conversations with the principal, it is apparent that he values the opportunity to work with the superintendent, building-based leadership team and his faculty to develop strategies to implement the school's 21st century learning expectations. Currently the school committee, superintendent and principal have not yet established a formal mechanism for working together to implement the school's 21st century learning expectations. (school committee, central office personnel, self-study, panel presentation)

The school committee's and superintendent's interactions with the principal suggest that they will provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school forward. The school committee and superintendent collaborate with the principal as they focus on goals and policy decisions affecting the district. However, they leave the day-to-day operations of Athol High School to the principal. There is evidence that the superintendent has challenged select decisions made by the

previous principal, and these instances have challenged the faculty's confidence in their principal's authority. The current principal, hired in July 2013, is invested by the superintendent and school committee with the authority to define leadership practices and frame the culture of the school. (school committee, central office personnel, school leadership, teachers, self-study)

Commendations:

1. The multiple and varied programs to encourage student health and safety in and outside of school like Best Buddies and Gay Straight Alliance

2. The Advanced Placement and honors courses that are offered to students of all abilities

3. The faculty's and administration's pride in the school and their passion to support all students within and beyond the classroom

4. The new, targeted professional development plan

5. The student opportunities for meaningful and defined roles that foster leadership

Recommendations:

1. Develop and implement a process to ensure the organization of time supports research-based instruction, professional collaboration and the learning needs of all students

2. Re-establish a district-wide professional development team

3. Provide professional development time to ensure faculty align curricula to Common Core State Standards and implement instructional strategies that incorporate 21st century learning expectations

4. Provide professional development and curricular materials to develop the current advisory time into 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

5. Provide professional development to support best practice in the use of class time in terms of both instruction and classroom management

6. Establish a process involving all stakeholders to review and make recommendations on the present master schedule in light of Athol High School's core values, beliefs and 21st century learning expectations

7. Develop and implement a formal process for shared decision-making that promotes the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations

8. Explore opportunities to increase formal teacher leadership roles

6 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 21st 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 21st 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
   - deliver collaborative outreach and referral to community and area mental health agencies 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st century learning expectations.

SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

Conclusions

The school has timely, coordinated, and directive intervention strategies for most of the students, including identified and at-risk students, that support each student's achievement of the school's 21ˢᵗ century learning expectations. Athol High School has a formalized referral system often used to identify at-risk students. The District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP) assists in identiying students in need of extra support. Members of the support team (including members of guidance, special education, and administration), participate in weekly Student Service Meetings to discuss and refer students who are at risk, have behavioral concerns or are low achieving. The Youth At Risk Survey is conducted by the health/PE for grades 10 and 12 to assess students' health choices. There is no evidence that the support team uses the outcomes of the Youth At Risk Survey. In more urgent situations, students are referred for additional services through Child Studies Meetings that may be requested by teachers or parents. A structured series of reviews are in place for students who have already been identified. Annual review meetings are held for all special education students leading into the development of a "student snapshot." Students' IEPs are re-evaluated every three years to determine their progress and academic performance. The school adjustment counselor provides intensified support for seven students with substantial needs through the STRIVE program. All Athol High School students have the opportunity to participate in a number of school groups, allowing them to become stakeholders in advocating for their own needs (e.g., Gay Straight Alliance, Training Active Bystanders, Anger Management Group, and Fairness in Treatment Group). According to the 2012 Endicott survey, 49 percent of Athol High School parents and 54 percent of staff agree that the school has timely and coordinated strategies to meet the needs of all students. Only 37 percent of the students believes the school meets the needs of all students. Athol High School's support staff offers a wide variety of intervention strategies and programs to identify at-risk students, however, many students feel that they are not serviced. (self-study, teacher interview, school support staff, Endicott survey, evidence bin)

The school provides information to most families in a variety of formats, especially to those most in need, about available student support services. A multi-pronged communication strategy is of high importance to the faculty at Athol High School as they attempt to reach families that frequently experience information access issues amid a variety of socio-economic hardships. According to the Endicott survey, slightly more than half (55 percent) of the parents feels the school provides information about available support services. At the beginning of the school year, packets are sent home with the students describing available services such as free and reduced lunch and insurance options. "Parents' Rights Brochures" are also distributed. Throughout the year, support staff relies on personal email or phone communication when possible. The school also uses an automated "One Call" phone system to make important announcements about upcoming programs. Special events are held throughout the year at the school, including transition meetings for incoming freshmen, college planning night, financial aid night and an open house. Monthly, the Parents Involved in Education (PIE) group meets to learn more about current initiatives and to give input. Frequently these meetings include food and childcare. At a recent PIE meeting, the new Aspen X2 Parent Portal was introduced. In their initial attempt, 75 to 100 parents district-wide signed up for an account to gain online access to their child's profile through this service (including up-to-date information on grades, assignments, attendance statistics, discipline referrals, etc). The school also maintains a website that is used to communicate with the community. Many interviews indicated that there is significant concern about

the availability and quality of Internet access, especially in the Royalston area. Continued diligence in reaching families through a variety of media will encourage families to engage in their students' educations, utilizing the full palette of support resources. (teacher interview, parent meeting, self study)

Support services staff use technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student. The X2 Aspen program is used school-wide to coordinate services for students. In the guidance department, the staff uses the online tool to provide accessible documentation to teachers and parents regarding attendance statistics and discipline referrals. Some staff school-wide also report using the X2 platform to send email to parents. Staff expressed concern that many families do not have access to technology, and the ability to differentiate using traditional ground mail is discouraged due to incurred cost. The school nurse uses X2 to track statistics on student visits to the nurses office. For example, last year she recorded an 87 percent "return to class rate" when students visited her during the school day, a figure she hopes to improve. The special education department utilizes ESPED to communicate IEP information to teachers involved in a particular case. The information is available to them in a read-only format . The special services and technology directors agree that adequate funding is available to equip special needs students with the necessary technology tools as recommended by their IEPs (e.g., ipads, Kindles, interactive white boards, audio books, ichats, Prolouo/Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display, CD players with headphones). Athol High School's coordination of technology resources allows the staff to support the needs of all students. (classroom observations, self-study, teacher interviews, central office personnel, school support staff)

School counseling services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff that meet some student needs, occasionally provide personal, academic, career, and college counseling; attempt to engage in individual and group meetings with all students; deliver collaborative outreach and referral to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers; but do not use ongoing, relevant assessment data. The department consists of two full-time guidance counselors (who split the student load alphabetically by last name), one full-time adjustment counselor and two district-wide school psychologists. There is no evidence of a written developmental plan, but the department understands the importance of creating comprehensive developmental guidance curriculum for grades 9 through 12 and will begin work on that soon. The counselors report that the majority of their time is spent meeting regularly with students to provide personal, academic, career, and college counseling, however the Endicott survey indicates that only 13 percent of students meets with their counselor regularly. The counselors confirmed that much of their workload consists of a small group of students who frequently need assistance. The counseling office provides these frequent visitors with permanent guidance passes. The use of these passes is logged by the guidance secretary. The guidance department has particularly strong connections with most students. However, the Endicott survey indicated 74 percent of students reported that they do not meet regularly with their counselor. The guidance staff would like to have more time to engage the general population of the school, but cite a lack of formalized meeting time as an insurmountable obstacle. The adjustment counselor supports seven students with substantial needs through the STRIVE program, occupying approximately 75 percent of her caseload, which leaves 25 percent for other at-risk students.The department does engage in occasional individual and group meetings with students, pulling small groups of a particular grade level out of class to meet in the library. Topics include tutorials on course selection, PSAT sessions and reminders of graduation requirements and future planning. The guidance department, in coordination with other student services delivers outreach and referral to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers. The weekly meetings of the Student Services Group are

43

instrumental in recommending the assistance of outside agencies. In addition, monthly meetings of the Community Based Justice (CBJ) group involve police officers, the district attorney, DCF Department of Children and Families, and other organizations as needed. The school has also developed a partnership with Mount Wachusett Community College to offer one course per year, offered at the high school for college credit. The course is selected annually via a survey: this year's course is Criminal Justice. They host representatives from a variety of other colleges, advertising their visits on a bulliten board and through email. In order to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21st century learning expectations, there are plans to roll out the "Your Plan for the Future" web-based program to guide students' post-secondary transition, but there is no current evidence that the program is underway, nor is their sufficient evidence of data collection to guide the improvement of guidance services. As guidance service staff continues to attempt new initiatives, the needs of all students will be met. (self-study, teacher interview, Endicott survey, school support staff)

The school's health services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support, who provide preventive health services and direct intervention services; use an appropriate referral process; conduct onging student health assessments; and utilizes in-house data to improve services. Athol High School employs a full-time registered nurse. In addition, a school physician provides students with occasional consulting and examination services. On a regular basis, the school nurse provides preventive and direct intervention services. When necessary, the nurse contacts families, by phone, and recommends referrals to medical specialists. In 9th grade, the nurse conducts Scoliosis screening to all incoming 9th graders. In 10th grades, vision/hearing and BMI screenings are completed. The majority of the staff, 72 percent, and 48 percent or parents agree that the health services personnel provide adequate preventive and direct intervention care. Over 80 percent of students feels comfortable going to the nurse's office. The annual health survey "Athol Royalston Regional School District Annual Health Survey" is used to update students' health information. Interviews with support staff revealed that while services are adequette, the 50-year-old vision machine is barely working and needs to be updated. The health services at Athol High School are excellent and fully support student learning and the core values. (self-study, Endicott survey, interviews with health services personal, teacher interviews)

Library/media services are often integrated into curriculum and instructional practices. The library/media services staff are engaged in implementing the school's curriculum, offer a wide range of resources, and ensures that the facility is available for students and teachers before, during, and after school. The library/media services are integrated into the curriculum and instructional practices, however, the staff was not involved in the initial development of the new curriculum. The library personnel conduct a Freshman Orientation each year to show students how to use the resources of the library and how to access the various databases. The library personnel conducts individualized lessons for English classes on the use of specific resources that are relevant to that class. In addition, the library personnel, upon requests by teachers, conduct various information sessions relating to the needs of the particular class. Library personnel also hold information/teaching/professional development sessions to show teachers how to use library resources in their particular discipline. In an effort to keep teaching staff informed of new resources, the librarian sends regular emails to staff to share new databases and/or resources. New books and other resources get displayed in the teachers' lounge to promote their use. There are currently over 5,000 print resources resources, e-books, magazines, video and audio artifacts. The library also empowers students to gain access to print and online resources through the Boston Public Library. The school maintains a library website for subject-specific research, utilizing JSTOR, Gale Group, and Science Online. In addition, the media center has 27 newly refurbished

computers. This media center was scheduled for class use 477 times during the 2012-2013 school year. The media center is available for classes and for students' and teachers' research and assignment completion. Evidence suggest that the library/media staff conduct ongoing assessment of its services to improve offering and add more resources. There is a suggestion box in which students and staff place suggestions for certain titles to be added to the library. A "Wish List" book is kept in allowing students to write the title of books they wish to have in the library. In addition, the librarian conducts bi-annual surveys to obtain the opinion of the school community to update its collection and to add more resources. Also, the librarian reviews collection statistics, using a computerized system, to keep collections and resources current. The library services conduct ongoing assessment to improve its collection and updates its resources to ensure that students achieve Athol High School 21st century learning expectations. Over half of the students agree that the library has the resources they need. The majority of students (65 percent) views the librarian as helpful. Eighty-four percent of staff believes that the Athol High School library provides a wide ranges of resources. The library is available for students and teachers before, during (including all three lunches), and briefly after school. The library/media resources are an integral part of the school that support student learning. (self-study, Endicott survey, student interviews, teacher interviews, librarian)

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. This school year, Athol High School employs six full-time special education teachers and nine paraprofessionals, four of which serve as one-on-one aides. Special education teachers teach courses in math, science, and English designed specifically for identified students especially those with IEPs and 504s. During a visit to the Algebra I class designed for identified students, the class was taught by a special education teacher with the help of a one-on-one aide. The class had 12 special education students. In regular education, observation suggests that there is an imbalance in the placement of special needs students. Some classes may have one or two students, other classes may have more than ten, often without the presence of a teacher aide. Administrative office staff reported that a few years back Athol High School used to offer courses co-taught by a special education teacher and a regular education teacher. This was recently lost due to budget cuts. The needs section of Athol High School self study report for this standard did not include the recommendation for additional staff. The results of the Endicott survey reveal that among respondents, 21 percent of teachers and 41 percent of students believe that the school has adequate certified support services personnel. Half of the parents respondents, 50.4 percent, is undecided. Although there is a lack of sufficient evidence to address this indicator, the available information suggests that there is an adequate number of certified support personnel for identified students. Having a sufficient number of support staff helps in meeting the needs of all students in achieving the school's academic and social learning expectations. The presence of teacher aides in regular education classes with identified students will give these students a greater opportunity for academic success.

(Endicott survey, teachers' interview, administrative office interview, staff directory)

Commendations:

1. The weekly Student Service Meetings to identify at-risk students and to coordinate intervention strategies

2. The large number of student groups aimed at promoting a positive school climate

3. The school's efforts to collaborate with parents through the PIE group

4. The variety of technological interventions for special education students

5. The efforts of the staff to coordinate with outside agencies and community resources

6. The expanded student and staff access to library/media services

Recommendations:

1. Develop a plan to actively encourage parents to create online profiles for Aspen X2 Parent Portal

2. Provide opportunites to train families in using X2

3. Develop and implement a comprehensive developmental guidance curriculum to reach all students 9 through 12

4. Review the caseload of school adjustment counselor so as to reach a larger population of at-risk students

5. Review the increasing use of library/media center for student and staff access before, during, and after school and staffing implications

6. Ensure the librarian is a member of Common Core curriculum development teams

7. Align courses for special education students to ensure they reflect the least restrictive environment guidelines

8. Develop and implement a plan to increase inclusionary practice for special education students

9. Ensure a special education teacher is a member of Common Core curriculum development teams

10. Design and implement a formal procedure using feedback from the school community to evaluate its support services, including library/meda, guidance, health and special edcation services

7 Community Resources for Learning

The achievement of the school's 21ˢᵗ 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.

Community Resources for Learning

Conclusions

The community and its district's governing body do not adequately 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; and sufficient instructional materials and supplies. The loss of professional and support staff due to a reduction in staff along with significant reduction in student population (school choice and vocational schools) and financial constraints has occurred over the past three years. From 2001 to 2011, 21 positions have been eliminated at Athol High School. In fiscal years 2012 and 2013, an additional eight positions were eliminated district-wide; there has been a loss of approximately 60 full-time teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, and maintenance personnel during the fiscal years 2010 through 2012. Staff is limited for the facilities department and technology department. The building lacks necessary electrical outlets, power conditioners, cable conduits, and has outdated equipment. Two departments, history and special education, have the use of SMART Board technology. In addition, technology staff has three full-time staff for six district schools and only one full-time during summer. Prohibitive protocols are in place for staff to be reimbursed for supplies and they often personally purchase instructional supplies and materials. With that said, Athol High School develops and implements a number of programs and services that reflect the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations. It includes programs (i.e., special education, sports, post-secondary education, and vocational opportunities). Some funding is available through the Athletic Association and Music Booster Club. Recently, all district staff has been provided with iPADs for use at faculty meetings as well as for their teacher evaluation process. Until the governing body and community are able to commit to increased steady funding for programs and services, there is concern as to the ability for Athol High School to successfully address student achievement. (self-study, central office personnel, parent meeting, facility tour and supervisors, teachers, school committee members, administrators)

The school has not adequately developed, planned, or funded 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. With limited custodial staff and overall reduction of the maintenance budget due to budget cuts, effort is made to address all cleaning needs daily. The custodial staff is responsible not only for the building, but for the grounds, athletic fields, and the summer playground. There is absence of cataloguing of equipment for maintenance and/or replacement, with repairs being made on an as-needed basis. Interviews with health services staff reveal that although services are adequate, the vision equipment is outdated and inefficient. The staffing cuts to the custodial department have resulted in challenges of thorough maintenance of the building to support a learning environment in a safe and clean manner. (self-study, central office personnel, parent meeting, facility tour with supervisors, teachers, school committee members, and administrators)

The community funds but the school does not adequately implement a long-range plan that addresses programs and services, enrollment changes and staffing needs, facility needs, technology, capital improvements. There is an absence of a two- or five-year plan by the facilities director as well as the absence of prioritization of need and/or proposal. Statements of interest for capital improvements have not been approved by MSBA for Athol High School renovation. The technology director has

developed a plan currently being submitted to administration for updated computers, equipment, technology, and tech staffing for implementation in the summer of 2014. The Athol Music Booster Club supports programs at Athol High School. The Athletic Association supports programs and capital needs, with long-range plan developed and budgeted. While some departments are planning long-term strategies, the lack of consistency between departments negatively impact school culture, cleanliness, and access to an appropriate education. (self-study, central office personnel, parent meeting, facility tour and supervisors, teachers, school committee members, administrators).

Faculty and building administrators are not actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget. There is no evidence of past faculty involvement in the budgetary process, however, the current building administrator intends to survey staff about classroom needs and plans and will participate with the superintendent in the budgetary process. The superintendent suggests the prioritization of allocated funds is relative to staffing needs in the upcoming budget year. The technology director has met with the superintendent to review technology needs and the current proposal; however, faculty has not given input into this process. Collaboration between and among faculty, building administrators, and central office administration will positively impact further desire for contribution by teachers in regard to their curriculum and instructional needs. (self-study, central office personnel, parent meeting, facility tour and supervisors, teachers, school committee members, and administrators).

The school site and plant does not adequately support the delivery of high quality school programs and services. The boys' locker room is in serious need of repair and update, with ceiling paint peeling, flooring outdated and in disrepair, mold and mildew, lockers are rusted and several do not function. Students and parents have expressed a lack of pride in the school in regard to the conditions of the team locker room facilities. The speech and language room is a converted bathroom with holes in the walls and has no natural light. Knowing that special education students receive much of the services, this uninviting atmosphere minimizes their success. The auditorium, while clean and functional, is outdated. Considering the age of the plant and site along with the disrepair, regardless of current programs and service students are at risk of not being able to achieve academic success. (self-study, central office personnel, parent meeting, facility tour with supervisors, teachers, school committee members, administrators)

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. Annual inspections for the boiler and pressure vessel as well as compliance with the AHERA plan are in place. All systems are tested quarterly and all egresses are locked during the school day, and the office has audio/visual monitoring security system. Fire drills, lockdowns, and evacuation drills are also performed annually. While the boiler and other plant facilities are functionally outdated, the school is in compliance with federal and state guidelines. (self-study, central office personnel, parent meeting, facility tour with supervisors, teachers, school committee members, and administrators).

All professional staff attempt to 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. Athol High School provides the "One Call" system to notify parents and families of a variety of school events and information. Parent nights are offered and held each year, being posted in the local newspaper and local website. A parent page has been developed on Facebook and is updated by class advisors and approved by the school board. Information is posted for parent opportunities to be

involved in their students' educational programming. The school librarian has a website which offers resources for coursework of each content area. The X2 portal is currently used by parents for school information, however, 75 families in the district have signed up for and been verified for access to their students' educational progress. Special education meetings are offered at the end of the school day to allow for increased parent ability to attend. Staff repeatedly reaches out to parents and families, with the vast majority of parents not responding. Staff is committed to improving their strategies for engaging parents of at-risk students as well as with all parents in an attempt to increase collaboration and communication for all involved. Despite the extensive efforts of the Athol High School staff to provide opportunities for parents to be engaged in their child's education, there has been limited parental response. (self-study, central office personnel, parent meeting, facility tour with supervisors, teachers, school committee members, and administrators).

The school attempts to develop productive parent, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support student learning.   The guidance department has a partnership with Mount Wachusett College for college fairs and college courses. College credit is awarded at the cost of $30 per course taken on the Athol High School campus. Additional local outside agencies and organizations such as Clinical and Support Options and Center for Human Development assist in supporting students and families who may be experiencing conflict and/or trauma. The local senior citizen community uses the facility for "senior walk" during the winter months. This allows community stakeholders an opportunity to utilize the building while appreciating the educational options for students and the commitment of faculty and staff. The technology director secured a grant to obtain 128 used computers from Amherst College, which will be refurbished during the summer of 2014. Transportation is provided by the district as well as by outside bus vendors to provide students the opportunity to access their education. Progress reports are sent via email or by ground mail four times per year. Advanced Placement courses continue to be supported well after the Massachusetts Math and Science Initiative grant was completed in 2013. These partnerships and collaborations allow parents and the school to support students in improving academic success. (self-study, central office personnel, parent meeting, facility tour and supervisors, teachers, school committee members, and administrators).

Commendations:

1. The Athletic Association's support for programs and capital needs

2. The financial support by active Music Booster Club

3. The FY 2015 planning proposal for technology

4. The faculty's and administration's consistent and varied attempts to reach out and to develop collaboration with parents and families

5. The school's many partnerships with community organizations and local businesses that provide a variety of programs and opportunities for students.

Recommendations:

1. Develop, implement and fund a plan for consistent and sustained funding support for the school and its programs

2. Create a task force to study and address the financial ramifications of school choice

3. Develop and implement a plan to improve the cataloguing of equipment and maintenance to assist in prioritization of needs

4. Implement a plan to renovate the high school locker rooms

5. Develop, implement and fund short- and long-term capital improvement plans for the high school facility

6. Implement technology department plans to meet current and anticipated future needs

7. Ensure faculty involvement in the budget process

8. Develop and implement a plan to prioritize site and plant repair needs, based on data from all stakeholders

9. Incorporate all compliance documentation in an accessible central location

10. Develop a plan to increase significantly the number of parents and families who are actively engaged in each student's education

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 Athol 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 Committee 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 Athol High School submit routine Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports documenting the current status of all evaluation report recommendations, with particular detail provided for any recommendation which may have been rejected or those items on which no action has been taken. In addition, responses must be detailed on all recommendations highlighted by the Committee 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 Committee 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 Committee has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that principals of member schools report to the Committee within sixty days (60) of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact which the change has had on the school's ability to meet the Standards for Accreditation. The Committee's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix on page 89. All other substantive changes should be included in the Two- and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report which is required of each member school to ensure that the Committee office has current statistical data on the school.

The Committee 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 Committee staff following the on-site visit.

The visiting committee expresses its appreciation for the hospitality provided by the entire staff at Athol High School. The time and effort dedicated to the self-study and preparation for the visit ensured a successful accreditation visit.

Appendix A

Athol High School

NEASC Accreditation Visit

November 17 – November 20, 2013

Visiting Committee

Howard Gilmore NEASC Burlington, MA 01803	Ethan Roe Blackstone Millville Regional High School Blackstone, MA 01504
Barbara Fecteau Beverly High School Beverly, MA 01915	Trevor Sindorf Montville High School Oakdale, CT 06370
Joanne Blocker Gateway Regional School District Huntington, MA 01050	Mary MacDonald Mount Greylock Regional High School Williamstown, MA 01267
Michael Hannigan Lunenburg High School Lunenburg, MA 01462	Lynsey Kraemer Watertown High School Watertown, MA 02472
Cathy O'Flaherty Boston Latin Academy Boston, MA 02121	Cheryl Ryan Hoosac Valley Middle and High School Cheshire, MA 01225
Haissam (Sam) Harb Lenox Memorial Middle and High School Lenox, MA 01240	Leny Jo Captein Belchertown High School Belchertown, MA 01007
Kathryn Sheridan Pelham High School Pelham, NH 03076	Elizabeth Boggio Hinsdale Middle/High School Hinsdale, NH 03451
Katie Miville Oakmont Regional High School Ashburnham, MA 01430	Elaine Mount Greenfield High School Greenfield, MA 01301

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIAION 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

Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations:

Core Values, Beliefs and Learning Expectations

1. The core values, beliefs and learning expectations that were developed through a collaborative process

2. The core value statement is concise, allowing for clear interpretation and easy understanding

3. The analytic rubrics for each academic, social, and civic learning expectation

4. The Athol High School Accelerated Improvement Plan for 2013-2014

5. The credit recovery program

Curriculum

1. The High School Curriculum Articulation Plan

2. The updated school library/media center and its resources

3. The Virtual High School opportunity

Instruction

1. The student reflective practice held during advisory time after report cards are issued

2. The increasing use of technology during instruction

3. The many content savvy, creative, caring teachers who have pride and passion for their own lessons

Assessment

1. The development of school-wide rubrics

2. The course syllabi which outlines grading practice, learning expectations, and objective

3. The grade 9 through 12 High School Curriculum Articulation plan

4. The increased graduation rate

5. All core departments have common final exams

6. The establishment of district and school-wide data teams

7. The new system of weighting that incorporates the Massachusetts State University System

School Culture and Leadership

1. The multiple and varied programs to encourage student health and safety in and outside of school like Best Buddies and Gay Straight Alliance

2. The Advanced Placement and honors courses that are offered to students of all abilities

3. The faculty's and administration's pride in the school and their passion to support all students within and beyond the classroom

4. The new, targeted professional development plan

5. The student opportunities for meaningful and defined roles that foster leadership

School Resource for Learning

1. The weekly Student Service Meetings to identify at-risk students and to coordinate intervention strategies

2. The large number of student groups aimed at promoting a positive school climate

3. The school's efforts to collaborate with parents through the PIE group

4. The variety of technological interventions for special education students

5. The efforts of the staff to coordinate with outside agencies and community resources

6. The expanded student and staff access to library/media services

Community Resources for Learning

1. The Athletic Association's support for programs and capital needs

2. The financial support by active Music Booster Club

3. The FY 2015 planning proposal for technology

4. The faculty's and administration's consistent and varied attempts to reach out and to develop collaboration with parents and families

5. The school's many partnerships with community organizations and local businesses that provide a variety of programs and opportunities for students

Recommendations:

Core values, Beliefs and Learning Expectations

1. Develop and implement a plan that includes all stake-holders in the process of regular evaluation and review of core values, learning beliefs and 21st century learning expectations that is informed in part by current research and student achievement data of its 21st century learning expectations

2. Ensure the school's core values are actively reflected in the culture of the school and that they drive decision-making as it relates to curriculum, instruction and assessment in every classroom, and also guide the school's procedures and resource allocations

3. Provide training and support to staff in using the school-wide rubrics

Curriculum

1. Ensure that opportunities for students to practice and achieve each of the schools 21st century learning expectations are clearly identified in curriculum documents

2. Ensure all curriculum is written in the school's common format and include units of study with essential questions, concepts, content, and skills, the school's 21st century learning expectations, instructional strategies, and assessment practices that include the use of school-wide analytic and course-specific rubrics

3. Develop and implement processes to ensure the written curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem-solving, higher order thinking, cross-disciplinary learning, authentic learning opportunities and informed and ethical use of technology

4. Develop and implement a plan to ensure there is clear alignment between the written and taught curriculum

5. Develop and implement a plan to vertically coordinate curriculum within departments at the high school and with sending schools in the district, as well as coordinate curricula among departments at the high school

6. Provide adequate and appropriate instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies and facilities to implement the curriculum and for students to achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations

7. Develop and implement a plan to provide the school's professional staff with sufficient time and resources for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum using assessment results and current research

Instruction

1. Implement a plan to ensure all teachers' instructional practices reflect the use of school-wide rubrics to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs and 21st century learning expectations

2. Develop and implement a formal plan for collecting a variety of school and student data based on school-wide rubric use in order to examine instructional practices

3. Provide formal opportunities for teachers for collaborative reflection on instructional practices

4. Increase opportunities for student reflective practice and ensure reflection on their work connects to the 21st century learning expectations and to the use of school-wide rubrics

5. Develop and implement a plan to train all teachers to use data to inform instruction

7. Develop and implement a plan to increase professional development time for teachers to improve instructional practice to meet the 21st century learning expectations

8. Provide formal opportunities and protocols for teachers to collectively examine student work and to collectively review student assessment data to refine instructional practices

9. Develop and implement a plan to review the alignment of instructional practices with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations

Assessment

1. Develop and implement a formal process, based on the school-wide analytic rubrics, to assess individual student progress toward achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations

2. Develop and implement a formal process, using aggregate individual student achievement, to access the school's progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations

3. Develop and implement a process to communicate individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to students and their families

4. Develop and implement a process to communicate the school's progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to the school community

5. Ensure that prior to each unit of study, teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21st century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed

6. Provide formal opportunities for teachers to collaborate regularly on the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments

7. Ensure all teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback for students to revise and improve their work

8. Ensure a range of evidence of student learning such as student work, common course and common grade-level assessments, individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations, standardized assessments, data from sending schools, receiving schools, and post-secondary institutions, and survey data from current students and alumni are individually and collaboratively examined by teachers and administrators on a consistent basis, to provide focused improvement of instructional practices and curriculum revision

9. Develop and implement a plan to ensure grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning

School Culture and Leadership

1. Develop and implement a process to ensure the organization of time supports research-based instruction, professional collaboration and the learning needs of all students

2. Re-establish a district-wide professional development team

3. Provide professional development time to ensure faculty align curricula to Common Core State Standards and implement instructional strategies that incorporate 21st century learning expectations

4. Provide professional development and curricular materials to develop the current advisory time into 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

5. Provide professional development to support best practice in the use of class time in terms of both instruction and classroom management

6. Establish a process involving all stakeholders to review and make recommendations on the present master schedule in light of Athol High School's core values, beliefs and 21st century learning expectations

7. Develop and implement a formal process for shared decision-making that promotes the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations

8. Explore opportunities to increase formal teacher leadership roles

School Resources for Learning

1. Develop a plan to actively encourage parents to create online profiles for Aspen X2 Parent Portal

2. Provide opportunites to train families in using X2

3. Develop and implement a comprehensive developmental guidance curriculum to reach all students 9 through 12

4. Review the caseload of school adjustment counselor so as to reach a larger population of at-risk students

5. Review the increasing use of library/media center for student and staff access before, during, and after school and staffing implications

6. Ensure the librarian is a member of Common Core curriculum development teams

7. Align courses for special education students to ensure they reflect the least restrictive environment guidelines

8. Develop and implement a plan to increase inclusionary practice for special education students

9. Ensure a special education teacher is a member of Common Core curriculum development teams

10. Design and implement a formal procedure using feedback from the school community to evaluate its support services, including library/meda, guidance, health and special edcation services

Community Resource for Learning

1. Develop, implement and fund a plan for consistent and sustained funding support for the school and its programs

2. Create a task force to study and address the financial ramifications of school choice

3. Develop and implement a plan to improve the cataloguing of equipment and maintenance to assist in prioritization of needs

4. Implement a plan to renovate the high school locker rooms

5. Develop, implement and fund short- and long-term capital improvement plans for the high school facility

6. Implement technology department plans to meet current and anticipated future needs

7. Ensure faculty involvement in the budget process

8. Develop and implement a plan to prioritize site and plant repair needs, based on data from all stakeholders

9. Incorporate all compliance documentation in an accessible central location

10. Develop a plan to increase significantly the number of parents and families who are actively engaged in each student's education