



TOWN OF NORTON

Norton Middle School SITE Council

(Committee)

MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, March 8, 2011 Time: 6:00 PM

Location: Norton Middle School Administrative Conference Room

Members & Staff Present: Sharyn Richard, Mary Steele, Sharon Gauvin, Gretchen Stalters,
Marie Thompson, Virginia Murray, Michael O'Rourke

Members Not Present: Donna Smith, Mary Valentine, Sheila Mackie, Gwyn Veglas, Patricia Maia,
Julie Lach, Eileen Sejkora, Michael Vitelli

The meeting was called to order at: 6:00 PM

Minutes from the _____ Meeting were reviewed and Approved with _____ adjustments.

Meeting Motions / Actions and Summary of Discussions:

No motions/ no actions

Discussions:

- 1) Strategic Plan: Theme #2: Parents were asked to reflect on goals and come to the next meeting for further discussion. Parents willing to share some of their talents with students or talk in a seminar format. Mr. O'Rourke may survey teachers willing to start.
- 2) NELMS Report- Revisited: Discussion over implementation of recommendations of NELMS (New England League of Middle Schools) report. Site visitation to Remington Middle School in Franklin (NELMS "Spotlight" school) occurring tomorrow. Teachers will work on "Varied Instruction" during upcoming Professional Day.
Ideas for collaboration of Parents/Community
 - a) Parents assist during ICE for teachers to have PLC (Professional Learning Communities) time
 - b) Career Day
 - c) Donations and/or hands-on activities in Community

List of Documents and Other Exhibits used at Meeting:

- Agenda
- NELMS Assessment Report
- NELMS Involving Parents and Community
- Strategic Plan

Meeting was adjourned at 7:05 PM until the next meeting on Tuesday, April 12 at 6:00 PM at the NMS Administrative Conference Room.

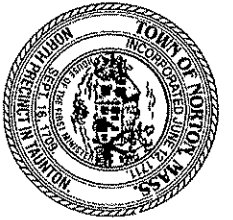
Respectfully submitted,

Minutes Approved by Committee on: 4-12-11
(Date)

Signatures:

Eileen Sakaa
(Name & Title)
Teacher

Chairman, Michael O'Kane
(committee)
Principal



COMMITTEE: Norton Middle School Site Council

Time Meeting called to Order: 6:00 PM

MEETING DATE: March 8, 2011

Time Meeting Adjourned: 7:05 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sharyn Richard, Mary Steele, Sharon Gauvin, Gretchen Stalters, Marie Thompson,

Virginia Murray, Michael O'Rourke

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT: Michael Vitelli, Donna Smith, Mary Valentine, Sheila Mackie, Gwyn Vegas, Patricia Maia, Julie Lach, Eileen Selkora

<u>AGENDA ITEM</u>	<u>DISCUSSION SUMMARY</u>	<u>DECISION/ACTION TAKEN</u>	<u>RECORD OF VOTE</u>
1. STRATEGIC PLAN	Theme #2: Parents were asked to reflect on goals and come to the next meeting for further discussion. Parents willing to share some of their talents with students or talk in a seminar format. Mr. O'Rourke may survey teachers willing to start.	No motions/ no action/ no vote	
2. N.E.L.M.S. Report- revisited	Discussion over implementation of recommendations of NELMS report. Site visitation to Remington Middle School in Franklin (NELMS "spotlight" school) occurring tomorrow. Teachers will work on "Varied Instruction" during Professional Day. Ideas for collaboration of Parents/Community: 1. Parents assist during ICE for teachers to have PLC (Professional Learning Community) time 2. Career Day 3. Donations and/or hands-on activities in community	No motions/ no actions/ no vote	
3. Other			

List of Documents or Exhibits used at the meeting :

- Agenda
- NELMS Assessment Report
- NELMS Involving Parents and Community
- Strategic Plan



Town of Norton

Town Clerk Date/ Time Stamp

NORTON MIDDLE SCHOOL SITE COUNCIL

BOARD / COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2011

6:00 PM

DATE

TIME

NORTON MIDDLE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE ROOM

LOCATION

A

G

E

N

D

A

- Call to Order
- ~~Acceptance of Minutes~~
- Strategic Plan
- NELMS Report revisited
- Other
- Adjourn



Town Clerk Date/ Time Stamp

To: Danielle M. Sicard, Town Clerk
From: NORTON MIDDLE SCHOOL
Date: March 4, 2011
RE: Meeting Posting

PLEASE POST THE FOLLOWING MEETING IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE
PROVISIONS OF MGL 30A §18-25

NORTON MIDDLE SCHOOL SITE COUNCIL

Name of Committee

Tuesday March 4, 2011 6:00 PM
Day Date Time

Administrative Conference Room

Meeting Room

Address: 70 East Main Street, Norton MA 02766

X Other: Norton Middle School, 215 West Main St, Norton, MA 02766

COMING TOGETHER...



A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

**Norton Public Schools
Strategic Plan
2006 - 2011**

Norton Public Schools
STRATEGIC & DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

CONTENTS

	Page
Forward.....	3
Steering Committee	4
Reporting Timeline	5
Relationship Flow Charts.....	6-8
Paving the Direction	9
District Core Values, Mission & Vision.....	10
District Plan Introduction.....	11-13
Professional Development	14-15
Curriculum and Instruction	15-16
Curriculum Accommodations	16-17
Support Services in District	18-20
District Goal.....	21
District Wide Goals.....	22-23
Program Specific Improvement Goals.....	24
Budget Review Process.....	25
Parent/Community Involvement.....	25-26
Glossary of Terms.....	27-28

Norton Public Schools
Our Strategic Plan
2006 - 2011

The purpose of our strategic plan is to ensure that our system moves toward the realization of our vision, that our expressed values are also our values in practice, and that our efforts continuously reflect our mission and core values. The Strategic Planning Steering Committee has been meeting since January of 2006 to develop a road map for our district. The Strategic Plan process is to ensure continuous improvement for the Norton Public Schools, focus energy and talents within the district, assess the school district's direction, ensure that everyone is working toward the same goals, respond to a changing environment and most importantly focus on the future of our district for our students.

In April we conducted a whole community general meeting to begin the process of extensive data collection that included students, staff, administration, parents, and the community. After a thorough review of this feedback, the Steering Committee identified the Core Values, Mission and Vision for the Norton Public Schools along with five strategic goals. These five goals articulate the focus for the district improvement plan as well as for each of Norton's individual school improvement plans. These five goals include a series of strategic instructional change objectives (ICOs) that are specific measurable steps that clearly articulate the work that needs to be accomplished; these annual guidelines ensure that we are all working together to continuously improve our system in order to meet the needs of all the Norton Public School students. These objectives will also inform budget development, as well as increase public understanding of the school system's needs and responsibilities. The plan is most substantive in the first three years. This structure enables us to maintain flexibility to meet current demands and to leave room for unforeseen developments. We appreciate your participation and welcome your feedback.

Steering Committee

Teacher/Staff: Dianne Bruno Strategic Plan Advisor: Dr. George Ladd	Administrators: Patricia Ansay Amy Berdos Parent: Joanne Porter	Community/Student Body: Ray Dewar Government: Lt. Stanley Walasavage
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Steering Committee Liaisons

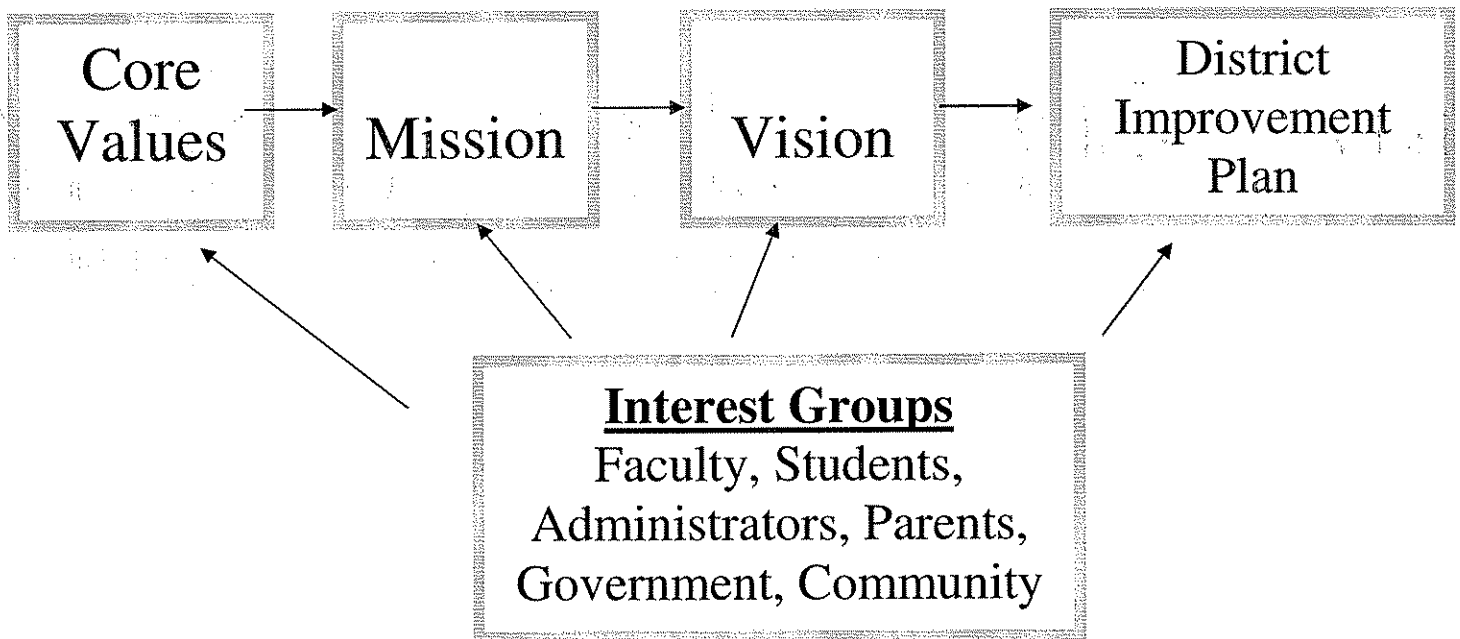
Teacher/Staff: Sarah Orszak Kathryn Rogers Sharon Roberts Kathleen Stejakoski	Administrators: Roger Parent Parents: Joanne Porter	Community/Student Body: Ray Dewar Government: Lt. Stanley Walasavage
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Reporting Timeline
April 2006 – March 2007

Original Date	Completed Date	
April 3		General Strategic Planning Meeting
April 14	April 14	Liaisons return core value surveys
April 28	May 8	Steering Committee provides proposed new Core Value Statements Steering Committee gives Mission Statement Survey feedback to liaisons
May 12	May 24	Liaisons return Mission Survey feedback
May 26	May 26	Steering Committee provides proposed new Mission Statement Steering Committee gives Vision survey to liaisons
June 9	June 9	Liaisons return Vision Survey
June 16	June 16	Steering Committee provides new Vision Statement to liaisons
June 23	June 23	Liaisons return Vision feedback
September	September 6	Steering Committee presents new Core Values, Mission, and Vision to School Committee
January	March	District Improvement Plan and Action Plans Completed
January	March	5 Year Strategic Plan Completed
April	April 4	Community Information Presentation (CIP)

Norton Public Schools Strategic Plan

A living long term (5 years) document that articulates the district's philosophy of education, values, accomplishments, goals, and strategies.



District Improvement Plan (DIP)

Establishes district-wide key priority areas that are informed through internal & external data collection, student achievement, and other important school factors. This helps drive the goals and strategies for each building.

Administration

Department of
Education
(DOE)

No Child Left
Behind
(NCLB)

Interest Groups

Faculty, Students,
Administrators, Parents,
Government, Community

Data
(test, facilities)

School Improvement Plans
(SIP)

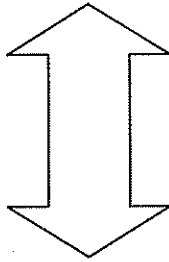
School Site
Council

Staff

Data

District Improvement Plan (DIP)

- District-wide priority areas
- Goals
- Strategies



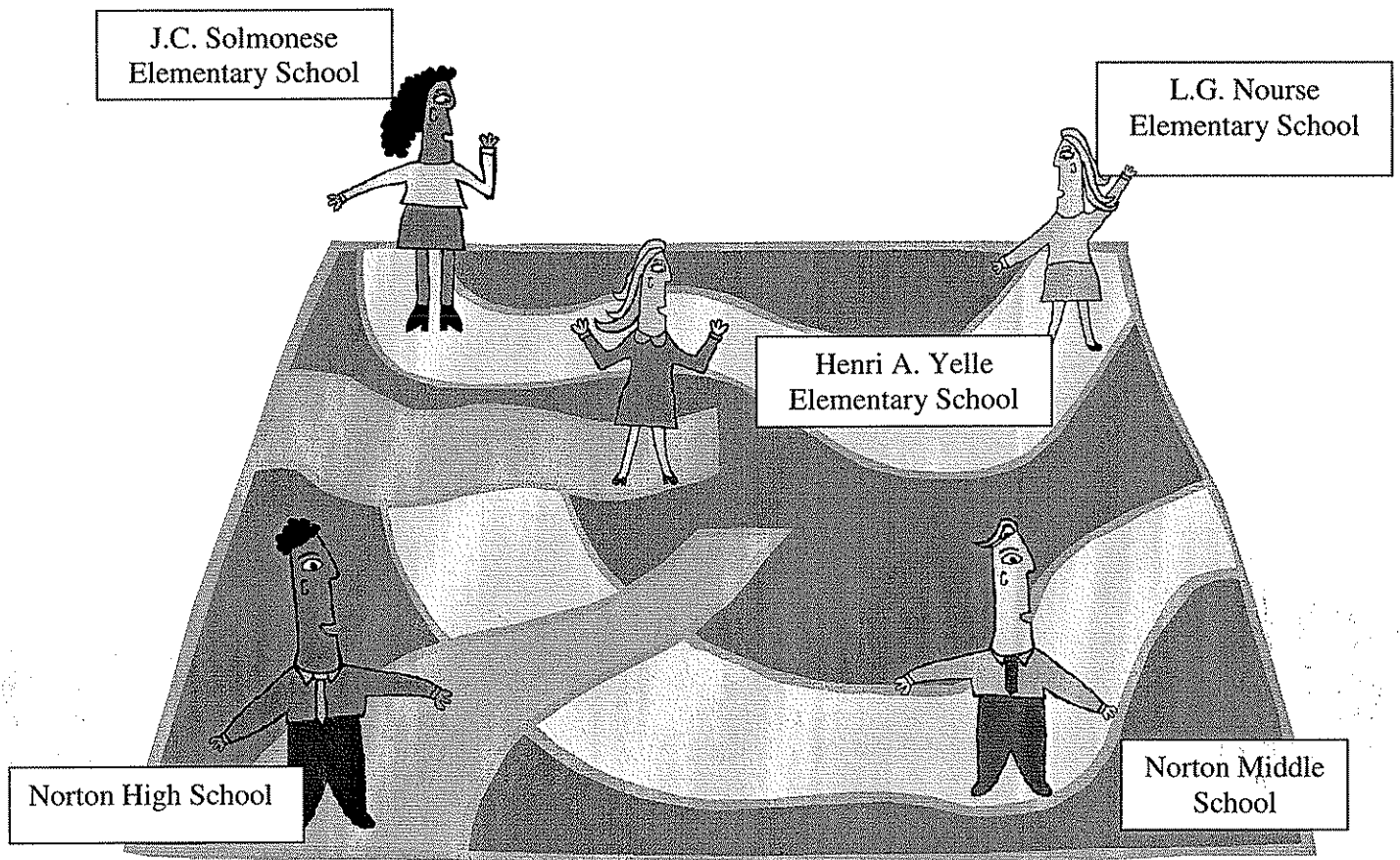
School Improvement Plans (SIP)

**School Site
Council**

Staff

Data

Paving the Direction



Each individual school's path, although different, will lead us in the same direction with the destination being a unified VISION, MISSION and set of CORE VALUES for the Norton Public Schools.



Norton Public Schools

Core Values:

We believe in...

- creating a safe environment and showing respect and appreciation for individual differences (School Climate)
- an active commitment between family, community, and schools as vital to student learning (Community Partnerships)
- high standards as key to academic excellence and life long learning (Curriculum and Instruction, Staff Development)
- taking responsibility for one's own learning (Student Achievement)
- pride in our schools as being essential (Community Partnership)

Mission Statement:

Guided by our Core Values the Norton Public Schools, in an active partnership with the community, provide each student with a quality education fostering personal development and intellectual growth which prepares each student to contribute and succeed in a global society.

Vision:

The Norton Public Schools, in collaboration with the community, inspires excellence in teaching and learning in order to promote individual talents and maximize each student's potential.

Norton Public Schools **DISTRICT PLAN**

I. Introduction

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This plan incorporates suggestions of the Strategic Steering Planning Committee, key questions contained within the DOE Panel Review Process for monitoring improvement plans, and elements from School Improvement Plans. It also includes mandates contained within the DOE and NCLB performance rating process which includes annual district and individual school report cards to parents. In addition, it incorporates recommendations from external audits including the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), the Massachusetts Department of Education's Coordinated Program Review (CPR), and the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA).

This District Improvement Plan for the Norton Public Schools consists of two sections:

1. The first section defines the mission, vision and core values of the Norton Public Schools.
2. The second section defines the goals and objectives of this District Wide Improvement Plan. It reflects input from the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, consisting of community members, principals, directors and other representatives of each of our schools and central office administrators. The goals presented are comprehensive and program specific improvement goals.

This District School Improvement Plan is to be revisited each October so that School Site Councils can develop individualized School Improvement Plans using this District School Improvement Plan as a guide. The District Plan must be reviewed and revised, if necessary, at least every three years.

The Norton Public Schools' School Committee has established a *District Action Team*. This team will meet at least twice a year in October and June and will be comprised of the following:

- The Superintendent
- The Director of Curriculum & Instruction
- The Director of Technology
- The Director of Pupil Personnel
- All school principals
- One teacher representative appointed by each School
- One representative of the Academic Coordinators
- Two additional representatives appointed by each School Council (one parent and one community member)

- One representative appointed by the Superintendent of Schools
- One representative of the Norton School Committee

The purpose of this *District Action Team* will be to coordinate advisory opinions on system-wide issues and programs that transcend individual schools (i.e. full day kindergarten, extended day programs, substitute's coverage, etc.). *District Action Team* meetings will be posted at least two weeks in advance of each meeting.

Relationship between School Improvement Plans and the District Improvement Plan

Each individual School Improvement Plan (SIP) must reflect the core values, mission and vision of the district and must contain a comprehensive data-driven analysis of student performance. The SIP should clearly delineate steps being taken to improve instruction, curriculum and assessment to bring all students to the proficient level on MCAS while making adequate progress each year, as defined by state and federal requirements. While raising students to the proficient level on the MCAS, we must not forget to also provide appropriate rigor to those who have already attained such status.

It is up to each individual School Site Councils to develop a data-driven plan which deals with the mandates for student achievement, teacher and paraprofessional qualifications and other areas which the Site Council feels could be most beneficial to its school. The presentation of data describing progress to-date and the establishment of measurable targets for the immediate future and long-range is required. An update of the plan for the following year must be presented to the School Committee at a meeting held between April and June. This deadline has been established to ensure that teachers and administrators have adequate time to plan professional development activities, which are aligned with district specific school plans. In this way the SIPs will be in place when school reopens in September.

Accountability

Each school's improvement plan must contain specific measurable improvement goals aligned with state and federal mandates for student achievement, teacher licensure/subject matter knowledge and paraprofessional qualifications. Plans must be data-driven with measurable statements for each improvement item. Progress on each item during the previous and current year must be included, as must measurable goals for the subsequent year, and for long-term student achievement targets under NCLB. For each goal, the plan must clearly indicate which staffs are responsible for monitoring and implementing.

Measurement

With a vision clearly defined, each school can take the appropriate steps to fulfill that vision by evaluating its progress via annual data, which is carefully analyzed to formulate instructional strategies. The selection of strategies should be research based. This will include SIP reports by individual principals and the Site Council representatives.

To that end, an accurate and representative system of measurement is essential to making progress towards achieving our goals. Analysis of data must include the development of measurable student performance goals. Please note that data must be disaggregated to reflect scores of all students (regular education students of all gender and races, those with disabilities, Limited English Proficient students, and those who receive free and reduced lunch). In addition, data on student attendance and graduation rates (high school) are required. These measurements and goals are to be reported to the School Committee as part of the annual School Improvement Plan and maintained throughout the school year in files accessible to audit by the DOE.

Needs Assessment

Each School Improvement Plan must include a needs assessment for improving performance. This assessment shall begin with a self-evaluation of the previous year's efforts. In addition to a data-driven assessment of student performance, factors to consider are:

1. Efforts to ensure that all instructional staff members meet the NCLB standard of certification and subject matter knowledge, sufficient to be deemed a highly qualified teacher.
2. Effectiveness of current programs as well as current goals, objectives and activities.
3. Possible impact of class sizes and student-teacher ratios.
4. An assessment of safety and student discipline within the school and any recommendations to better insure safety and appropriate student behavior.
5. Annual training needs for implementation of the crisis plan and required civil rights; special education, section 504, Title IX, sexual harassment, sheltered English immersion, physical restraint and any other mandates. There must be written documentation of such training maintained at the school for at least the most recent five years.
6. Establishment/continuation of a welcoming school environment, characterized by tolerance and respect for all groups and individuals.

II. Professional Development

Individual staff, licensure plans and school professional development plans must be aligned with school and district goals and with state and federal mandates and should clearly reflect staff progress toward licensure and recertification requirements and for paraprofessionals, their efforts to meet NCLB expectations. The primary focus of professional development is to identify strategies to address specific weaknesses identified in students' skills and knowledge.



Professional development opportunities are printed in an electronic format, which clearly state the district professional development mission, overview and goals. Various students' learning needs are analyzed and accommodated. Staff members suggest topics in areas they feel are in need of professional development. The district utilizes regular education and grant funds as well to support professional development offerings. The belief is that a teacher's skill is the greatest determining factor in student achievement. The district holds early release days annually and a full day of professional development opportunities for staff. The district has a Professional Development Plan. Whenever possible, common planning time is afforded teachers. Policies are frequently reviewed for consistency with Massachusetts General Laws. Examples include:

- Guided Reading in the Intermediate Classroom
- Root Cause Mathematics Analysis
- Differentiated Instruction
- The Skillful Teacher-Research for Better Teaching
- Mathematics Curriculum Development
- Examining Student Work – Research for Better Teaching
- Running Records, DRA Assessments
- DIBELS Training
- Mentoring New Teaching Staff
- Rubric Development
- Classroom Management

- Interactive Writing in the Primary/Intermediate Classroom
- Integrating Technology in Content Classes
- Applications of SmartBoard/MIMEO Technology within the Classroom
- Observing and Analyzing Teaching
- Curriculum Mapping
- Mathematics Data Analysis
- Developing Mathematical Ideas
- Secondary School Reading
- Writer's Workshop
- Standards-based Curriculum & Instruction
- Student Assessment "Getting It Right"
- Mid-Term & End-of-Year Math Assessments
- Open Response Questions
- MCAS Analysis/Interpretation
- Assertive Discipline
- Topic Development Writing
- Reading Strategies for all Classrooms
- Developing Literacy Closets
- Benchmark Development

Guiding Questions:

- What professional development program initiatives are needed to bring about instructional change and improve student performance?
- What professional development initiatives are needed to promote and support enduring teacher quality, uniform professional practice and growth?

In addition to the professional development opportunities offered within the district, a comprehensive induction and mentoring program is offered for new teachers. The mentoring program assigns a peer mentor, provides new teacher workshops and support meetings. It is intended to provide a foundation and support to ease a new teacher's transition into a solid career commitment.

III. Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and Instruction for PreK-12 is under the guidance of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. In addition to curricula, grants management and professional development are handled through the curriculum office. At the secondary level Academic Coordinators for English, Math, Science, and History also oversee curriculum and instruction for grades 6-12.

Curricula are adapted and aligned with the state curriculum frameworks to ensure that all efforts have been made to meet students' needs in the regular education program. Staff are assisted and required to analyze and accommodate diverse learning styles and differentiate

instruction within the regular education classroom. Each school utilizes building based reading specialists to provide direct instruction to students and to consult with other teachers on how to adapt their instruction. This ensures direct and systematic instruction in reading for all students.

IV. Curriculum Accommodations

Changes in the Massachusetts Special Education Laws (12/03) require school districts to implement District Curriculum Accommodation Plans (DCAP) to help ensure all efforts have been made to meet students' needs in regular education. The plans should encompass efforts as follows:

- Analysis of diverse learning styles within the regular education classroom
- Accommodations to meet needs of the diverse learning styles within a regular education class
- Provision of appropriate services and support within the regular education classroom
- Direct and systematic instruction of reading
- Services to address the needs of children whose behavior may interfere with learning

The District Curriculum Accommodation Plan details programs and supports already available and implemented within the Norton Public Schools. School Site Councils need to formulate specific School Curriculum Accommodation Plans (SCAP) at each school building.

Students learn best in classrooms that support accommodations for all students' learning styles. The Norton Public School System has adopted a Curriculum Accommodation Plan (SCAP) to assist principals, insuring that all efforts have been made to meet students' needs in regular education. This plan has been designed to assist the regular classroom teacher in analyzing and accommodating diverse learning styles of all children in the regular classroom, and in providing appropriate services and support within the regular education program including, but not limited to, direct and systematic instruction in reading and provision of services to address the needs of children whose behavior may interfere with learning. The Curriculum Accommodation Plan does include provisions to encourage teacher mentoring and collaboration as well as parental involvement. The purpose of this document is to strengthen and improve the general education program for the benefit of all students. School principals and school site councils are involved in identifying the types of educational concerns that are presented by diverse student learners, and in the development, implementation, and assessment of a SCAP at the building level.

Building-Based Support Teams

The Building-Based Support Team (BBT) is an on-going confidential team approach to assist students of concern. It is not a disciplinary team, but one that functions as an assessment, prevention and intervention team. It allows teachers to receive support from

professional peers when the teachers have questions about a student's progress. Students who are at risk of failing multiple subjects, have major behavioral problems, are suspected users or abusers of alcohol or drugs, are involved in the court system or in psychiatric referrals are appropriate referrals to the BBT team. The team may be comprised of the school nurse, teacher(s), specialists, guidance counselor, adjustment counselor, social worker, building principal, and psychologist. Although referrals are typically initiated by classroom teachers, parents, and in the upper grades, students may make referrals to the BBT.

BBT members listen to the concerns expressed by the person making the referral and when it is deemed appropriate, instructional strategies are offered through a brainstorming format. These strategies are then reviewed with the classroom teacher and considered for implementation. Because of the varied expertise of the BBT members, instructional strategies often reflect alternative methods of instruction not yet explored by the classroom teacher. In-house consultation services are also available to the BBT team members. Title I teacher/assistant, psychologists, Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist and the Physical Therapist are resource people who are available to deliver consultation services.

Once the BBT has formulated an instructional strategy, the strategy is reviewed on a regular basis. During the review, the BBT analyzes the classroom teacher's(s') documentation of progress and the team members determine if:

- The strategies are effective and the student has made adequate progress, no longer needing the BBT process.
- The strategies are effective and there is evidence of some progress. The BBT process should continue and another meeting date should be set to carefully monitor progress.
- Strategies have not been effective and adequate progress is not evident. The BBT members suspect that there may be other issues impeding the student's progress. The student may at this point be referred for a special education evaluation or a 504 plan.

504 Accommodation Plans

Student 504 Accommodation Plans are provided for those students who are experiencing a disabling condition that prevents them from accessing and benefiting from the regular curriculum. Identifying the disability condition and developing modifications allows the student the opportunity to fulfill Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) through the regular curriculum.

V. Support Services Available Within the District

Title I

Title I, a regular education program, is the largest federal aid program in the nation. The goal of the Title I program is to:

- Identify students who are at risk academically.
- Provide individual or small group direct reading/math instruction for the students identified. Instruction in Norton is provided within and outside of the regular classroom in grades 1-3.
- Provide instruction through the use of a variety of teaching methods and services.
- Work closely with school personnel to provide collaboration and consultation regarding the student's progress.
- Increase meaningful parent involvement in student success.

Informal and formal assessments are conducted to determine which students could benefit from services provided through Title I. Title I teachers work closely with the Title I Director and classroom teachers. Special educators may also provide consultation to the Title I teachers/assistants regarding instructional methods and materials.

In Grades 4 and 5 a supplemental reading support program, similar to the Title I program, is available for identified students. Students who have been identified as at risk are provided supplemental reading and writing support through direct instruction. The selection process for this program is comparable to that of the Title I program in grades one through three.

Direct, systematic reading instruction is offered to all students in grades K – 7. In grade 8, all students are exposed to foreign language instruction in lieu of reading class. Any grade 8 student who would be better served with an additional year of direct reading service is given that opportunity. All students do receive literature instruction in their English classes. Title I classes are available for students in grades 1-3 with a supplemental reading support program servicing grades 4-5 also available. Grade 9-12 students, in need of additional systematic reading instruction, have daily access to the Learning Center.

Behavioral Support Services

Counseling services are available to all regular education K – 12 students in the Norton Public Schools. Whole class mini-lessons led by Counselors in age appropriate topics such as bullying and conflict resolution take place at various grade levels. Further, teachers have participated in various professional development opportunities in an effort to extend their knowledge base on strategies for working with behavioral students. Smoking cessation, diversity issues, bullying, and other social issues are addressed on an as needed basis. If necessary, referrals to providers outside the district can be arranged.

Consultation services include behavioral intervention strategies, functional behavioral assessments, classroom management consultations and participation in the pre-referral

process. The pre-referral process involves discussion of the students who may be experiencing social, educational, or behavioral difficulties due to social/emotional issues.

Direct services that are available consist of individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, peer mediation, psychological assessments and recommendation, family/school communications and feedback, and referral to outside therapy as needed.

A crisis team is established as needed with counselors and school psychologists in the geographical area.

Occupational and Physical Therapy

Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physical Therapy (PT) services are provided by certified occupational and physical therapists. The Occupational and Physical Therapists provide direct OT/PT treatment and informal support services. During whole class inclusion sessions, the Occupational and Physical Therapists provide support and demonstration for primary fine and gross motor and visual motor skills. Also, the Occupational and Physical Therapists provide informal consultation on an as needed basis.

Speech-Language Pathology

Speech-Language Pathologists provide consultation to address language development in areas such as phonemic awareness, auditory processing, and articulation. Students benefit from indirect services provided by speech/language pathologists to general education classrooms. They support the systematic development of auditory processing and phonemic awareness skills that are utilized within school buildings. Speech-Language Pathologists provide speech, language and hearing screenings throughout the school year. Technical support for assistive listening devices is also provided as needed. Through consultation and direct instruction, the Speech-Language Pathologists provide a valuable service for students.

Character Education Programs

Within the elementary schools, principal/teacher training in Character Education Programs is ongoing. Programs of this type provide a model for helping children develop social competency and appreciation for diversity skills in a thoughtful and systematic manner. Such models focus on strategies to build self-esteem, problem-solving skills, and a classroom environment of collaboration and cooperation. An open discussion format allows students opportunities for modeling and practicing skills while receiving positive reinforcement. The program is built around a yearlong curriculum and multi-year community based training for school staff.

Peer Mediation/Conflict Resolution

Peer mediation/conflict resolution is offered at both Norton Middle School and Norton High School. Students receive intensive training to prepare them for this responsibility.

Peer mediation is students helping students to avoid violence by resolving conflicts in a peaceful, pro-social manner. The goal of the program is to improve the school environment by reducing violence, assaults, hateful language, bullying, discipline referrals, as well as increasing academic performance. In the peer mediation intervention, teams of student volunteers are trained to serve as role models and "neutral third parties" to provide mediation services for their peers who lack the skills to successfully resolve their conflicts.

Student Peer Tutoring

High school students offer academic assistance to middle school students to develop better organizational skills and encourage the younger students to practice good study skills. The goal of the tutor is to be a mentor, a good role model, and a friend to the younger student.

Teacher Mentoring Program

A teacher mentoring program has been in place since 2000. A cadre of 20 trained mentors assists new staff. Each year new teachers to the district participate with their mentors in a variety of professional development opportunities as well as work closely to collaborate with their mentor. Mentoring new teachers provides a mechanism to indirectly support students that may need additional assistance throughout the year.

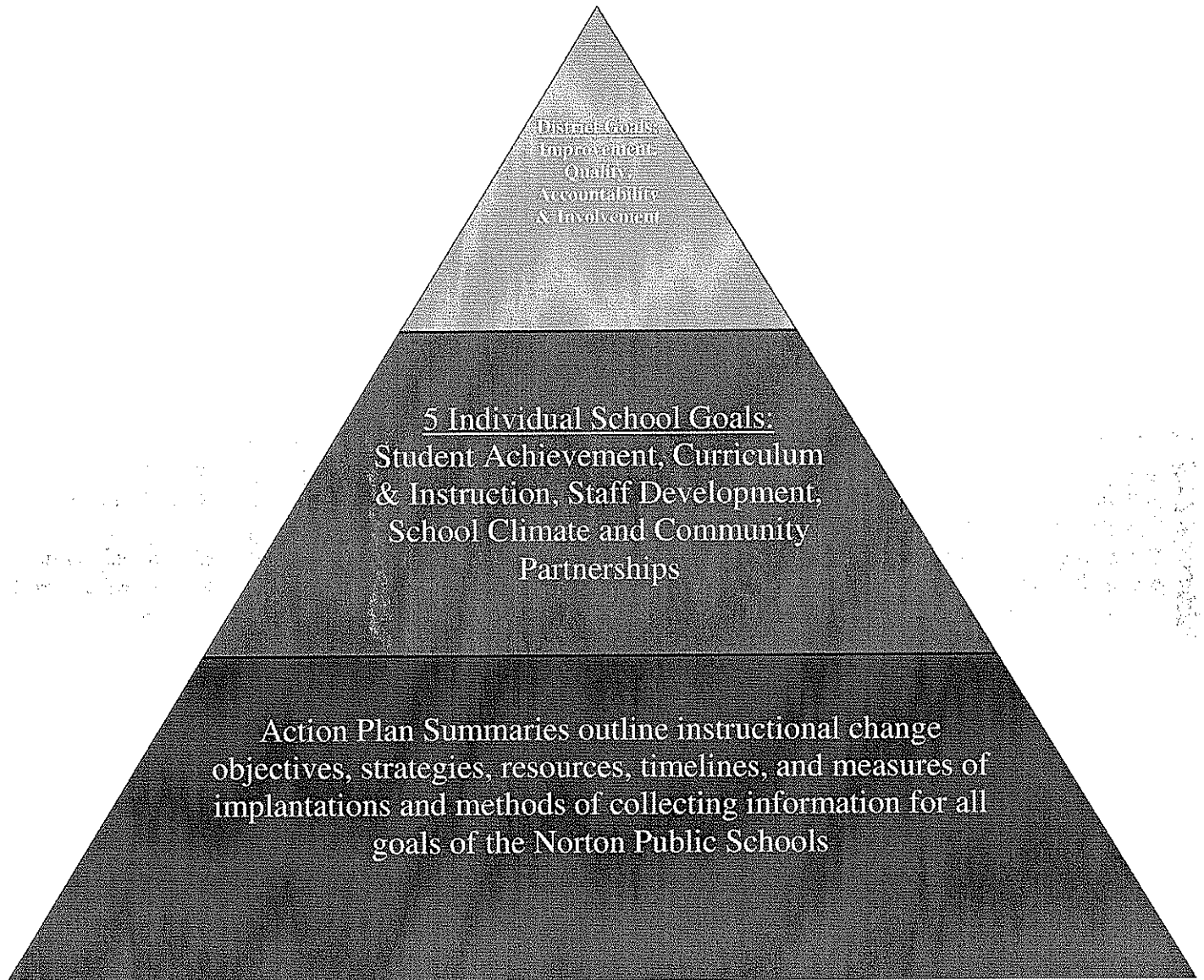
Learning Center

The high school offers academic support for students who failed MCAS tests in grades 8 and 10 and who are at risk of academic failure, or have yet to pass an MCAS retest for graduation. The middle school has an academic support program designed to assist students with academic success by improving organizational skills, homework/project completion, etc.

Academic Support

All at-risk students have an Individual Student Success Plan. MCAS remediation is provided for students in grades 9 – 12 during the school day. The Middle School provides homework/tutoring assistance Monday – Thursday with highly qualified certified staff.

Norton Public Schools



VI. District Wide Goals

Goals for district improvement are district-wide and site-based. Contributions from individual school improvement plans, analyses of the results of MCAS and achievement testing, and the input of Norton educators create the foundation for the goals necessary to address continual student achievement.

The overall goals of this District School Improvement Plan are as follows:

1. To provide guidance and direction in the development of individualized School Improvement Plans for continuous improvement in the quality of education in each school in the Norton School System. This plan outlines a specific direction under which each School Site Council must operate, in developing a School Improvement Plan for its own school.
2. To increase accountability throughout the school system. The Education Reform Act and the federal No Child Left Behind Law transfers much of the authority and responsibility for the administration of public education to each local school, specifically the principal and the School Site Council.
3. To promote participation and active involvement from those who are the most familiar with and the most affected by each School Improvement Plan (stakeholders such as students, community members, staff and parents). In order to accomplish this goal, the district's administration will make every effort to provide translators/translations when needed.

District Goals

Goal 1 – Student Achievement

Our staff feels valued, supported and encouraged to grow. A spirit of collegiality permeates the schools. Teachers and administrators use data to assess and improve their own effectiveness. We provide teachers the tools, supports and resources to be successful. Innovative educational ideas and teaching practices are brought to the school system through joint planning, professional dialogue, collaboration and professional development. Our students realize that they hold responsibility for their own learning and are accountable for reaching their full potential thus Education is a shared responsibility.

Goal 2 – Curriculum & Instruction

We are committed to continuous improvement of student achievement. Our school programs are diverse and challenging while attempting to meet individual needs. Students, parents, teachers and administrators have a clear set of standards regarding what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. Parents, teachers and administrators have a common understanding of effective

instructional practices that are used in the classrooms. Instruction is provided in a way which requires exploration, problem solving and critical thinking enabling all students to achieve. Each individual student's needs are met at every grade level, while taking into consideration that cognitive, social, physical and emotional development vary.

Goal 3 – Staff Development

The faculty and staff in Norton are committed to continuously enhancing teaching and learning through continued high quality professional development. We believe in recruiting and retaining a staff that will be dedicated to our students and have passion and enthusiasm for teaching and learning. The Norton schools will sustain an environment that values scientifically based research, promotes collegiality and collaboration.

Goal 4 – School Climate

The Norton Public School district is rightly proud of its reputation for promoting learning through high academic standards and the ability to challenge all students. We prepare our students for success in a global society.

The culture and climate within the learning community honor diversity, and model respect, responsibility, integrity and accountability. We convey these values by the ways in which we develop school atmosphere, maintain school facilities, establish expectations for student achievement, and present learning experiences to our students.

Goal 5 - Community Partnerships

The community is an active and contributing partner that fully supports our schools. This is evident not only through financial support, but by active parent and community involvement in classrooms and other efforts. There is frequent communication between our schools and the community regarding opportunities, accomplishments and progress on educational goals. This partnership of students, teachers, support staff, administrators and the community, excelling at what they do and acting with strong conviction and deep commitment, brings about quality education in Norton.

VII. Program Specific Improvement Goals

1. **District Reading and English Language Arts Improvement Goals:** To support meaningful and measurable change that will result in making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all Norton student subgroups in Reading and English Language Arts for 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09. The Composite Performance Index (CPI) Performance or Improvement goals are the following:

<u>Student Population</u>	Performance Target for 2007	Performance Target for 2008	Performance Target for 2009
Aggregate	91.0	92.8	94.4
Special Education	78.9	82.1	86.1
Low Income	84.9	87.5	90.2
White	91.2	92.9	94.5

2. **District Mathematics Improvement Goals:** To support meaningful and measurable change that will result in making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all Norton student subgroups in mathematics for 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09. The Composite Performance Index (CPI) Performance or Improvement goals are the following:

<u>Student Population</u>	Performance Target for 2007	Performance Target for 2008	Performance Target for 2009
Aggregate	78.8	82.5	86.4
Special Education	62.0	68.5	75.5
Low Income	67.0	72.0	78.3
White	79.1	82.8	86.6

3. **District Special Education Improvement Goals:** To support meaningful and measurable change that will result in making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all Norton special education student subgroups for 2006-07 and 2007-08. The Composite Performance Index (CPI) Improvement goals are the following for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics:

2007: ELA 78.9 Math 62.0

2008: ELA 82.1 Math 68.5

2009: ELA 86.1 Math 75.5

VIII. Budget Review/Prioritization

The Norton Public School System must strive to provide each student with a quality education. This can only be accomplished through collaboration among all members of the community to actively support a culture of educational excellence and with proper funding. Annual increases in the budget are needed to keep pace with increased utility costs, negotiated contractual obligations, and increased costs of materials and services, as well as to address areas that have been neglected over the years. The Norton School System must continue to move forward, this is a must. The school department's budgets are developed after months of planning between the Superintendent, administrators, and the School Committee. The budgets are designed to not only bring educational services to a level commensurate with other area communities, but also to address deficiencies that have been identified through audits, such as NEASC, CPR, and EQA. The school and district-wide improvement plan initiatives are funded through the school department's budgets.

In conclusion, the school department budgets depict the district's educational philosophy in numbers.

IX. Parent Involvement/Community Development

Parent Involvement in their children's education has increased significantly over the last several years. Effective decision-making is a collaborative process maintaining a constant focus on our students. Administration must continually and actively listen to its constituents as schools can not do it alone. Children must recognize that their parents support and value education and the work that both schools and students do on a daily basis. In Norton, parents are active advocates for their children. The use of Edline has increased parental involvement and support for their student's success in the Norton Public Schools, by making up-to-date grades and homework assignments available on a nightly basis. The relationship between all members of the school department is a constructive one whereby both parties feel free to express concerns and have an expectation that everyone will work together for the good of the children.

All parents are eligible to serve on PTA/PTO/SPO and Site Councils. The Superintendent holds meetings for parents and community members. Information is shared, concerns aired, and questions answered. Title I and Parent Involvement Project grants have increased the number of evening activities for families. Schools consistently conduct literacy, science/mathematics curriculum evenings, science fairs and MCAS presentations and parent volunteer training sessions. Parent volunteer sessions focus both on working with children at home as well as working with students in our classrooms. The Title I program embraces parent/staff communication, community involvement, volunteerism, new family orientation, and so forth. A Middle School Parents' Night for Grade 8 students going to Grade 9 is held where topics of school choices, high school transition, school requirements, etc. are addressed. At the secondary level, parents are invited to award presentations, college financial aid workshops, MCAS presentations, Honor Society

Inductions and sports award evenings. Parent/Teacher Organizations and Site Councils are active as well.

A parent/community volunteer group of hundreds of individuals work weekly in classrooms and schools throughout the district. This initiative helps to reduce the adult/child ratio. Channel 98, our educational television station, provides timely information to Norton residents. A district/school website, newsletters, student handbooks, and sign boards are afforded to parents/guardians as additional forms of community communication. It is our intent to continually involve our parents and community as we work closely to provide a partnership which is vital to student learning.

Glossary of Terms

AYP *Adequate Yearly Progress.* As required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), all schools and districts are expected to meet or exceed specific student performance standards in English Language Arts (ELA)/reading and math by the year 2014. AYP determinations are issued yearly to monitor the interim progress of all students toward attainment of those performance goals. School and district AYP determinations are made based on the performance of students in the aggregate and for student subgroups for both ELA and mathematics.

To receive an affirmative 2005 AYP determination, schools and districts must meet 1) a student participation requirement, 2) an additional attendance or graduation requirement, and either 3) the State's Cycle IV performance target for that subject or 4) the school or district's own Mid-Cycle IV improvement (gain) target. A group may also meet AYP by reducing the number of non-proficient students by 10% between 2003-04 and 2004-05 (NCLB's Safe Harbor provision).

Accountability

Status Districts, schools, and student subgroups are expected to make Adequate Yearly Progress in ELA and mathematics. Districts, schools, or subgroups that make AYP in consecutive years have no Accountability Status. Those that do not make AYP for two consecutive years or more may be identified for Improvement, Corrective Action, or Restructuring for students in the aggregate or for one or more student subgroups. Improvement, Corrective Action, and Restructuring status all trigger specific consequences.

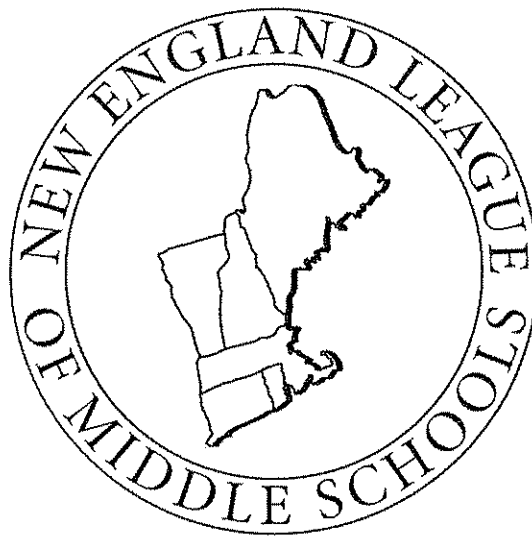
CPI *Composite Performance Index.* The Composite Performance index (CPI) is a measure of the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, respectively. The CPI is a 100-point index that combines the scores of students who take standard MCAS tests (the Proficiency Index) with the scores of those who take the MCAS-Alternative Assessment (MCAS-Alt) (the MCAS-Alt Index).

ELL *English Language Learners:* Students who are learning English as a second language.

DRA *Developmental Reading Assessment:* Not part of MCAS; given to Norton students in grades 1-5.

MCAS *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System:* A growing statewide testing system linked to AYP determinations required by NCLB law.

- MELA-O** *Massachusetts English Language Assessment – Oral:* Part of MCAS for ELL students. The MELA-O tests students’ listening and speaking proficiency in English.
- MEPA** *Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment:* Another component of MCAS. The MEPA tests ELL students’ reading and writing proficiency.
- Cycle IV** The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) established the years between 2002 and 2014 as the period within which states must help all students attain proficiency in English language arts and mathematics. To align its existing accountability system with NCLB, Massachusetts has set intermediary performance targets for each 2-year **cycle** between 1998, when the Massachusetts School & District Accountability System was adopted, and 2014. Cycle IV consists of 2005-06 data.
- NCLB** *No Child Left Behind:* A federal law passed in 2001 to improve public education.
- State Target** State performance targets for ELA and for mathematics have been set for each two-year period – or cycle – between 1998 and 2014. These targets establish benchmarks toward the NCLB goal of all students scoring proficient or advanced by 2014. For both years of Cycle IV (2004-05 and 2005-06), the state target for ELA is a CPI of 80.5 points. For math, the state target is 68.7.

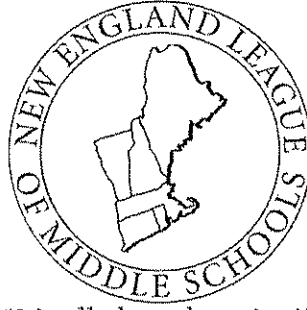


"It's all about learning!"

**Assessment Report
of
Norton Middle School
Norton, Massachusetts**

**Visitation Dates:
October 29, 30 & 31, 2008**

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"It's all about learning!"

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Table of Contents

The NELMS Assessment Process	3
The <i>Turning Points 2000</i> design	4
Introduction	5
Curriculum and Assessment.....	6
Varied Instruction	7
Middle Level Teachers and Staff	13
Relationships for Learning	16
Govern Democratically.....	18
Healthy School Environment.....	20
Involving Parents and Community	23
Summary	25
About the Assessors	26

The NELMS Assessment Process

The New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) designed its school assessment program to help schools become even better at what they do for young adolescent learners. It is based on research summarized in *Turning Points 2000*, a validation of the original report of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, *Turning Points* that was first published in 1989. This report outlines best practices for young adolescent learning and was written by Anthony W. Jackson and Gayle A. Davis with the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It was published by Teachers College Press, New York, New York.

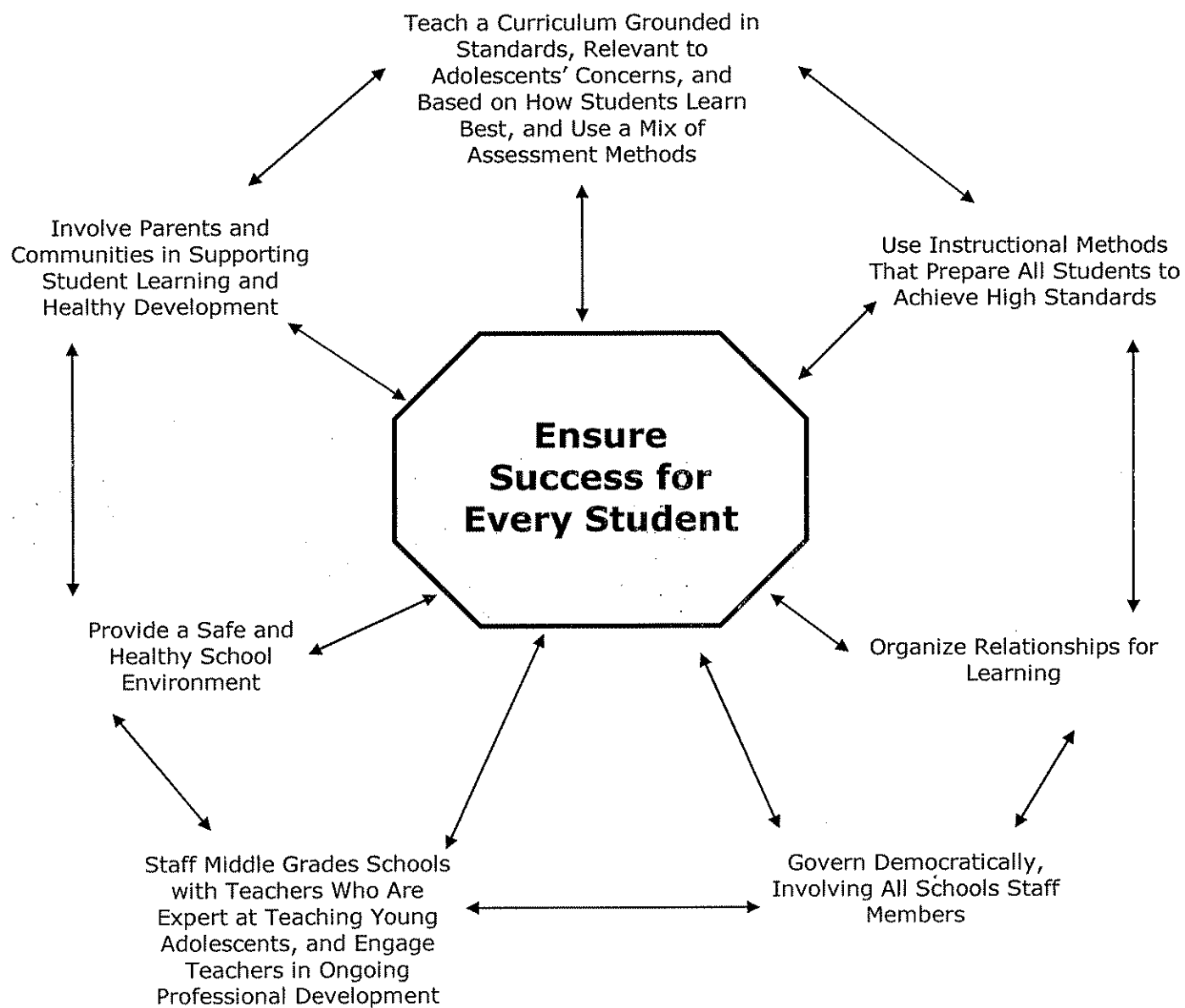
The administration of Norton Public Schools contacted NELMS to learn more about this process and seriously began this work in May of 2008. This assessment was suggested by the superintendent as Norton Middle School would have a new principal when school opened in September. Also, the self assessment and onsite visit would provide the opportunity for NMS to honestly examine itself and grow on behalf of their students. Following conversations with the superintendent and NMS assistant principal, the school completed surveys of faculty, parents and students. This data is the school's self-study and is extremely important information that should be used in conjunction with this report.

Another piece of this assessment is a three day on-site visit by a team of middle level educators, referred to as the Visiting Team (VT), who represent different states in New England and various professional backgrounds and roles. During the visit, they analyze themes raised in the self-study and make their own observations before creating a report for the school to use in conjunction with its self-study. These observations reflect three days in the life of a school which may or may not accurately represent the learning that takes place on the other days of the school year. However, generally themes that arise in the self-study tend to be visible during a school visit, and this is true of NMS.

The final, and most important piece of the school assessment process, is how the school decides to use the information it has gathered in this work. The self-study combined with the report of the NELMS VT provides a roadmap to school improvement. "Good and getting better" is a positive theme to use in implementing some of the recommendations contained in this report. The change process is neither speedy nor painless, but our focus should always remain on improving learning opportunities for young adolescents.

NELMS and this VT hope that the information contained in this report, in addition to the data in the self-study, will provide direction for growth so that Norton Middle School will become an even more effective learning community for the young adolescents of Norton, Massachusetts.

The Turning Points 2000 Design



Jackson A.W & Davis, G.A. (2000) *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*; Carnegie Corporation of New York, Teachers College Press, p. 25

Introduction

Members of the Visiting Team (VT) from the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) arrived at Norton Middle School (NMS) prior to the start of school on October 29, 2008. The VT was welcomed by the principal and the assistant principal who were supervising students at breakfast.

As students entered school from the buses, staff members supervised their arrival as they reported to homeroom. The VT also went to the conference room which would be their home during the three day visit.

The visit began with a student led tour of NMS. Students expressed pride in their school and indicated that they felt safe at NMS and thought that their teachers and the NMS staff cared about them.

The VT then met with the principal and assistant principal. They shared that their purpose of the whole school assessment was to "make NMS the best". They also shared general information about the school, gave an overview of the community and provided an overview of the three day visit.

The remainder of the first day was spent visiting classrooms and conducting a few interviews.

That evening the superintendent hosted a supper at school which provided the opportunity for members of the VT to meet with members of the steering committee, school committee members and community representatives.

During the next day, members of the VT interviewed faculty, staff, parents, central office personnel, school committee members and community representatives.

The final day was spent completing the interview process and classroom visits.

At the close of the school day the VT met with faculty and staff in the auditorium to thank them for their hospitality and for welcoming the VT into their classrooms.

Several members of the VT also participated in the principal's weekly parent podcast prior to departure.

Curriculum and Assessment

Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards, relevant to the concerns of adolescents, and based on how students learn best.

"Content or academic standards, which spell out what students should know and be able to do, form the basis for the curriculum we recommend. Academic standards provide the link between excellence and equity by setting consistently high, public expectations for *every* student. As a reflection of the school's broader goal of enabling young adolescents to reach their full intellectual potential, the effort to support every student, including special education and English language learners, in exceeding or exceeding high academic standards should drive all other aspects of school improvement." (*Turning Points 2000*, p.32)

"Assessment should be designed to provide ongoing, useful feedback, to both students and teachers, on what students have learned. This feedback should be used to improve teaching and learning progressively, not just to audit student performance. Effective assessment should connect directly to curriculum and instruction. Simply put, assessments should be perfectly meshed with what we want students to learn. . . .For all students to be successful, to meet or exceed the "building codes" (performance standards), they must have a thorough understanding of the standards that form the concepts and questions that form the frame." (*Turning Points 2000*, p. 54)

The VT had the opportunity to observe the varied curricula being used at NMS. Through interviews with school and district administrators, faculty, staff, parents and students, as well as through classroom observations, the VT was made aware of the academic expectations of NMS.

Currently, the 2007 Norton Public Schools Science and Technology/Engineering Modular Curriculum is presented as the model for curricula in other content areas. At this time, a process is in place to update the curricula in the remaining content areas to incorporate this model. Content maps and pacing guides for every content area and grade are a part of this process. Governance of this process is the responsibility of each Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and flows through the Academic Coordinators (for grades 6-12) to the grade level teachers who meet with his/her department once a month. Increased accessibility to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, or a movement towards building-based department heads, may help expedite the curriculum-updating process.

Because curricula for all content areas have not yet been finalized, and as ascertained through staff interviews, the VT was made aware of a need for common assessments across grade-level content areas. The implementation of common formative and summative assessments and the subsequent analysis of their data would allow for more informed instruction within each classroom in order to maximize student learning, as well as a greater understanding of student performance according to the performance standards.

Common Assessment: A common assessment is a uniform tool administered consistently by all teachers in a grade level or course within a given time frame. These assessments utilize various levels of depth of knowledge and various types of questions to measure students' understanding of essential outcomes. Scoring is done collaboratively using a uniform scoring guide which is understood by students and staff. Data will be shared and analyzed to direct instruction.

Formative Assessment: "Formative Assessment is part of the instructional process. When incorporated into classroom practice, it provides the information needed to adjust teaching and learning while they are happening. In this sense, formative assessment informs both teachers and students about student understanding at a point when timely adjustments can be made. These adjustments help to ensure students achieve targeted standards-based learning goals within a set time frame." – Catherine Garrison and Michael Ehringhaus

Summative Assessments: "Summative Assessments are given periodically to determine at a particular point in time what students know and do not know. Many associate summative assessments only with standardized tests such as state assessments, but they are also used at and are an important part of district and classroom programs. Summative assessment at the district/classroom level is an accountability measure that is generally used as part of the grading process." – Catherine Garrison and Michael Ehringhaus

Likewise, a uniform practice of Understanding By Design (UBD) would allow for effective mastery of all performance standards. Many NMS faculty articulated the need for common planning time in order to facilitate communication between grade-level content areas and to allow for the creation of common formative and summative assessments.

The VT recognized the regular optimal utilization of new technology. The use of laptop projectors was widespread throughout the facility, and the accessibility for faculty, staff and students to modern technology is prevalent. Increased professional development opportunities for faculty and staff in order to comprehend fully the new technologies at their disposal were a consistent request throughout the interview process. As regards the integration of technology across the content areas, the NMS program has been heralded as the "model curriculum for technology integration." While successful integration of new technology has occurred within many content areas, the complete integration of new technology across all content areas is a work in progress. Interviews with faculty indicated the need for common planning time in order to allow for increased and successful integration with the Technology Department.

Similarly, Unified Arts has made a strong attempt to connect with the core subject areas. The VT received enthusiastic explanations from faculty and students of the annual interdisciplinary themed theatrical performance. Currently, the

performance is a synthesis of efforts by Unified Arts and selected content areas within the seventh grade. School-wide involvement in this interdisciplinary activity is a goal; however, interviews with faculty again reaffirm the need for common planning time in order to be a part of such an undertaking.

The VT was informed that due to budget-induced staff reductions, the Family Consumer Science curriculum has been eliminated. Also, operation of the Library has ceased on account of budgetary constraints. Students and faculty voiced their desire to reintroduce both programs.

Report cards and progress reports of all 6th, 7th and 8th grade students are sent home to NMS parents on a quarterly basis. The parent survey indicated a strong degree of satisfaction as regards communication between school and home.

Parent/staff conferences are held midway through Term II and near the end of Term III. Teams meet individually with parents on an as-needed basis.

Curriculum meetings are held monthly by department with Curriculum Coordinators who are based in Norton High School.

Strengths:

1. Unified Arts has made a strong attempt to connect with core areas for interdisciplinary planning.
2. Technology integration is acknowledged as the "model curriculum for technology integration."

Recommendations:

1. Complete the effort to create and articulate the curriculum for each content area.
2. Implement the consistent use of common assessment and analyze their corresponding data in order to inform instruction. The implementation of solely summative assessments does not allow for the pedagogical adaptations necessary to ensure student achievement.
3. Provide professional development opportunities to increase understanding of common formative and summative assessments.
4. Implement the use of software packages such as Test Wiz in order both to monitor strengths and weaknesses for individual students as well as to identify gaps within the curriculum.
5. Create opportunities for staff to work together on developing an interdisciplinary curriculum and assessment opportunities that maintain the rigor of strong literacy and math skills incorporated with relevant and meaningful social studies, health, and science topics, enhanced by the excellent art, music, and technology opportunities available to NMS students.

Varied Instruction

"A middle instructional program needs to be designed to meet the needs of a highly diverse and unique student body. To be effective, instruction should mesh with three other aspects of teaching and learning: the standards and resulting curriculum outlining what students should learn; the assessments students will use to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and the needs, interests, and learning styles of the students themselves. Classes should include students of diverse needs, achievement levels, interests, and learning styles and instruction should be differentiated to take advantage of diversity, not ignore it." (Turning Points 2000, P.23)

Carol Ann Tomlinson, a noted authority on differentiated instruction, states, "Students can be provided different avenues for learning, based on their diverse levels of readiness, interests and learning profiles. Teachers in a differentiated classroom act as diagnosticians, "prescribing the best possible instruction for their students". (Turning Points 2000, p.76) Teachers can then use their diagnosis to differentiate on three dimensions – content, process, or product. It is important that when planning for instruction that is differentiated that every student participates in respectful work, work that respects their level of readiness challenged them to grow in their mastery of essential concepts and skills, supports their growth by consistently escalating the degree of difficulty and offers "equally interesting, equally important, and equally engaging" tasks. (Turning Points 2000, P.76)

The VT visited all classrooms and programs over the course of the 3-day assessment period. NMS operates on a fixed eight period day consisting of 7 periods of 48 minutes each and 1 period of 25 minutes for lunch daily. Student passing time is not accounted for within the current schedule model. Students at NMS are provided an extra ½ year of Mathematics (Math Plus) and ½ year of Reading in 7th grade. The VT found this program to be an effective reinforcement opportunity for students. Both staff and students alike viewed this program as very positive and worthwhile.

The VT observed both class instruction as well as transitions between classes and programs. Classes within each "team" area transitioned very well and instructional time was not impacted. The VT observed that classes before and after lunch and specials lost instructional minutes due to "travel time" between areas.

The VT found learning spaces to be safe and organized in manner conducive to learning. The VT observed computers, projectors, and general use of technology in many classrooms. Core teachers seemed to have an adequate amount of instructional resources and materials within their classroom.

NMS has a fully equipped media/library center that has been closed due to staffing issues. Parents, staff, and students alike had great concern over the closing of the school library and its impact on learning.

The VT observed instructional practice in all core and special areas a NMS. Learning objectives were visible on white boards in most areas. Students were able to clearly articulate what they were "doing" in the form of activities but many had

difficulty explaining the "why" of subject matter they were learning about. In general, students were engaged and participating in learning activities.

The VT noted some variety in the form of instructional delivery with observations of cooperative learning and flexible grouping. Overall, there was very little evidence to support effective and consistent use of Differentiated Instruction (DI) at NMS. The lack of DI has resulted in lowered expectation of student outcomes as a whole. The VT felt while the teachers were dedicated and caring towards the students, there was a lack of rigorous education being provided that meets student needs and challenges all learners at each level.

NMS has not adopted the regular use of Rubrics, Common Formative Assessments or assessments to drive instructional practice. A clear understanding of what these practices are seemed to be lacking across all grade levels.

The VT observed that Special Education teachers were present in the classroom but playing a role that more closely resembled that of an Educational Assistant. The VT did not observe co-teaching at NMS. There was little evidence of the Special Education teachers making specific and individualized modifications for Special Needs students; most simply expected "less" from them as learners. Through faculty interviews it was concluded that while teachers are required to co-teach most were confused as to the role each played in that model. Teachers expressed frustration with being provided little training or time to collaborate in that area. The VT observed very large inclusion classes at NMS.

The VT observed student work samples that showed some evidence of interdisciplinary themes. This work was more consistently found within the Special Areas program. There was no evidence of a school-wide model for curriculum mapping at NMS.

The VT observed special area classrooms and instruction and noted P.E. class size was excessive. The VT was impressed with the high levels of safety and student engagement given the size and space constraints. P.E. students at NMS have irregular patterns of physical education activity. Student access to the outdoor campus and fields are dictated by a rotating special areas schedule. P.E. faculty expressed concern about the ability of students to maintain regular healthy exercise patterns with the current schedule model.

The Technology Education "Science Technology/ Engineering Modular Program" in particular was highly structured and provided an effective and rigorous environment for middle learners. The clearly articulated program goals serve as a model for Unified Arts in NMS.

Strengths:

1. Learning objectives posted in most classrooms help to guide instruction and maintain instructional and learning focus.
2. NMS faculty and staff are dedicated and respectful of one another's practice. All observed and interviewed members were welcoming of the assessment and are looking for more ways to improve instruction models.
3. NMS provides safe, clean and respectful learning spaces for all students.
4. NMS regularly utilizes technology to assist instruction within the classroom. The Modular Technology Program serves as a model for excellence within the school.

Recommendations:

1. The use of learning objectives and learning outcomes should be extended to all classrooms. In order to make authentic, deep connections with content, students need to be able to articulate the "why" as well as "what" they were learning.
2. Teacher planning time should be incorporated into the middle school schedule to assess and discuss student work and needs. Time for both team and grade/content level should be included.
3. Teachers need to begin the process of Differentiating Instruction at NMS. Teachers should offer lessons that differ in content, process, and product based on student levels. The VT recommends professional development in the area of Differentiated Instruction.
4. The VT recommends immediate attention be given to addressing the unique needs of special education students including: creating meaningful opportunities for inclusion, becoming knowledgeable about modifications, developing strategies for implementing modifications within the classroom, creating models of co-teaching, and improving collaboration with paraprofessionals to deliver challenging and supportive instruction to students. The VT recommends professional development in the area of co-teaching.
5. More opportunities for students to make connections between content areas need to be provided. This can be done through the planning of interdisciplinary units that can be shared across grade levels. Use of team curriculum mapping should become regular practice at NMS. Connecting content areas intensifies student learning and deepens understandings.

6. The VT recommends NMS employ the use of Common Formative Assessments across grade levels. A Common Assessment is "an assessment typically created collaboratively by a team of teachers responsible for the same grade level or course. Common Formative Assessments are frequently administered throughout the year to identify (1) individual students who need additional time and support for learning, (2) the teaching strategies most effective in helping students acquire the intended knowledge and skills, (3) program concerns – areas in which students generally are having difficulty achieving the intended standard – and (4) improvement goals for individual teachers and the team." – Learning by Doing, p 214. The VT recommends professional development in the creation and use of Common Formative Assessments.

7. The VT recommends NMS direct efforts toward the consistent utilization of Rubrics by teachers for assignments, essays, and assessments. Rubrics are not a form of assessment but are the criteria for making an assessment. Rubrics encourage clear assessment targets and clear expectations. When a rubric is well defined, learners know exactly what is expected of them. Rubrics are sets of criteria or scoring guides that describe levels of performance or understanding. They provide students with expectations about what will be assessed, standards that need to be met, and information about where students are, in relation to where they need to be. The VT recommends professional development in the area of creating and using Rubrics to improve instruction models.

Middle Level Teachers and Staff

"Middle grades teachers must be well grounded in the development and needs of young adolescents if they are to be successful. Just as middle grades teachers need to know how, specifically, young adolescents are different from young children and older adolescents, they also need to understand that middle grades schools are different from elementary and high school. This difference is much more than the sign in front of the school; it lies in the philosophical foundations of middle grades education and the organizational structure that grows from and supports this philosophy." (*Turning Points 2000*, p.100)

"Effective professional development in middle grades school is results-driven, standards-based, and embedded in teachers' daily work (Sparks, 1977). It grows out of understanding the principles of adult learning and organizational development, and it also involves follow-up assistance in implementing new instructional strategies (Bransford et al., 1999, pp. 178-193)." (*Turning Points 2000*, p.110)

A consistent theme that was identified throughout the interviews with the Visiting Team (VT) and in surveys was the need to address issues of communication. There is a limited amount of time that teachers and other staff such as special education teachers and educational assistants have to meet to discuss and plan for student learning. This is true of teachers and staff in the same cluster (white or purple for example) and share the same students as well as teachers across each grade level (white and purple) whose differing schedules preclude meeting to discuss such things as common formative and summative assessments. Common team planning time will also provide additional time for parent teacher meetings outside of the times provided for parent conferences. Communication between grade level teams (white and purple) and among team members, specials teachers, special education teachers and support staff will be improved if the schedule is changed (a recommendation of the Environment section) to facilitate common team planning time. Team leaders will need job descriptions and roles of team members defined so that the time that is allocated to team meetings is used effectively.

The teaching staff at NMS is highly qualified. The percentage of core academic classes taught by teachers who are highly qualified is 97% (Massachusetts School and District Profiles).

A mentor program provides all new teachers with a colleague who they can access. This is mainly done over the summer and during the year as needed.

The concept of professional learning communities (PLCs) has just been introduced to the administration during the summer. It is recommended that the school leadership in collaboration with the staff continue to develop learning communities that focus on student learning outcomes as well as the recommendations of this report.

Middle school teachers should possess a strong understanding of the characteristics of middle school learners and their learning styles. While there will always be the need to focus student learning to improve test scores and make learning more "rigorous", this needs to be balanced with learning opportunities that are actively engaging and meet the needs of all students in the

classroom. Many of the lessons that were observed by the VT appear to be lecture with student response to teacher questions, teachers need to be provided with training in providing alternative methods of delivery and varied instruction and assessment techniques, such as interdisciplinary instruction, differentiation, authentic assessments, rubrics and co-teaching to better address the needs of the adolescent learner. The school should work on developing a more cohesive community and an identity that is built around a middle school vision and mission that addresses the whole learner and unite the staff around common goals. Although there are professional resource materials in library, there is only a handful of relevant middle school information.

The VT heard from many people that the staff is hard working and dedicated. Some indicated that they would like to see more recognition for their extra efforts and that the community is not always aware of the good things that are happening at the school.

Teachers have submitted "specific and measurable" goals to the principal for the year. The administration should continue to work with individual teachers on professional goals that address the needs of their students through improved instruction.

Educational assistants (special education) have no time to meet with teachers to interact on students. Some also lack adequate training.

Although the VT heard that professional development activities are selected by district level administration with the needs of students in mind, teachers perceive that these do not always meet their needs. If professional development activities will continue to be structured from the top down, they need to be more connected to student learning outcome, building shared vision and goals for the school.

Strengths:

1. The teaching staff at NMS is highly qualified.
2. The VT heard from many people that the staff is hard working and dedicated.

Recommendations:

1. School leaders need to address issues of communication that affect student learning and teaching.
2. Professional learning communities should continue to be developed to enhance student achievement outcomes and address important school issues collaboratively among staff and administration.

3. Teachers need to be provided with training in providing alternative methods of delivery and varied instruction and assessment techniques, such as interdisciplinary instruction, differentiation, authentic assessments, rubrics and co-teaching to better address the needs of the adolescent learner. Expanding the professional library and having teachers plan professional development activities will help to address this need. The professional development needs of individual teachers can also be addressed through goal setting and review with administration. Professional development should also be extended to special education teacher aides.

Relationships for Learning

"To ensure strong teams, schools must pay attention to the nature and quality of interactions among teacher and student team members, ensuring that teams continually concentrate their efforts on achieving high standards for both teaching and learning." (*Turning Points 2000*, p.24)

The concept of teaming can be seen through a variety of practices. For teachers: common prep time, daily time to conference with cluster, team ownership/input of scheduling, planned integrated units, shared physical spaces, value of team time, shared responsibility for groups of students and shared vision of achievement and learning. Student teams can be facilitated by names, logos and traditions that are unique to that team, team leader positions, activities encouraged to create a sense of identity, peer mentors/mediators, advisories where a cluster teacher leads groups discussing issues among students, consistency in teams over a number of years, focusing of an environment to enhance the concept of small learning communities and non-academic activities.

Schools are responsible for building a sense of community and identity for the adults and students as part of an integrated team. The designing of team protocols, organizational structures and instructional practices should foster and sustain the idea of teams as an essential part of the middle school experience. Communication with the wider school community (parents, PTO, School Council) should recognize individual teams as vital components of the school.

In the context of physical space NMS is supportive of the concept of teaming. The two teams per grade, Purple and White, are distinctly divided by the design of the building. NMS is arranged with one grade per floor and each floor divided into smaller sections housing content areas including the pairing of a foreign language teacher with each cluster. The VA team found a strong connection between the students and their teams, further enhancing the identity and importance of each group. Although the students were strongly connected to each team the VT was unable to identify criteria for the placement of students into teams over the course of the three years at NMS. It was common for students to be switched from the Purple team to the White and back again during their time at NMS. While the design and structure of the building is conducive to the concept of teams there were several impediments entrenched in the philosophy of the schedule that have created significant blocks to the potential that exists for true teaming at NMS. The most evident of these impediments is the lack of common planning for teachers. Each teacher is allotted one preparation period per day. It is common for teachers to miss more one or more of their preps a week due to parent meetings, P.P.T.s, school meetings and guidance concerns. It was evident to the VT that the teachers are making great efforts on their part to meet for common planning; despite the lack of contractual time given to them. As a group, the team members are aware of the importance of common planning as a way to accommodate consistency across the curriculum and to advance student learning. The VT interviewed some of the Team Leaders in the NMS. This group of teachers has the responsibility to keep their members aware of changes in the school, different functions, schedule changes, updating curriculum, as well as being a conduit of information from the administration to the faculty. As with the lack of common planning time, Team

Leaders do not have time in their schedules to properly address issues that occur during the school year. One of the possible vehicles for better communication is the school's EdLine. This online program has the capacity to reach the entire NMS faculty and staff to maintain a line of communication that is currently missing. The VT was made aware of the Building Based Support Team, an administrative based group that worked with team clusters with a variety of issues.

Strengths:

1. Motivated staff that is aware of the importance of communicating to assess student work, plan interdisciplinary units and promote awareness of students needs.
2. Design of NMS lends itself to sustaining the concept of teaming.
3. EdLine is a resource available to the entire staff and faculty.
4. The presence of Team Leaders as a group to communicate with faculty.
5. The Building Based Support Team: an administrative based team that deals with issues ranging from discipline concerns and student placement to supporting faculty needs.

Recommendations:

1. Take steps to reevaluate the current schedule with urgency towards implementing consistent common planning time as an integral part of moving NMS toward academic progress.
2. Revise for specificity a formal job description for Team Leaders as well as time in their schedule to perform those duties.

Govern Democratically

"Americans consider participation in the democratic process a fundamental right, founded in our belief in the equality of all..." (*Turning Points 2000, p.145*)

"A middle grades school should be organized and should function through a democratic governance system with structures and processes that are systematically inclusive, collaborative, and focused on the improvement of student learning. The system should give all "stakeholders" in the school – teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, students, and community members - a primary voice in planning and implementing school improvement efforts. When educators, parents, and students make important decisions regarding school matters, they share responsibility for implementing those decisions and for the outcome of those decisions." (*Turning Points 2000, p.146*)

The assessment visit at NMS began with a tour of the building led by Peer Leadership Students. Students were particularly proud of a display called "The Wall of Honor". This was a student driven project in which retired teachers and staff members were recognized for their contributions to the school.

The assessment team visited classrooms where students eagerly participated in private ballot voting for the upcoming election. Interviews with students concluded that while the school maintains a student driven newspaper, "*The Informer*", some felt that more student involvement in the decision-making process and governance within school were necessary. Also present at NMS was a functioning Student Council that solicited student representation at each grade level school wide.

NMS maintains internally staffed Program Improvement Council where Guidance, Team Leaders, and Administration meet to collaborate. Faculty members clearly noted feeling respected and valued by the current administrative team. Some frustration with the inability to make building based decisions was noted.

NMS has strong parental support within the School Site Council that meets monthly and consists of parents, teachers, and administration. The VT spoke directly with parent members of this group who provided feedback on the functions and concerns of the Council. Most parents strongly felt that communication from parent to teacher, teacher to teacher, and between teams at all grade levels were problematic. Teachers and administration confirmed the lack of common planning time within the current schedule as the genesis for disconnect between groups. Students as well as parents articulated the need to formalize the consistent and fair use of "Academic Support" time between teams and expressed a lack of communication as to its function across grade levels and teams.

Parents of special needs students were concerned that their "voice" within NMS was unaccounted for. A lack of trust and support with the previous administration has created a significant gap in communication.

The current administration recognizes a need for change and staff members have indicated a strong willingness to implement recommendations that result from the assessment process. While the school has developed an Improvement Plan based on the results of MCAS scores, a Mission Statement that drives the Norton Middle School philosophy and relates to effective middle level learning does not exist. A common theme among most interviewed was the need to create and sustain change within Norton Middle School. It is the hope of many that the NELMS assessment would generate a "shared vision and mission" among all stakeholders including previously underrepresented groups.

Strengths:

1. NMS has a School Site Council with active membership which plays a role in the development of activities and events that involve faculty, staff, and community members/groups.
2. Students have a "voice" through participation in Student Council activities, *"The Informer"* a school newspaper, and Peer Leadership programming. Activities and decisions are driven by the students themselves and supervised by faculty members.
3. The current Administrative Team has taken an active role in beginning the process of necessary change. Faculty and staff are eager and willing to collaborate. All stakeholders are welcoming of a thorough self-assessment.
4. There is a strong sense of commitment and cooperation between administration, faculty, and staff.

Recommendations:

1. NMS has an urgent need to identify its vision, mission and goals as they relate to middle level learners.
2. NMS should utilize The Program Improvement Council to review the recommendations of this report in conjunction with their self-study. This team should identify priorities, determine those responsible for action, develop a timeline for implementation and establish a method to monitor progress. Representation within the council should be broad and include a "voice" that represents all areas and departments within Norton Middle School.
3. NMS must create an effective communication model to better meet the needs of all groups within its governance.
4. The NMS Student Council should continue to investigate ways for all student voices to be heard and valued, in particular, the voices of special needs children.

Healthy School Environment

Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.

"A healthy school is one that provides its students and teachers with a secure and supportive environment, free from violence and discord; that promotes intergroup understanding and respect for those who differ in race, culture, gender or religion; and that is strongly connected to the community." (*Turning Points 2000*, p. 168)

"Middle grade schools, in partnership with the community, should provide physical and mental health and fitness by providing a safe caring and healthy environment, health education and access to health services."
(*Turning Points 2000* p. 24)

As the VT entered NMS the great pride of the faculty, staff, custodial crew, secretaries and students have for their ten year old facility became immediately apparent. The VT was able to spend three days interviewing staff, talking to a variety of school related personnel, visit all the classrooms, enjoy dinner with the Superintendent and teacher/parent groups as well as having full access to the school during our visit. The principal, as well as the assistant principal, went out of their way to be courteous, informative and to obtain any documents we needed or additional information. On the first day the VT was met by a group of students designated to guide our initial tour of the school. These student council members were articulate, enthusiastic and served as ambassadors for the entire staff and student body.

As the VT was taken on our tour around the school we were exposed to many examples of student work, projects, posters indicating future activities and the many programs the school has to offer their student body. As witnessed by the VT, NMS is a very clean, well-designed middle school that meets the needs of its students. Its capacity of 990 students is not closely approached by the current population of 742. Our student guides indicated the fondness for a school that provides them with a safe, structured learning environment that offers a variety of programs for students with diverse interests. After seeing the facility the VT was provided a room that was set aside for the group for the entire visit, NMS was also kind enough to provide a kitchen, coffee, snacks and drinks for the three days we were here. The first day of the visit the VT focused on visiting classrooms. Although many of the classes had 24-27 students the rooms did not seem crowded. These classes were large and well designed with a variety of technologies available and in use during student learning time. Each class had a sign out sheet to keep track of student movement during class time. The classrooms had many examples of student work, posters on the walls and in display formats. As the students transitioned to their next classes the VT observed a well-structured, orderly, safe passage. Students are required to carry I.D. badges with them at all times. One of the few obstacles to this orderly passage was created by a bottleneck of student traffic at several locker sites. The hallway at the locker sites is only eight feet wide and with the double locker set up (an upper and lower locker, creating an need for students to kneel down to reach material in the lower lockers), there was at times difficulty for the students to pass without being obstructed by the students standing and kneeling in the hallway. Currently there are a number of possible solutions, including some innovative ideas

by the students, being considered to this problem. The presence of the administration, the rescheduling of class times and the rerouting of student traffic has reduced the impact of crowding in the narrow areas in the hallway.

The arrangement of classes and grades at NMS is set up with each floor housing a single grade consisting of two teams, White and Purple. Students are assigned to each team at the end of the year depending on a variety of criteria. It is not uncommon for a student to switch from the White team to the Purple team during their three years at NMS. This was generally viewed as a positive by the students interviewed.

The library/media center was closed during the VT's three days at NMS. Staffing reductions due to budget restrictions have created a gap in the resources available to students.

The VT was made aware of the Bully Guard program, a second year program developed by a member of the business community, which has created an awareness of, as well as offering solutions to bullying at the middle school level. The Bully Guard program has been presented to the staff, students, administrations and even cafeteria staff/bus drivers, through assemblies, posters and the program director doing small group instructions. The Bully Guard information has been made available to parents through evening assemblies as well as a Pod Cast. The program director has reported that Bully Guard is a developing program, both self-reflective and actively evolving. With input from the administration, guidance counselors, staff and the student body, Bully Guard continues to look to ways it can better serve the needs of the NMS population.

NMS has two newspapers, the Lancer-the school paper and the Informer, representing the views of the students. Continuing with opportunities for a student voice are the Student Council and Peer Mediation. The VT was not made aware of an Advisor/Advisee program.

Strengths:

1. NMS is clean, well structured, meticulously maintained and a source of tremendous pride among the staff and student body.
2. Classrooms at NMS are large and well designed.
3. Technology is available and used effectively for instruction.
4. The Bully Guard Program supports the positive school climate.

Recommendations:

1. Identify options to address the issue of crowding at specific points during transitions
2. Develop and implement a plan to resolve the issue of inadequate staffing of the library

3. Consider exploring and implementing an advisor/advisee program to develop interpersonal bonds between students and staff to support academic learning and social growth.

Involving Parents and Community

Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development.

"Schools and families must collaborate to establish continuity and communication between home and school; to monitor and support students' schoolwork and academic progress; to create opportunities outside the school for safe, engaging exploration; and to improve the school itself through parent and community involvement on site. Schools and communities should forge connections to provide needed services to students, offer career exploration opportunities, expand learning beyond regular school hours and outside school walls and advocate for school improvements critical to ensuring success for every student." (*Turning Points 2000*, p.24)

During the visit to NMS, the VT had the opportunity to interview faculty, staff, students, and parents. It was very clear to the VT that Norton has a strong sense of community pride in their schools.

Evidence of communication with the parents and community includes a detailed Parent Student Handbook which is distributed at the beginning of the school year, a school web-page, local newspaper articles and EdLine. However, the VT heard and surveys indicated that additional opportunities for communication could be added.

The principal and assistant principal are part of a Community Task Force to identify the best programs for the youth of Norton. The Police and Fire Chiefs, the BullyGuard Program and Wheaton College are also represented.

Several programs have been supported by local groups and businesses i.e. The Robotics Team and a Grade 6 Garden Laboratory Project. The NMS Literacy Project was funded with a CLC Grant through Bridgewater State College and the School Wide Read was sponsored by the Norton Cultural Arts Association and Norton NEED Organization.

Student grades are reported to parents by mid-term Progress Reports and a final Report Card for each term. School Newsletters, a weekly Principal's pod cast, Alert Now messaging system, cable T.V. and notices are used to enhance communication.

There is an active PTO which supports the needs of NMS. This group supports the BullyGuard Program and also provides mini-grants to teachers. When the NMS Library was closed for budgetary reasons, the PTA provided parent Library Volunteers to provide some access to the library for the school community.

It was obvious to the VT that the administration, faculty and staff recognizes and values the contributions of the parents to NMS. The general comment of faculty and staff was "the parents are always there when we need them." It is evident that parents play a supporting role at NMS.

Strengths:

1. The PTO should be commended for providing support for a variety of middle school activities.
2. The PTO has provided Library Volunteers to open the Library for student use.

Recommendations:

1. While there are several forms of communication in place, the VT heard evidence for a need to continue to expand avenues of communication for parents and community.
2. NMS should continue to work cooperatively with the community to provide opportunities for community service and service learning projects.

Summary

NMS is at an appropriate junction to facilitate the integration of a dedicated staff and an excellent facility with a strong curriculum linked to assessment and instruction practices which support the needs of the young adolescent learner.

The administrative team is seen as both accessible and supportive. They are eager to work closely with the NMS Professional Learning Community as they develop integrated long term goals to make a good school even better.

The current master schedule at NMS does not provide the necessary regular opportunity for teams to meet and develop learning units which demonstrate the meaningful integration of concepts. The modification of the existing schedule should be a priority.

While the library is staffed by parent volunteers, its value as a resource for students and faculty is limited. It is a wonderful area which could serve as a meaningful support of student learning.

The VT heard many requests for ongoing professional development in several areas: Nature and Needs of the Young Adolescent Learner, Differentiated Instruction and Assessment and the Co-Teaching model for students with special needs.

Various resources are available to support NMS in their work. *Turning Points 2000* provides both a wealth of information and validated recommendations to assist NMS as they develop an action plan following this assessment.

The VT clearly identified a strong sense of commitment to excellence from the NMS school community during their visit. Comments reinforced a desire to do what was necessary to move forward. The VT is confident that NMS will provide a strong learning environment to support the success of their young adolescent learners.

About the Assessors

William Downey is a retired educator from Massachusetts. Certified in science, elementary, middle and high school principal and as superintendent, he has worked as a fifth through eighth grade teacher, elementary and middle school principal and also chaired the long range space study as well as the middle school building and renovation for his district. He is most proud of the years spent working with faculty to transition their junior high school to an exemplary middle school. Since retiring, Bill has worked as a consultant for NELMS. He has participated on and chaired several school assessments and currently coordinates the school assessment programs for NELMS. Bill is certified to provide Breaking Ranks in the Middle training through NELMS.

Dr. Philip Lanfranchi is the Past Principal (now retired) of Bolton Center School in Bolton, Connecticut. Phil had been a teacher of math and science in New York and Connecticut for more than 15 years, and he is certified in math and in grades 7-12 in all of the sciences except physics. Phil has experience in middle school as a team leader and a department leader and provided regular professional development to staff as a lead teacher and administrator. He is certified as an administrator and as a superintendent. Phil's K-8 school had a grade 6-8 middle school program which experienced a site assessment from NELMS in 2003. Phil had been an administrator for 12 years in Connecticut.

Raymond Donohoe is an English/Language Arts teacher and Theater Director at Grafton Middle School in Grafton, MA. After a successful career in software development and as a project manager for a marketing firm, Ray received his Masters in Teaching Degree from Tufts University and has thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated his last six years in a middle school classroom. This is his first time participating on an assessment team, and he is grateful for the opportunity.

Kara Casimiro is an eighth grade Social Studies teacher in the Danbury Public School system located in Connecticut. She is dually certified in grades 4-8th all subject areas and also holds secondary certification in History and Social Studies in grades 7th through 12th. Having taught at the middle school level for over 13 years Kara has acted as a facilitator in the development of effective middle level education.

Kara is a mentor in Connecticut's Beginning Educator Support (BEST) program and serves as a cooperating teacher at the 8th grade level. Serving as chairperson of The Instructional Leadership Team in her building, she has been able to provide support and guidance in areas of instructional practice and professional development within her middle school.

Currently she serves on The Social Studies Curriculum Writing Team, District Development Team; Superintendent's Task Force, Broadview Middle School Crisis Management Team and coordinates The *National Geographic* Geography Bee Contest at the local level.

She is an active participant in The Teaching of American History federal grant. This program serves as a vehicle to improve effective teaching practices and delivery of American History instruction.

Kara Casimiro has received her B.A. in History & Social Studies from Western Connecticut State University, as well as a M.S. and Sixth Yr. Professional degree in Education from The University of Bridgeport. She is currently pursuing a degree in Educational Administration from the University of Bridgeport.

Kara is the proud mother of two daughters and resides in Prospect, Connecticut with her husband George.

Kenneth Robbins is the Assistant Principal at Rogers Park Middle School in Danbury CT. Ken had been a teacher of science and social studies for 12 years before taking the job as Assistant Principal. He also has degrees in Chemical Engineering, Special Education, Administration and History. Ken has a Masters in psychology and is currently working on his dissertation towards his Ph.D. in psychology.

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