

NEWTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DRAFT Systemwide Goals 2008-2009

In the Newton Public Schools we are committed to meeting the learning needs of all students. By increasing student achievement, and by providing opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, we prepare students for success in their personal lives, their community and the global society. Newton Public Schools will meet this high standard of excellence by continuing to ensure that the K-12 curriculum offers a coherent course of study, yet remains flexible enough to allow for differentiation according to children's needs. We respect teachers' judgment in making sound instructional decisions for the students they meet every day.

Moreover, our new core values will be integrated into and inform the work of our staff in all areas of the educational experience. This means that, in Newton, we will strive for *excellence* in all the work we do with students, academically and interpersonally. We will nurture and support *innovation* and inventiveness, at all grade levels in all subject areas, with both students and staff. We will foster *respect*, recognizing the uniqueness and dignity of all children and adults, regardless of race, religion, class, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation. To advance these core values, we must all share *responsibility* to create a culture of collaboration, where people communicate honestly as we prepare our students to contribute to and care about their community and the world.

The system seeks to hold true to this shared vision and its values as it sets out to accomplish the goals specific to 2008-2009 as outlined below. These annual systemwide goals should be viewed within the larger context of the system's long-range strategic planning process.

1. Improvement in Teaching and Learning

The recent reorganization of the Newton Public Schools' central staff brings together the different administrative departments that oversee teaching and learning in our schools. Guided by our core values, this group is working on a number of significant initiatives that build on the strengths of our standards-based curriculum.

The most important interactions that occur in our school system are those that take place every day in classrooms between teachers and students. Schools need to be attentive to the social/emotional needs of students and create structures and programs to ensure that students are personally connected to the adults who work with them. Nothing is more crucial to the Newton Public Schools going forward than recruiting, retaining and nurturing highly qualified teachers who are prepared to give their best to Newton students. A strong professional development program, along with an effective system of supervision and evaluation, is key to realizing this goal. Additionally, Newton must recruit and encourage our exceptional educators to become administrators and take on the leadership challenges of the future.

This year, teachers and administrators will follow recommendations from the Strategic Planning subcommittee on Education for the Global Age regarding 21st century skills like critical and creative thinking, collaborative problem solving, and effective oral and written communication. We are also committed to pulling the NPS educators together to ensure that all students are challenged academically and are helped to develop the social competencies they will need to function successfully in the global society of the 21st century.

Central to this new approach is organizing our staff – special educators; ELL teachers; counselors; coordinators; administrators; elementary classroom, arts, and wellness teachers; and secondary subject teachers – to work collaboratively to assure that all students:

- demonstrate both their developing academic skills and the essential understandings they have taken from their studies (through more imaginative assessment opportunities that will be developed by our teachers in 2008-2009);
- participate in appropriately challenging learning activities (as teachers plan new ways to differentiate instruction, informed by collegial evaluation of student assessments);
- use writing to develop analytic skills in inquiry-based science and mathematics, in the engineering design process, and in the exploration of historical and cultural narratives (i.e. “writing-to-learn”: the next step in developing our elementary writing program);
- engage in exciting, age-appropriate interdisciplinary projects featuring collaborative problem-solving and higher order thinking (BRIM initiative in all of our middle schools);
- achieve academic proficiency by the end of high school (through thoughtful analysis of standardized test scores, with particular attention to the subgroups that have traditionally tested lower and to appropriate supports for those students so that we can close the “achievement gap” in the Newton Public Schools);
- acquire social competency skills to live respectfully, responsibly, and successfully in a changing society (as we train teachers to develop social/emotional skills and to help students understand the power of empathy);
- embrace learning challenges joyfully (through a variety of new and inventive opportunities for discovery and self-expression).

In addition, to achieve these goals, we will:

- complete the Long-Range Strategic Planning process;

- integrate technology to enhance the modeling, demonstration, and exploration of key concepts into appropriate content areas to engage students and deepen their learning experience;
- provide technology-based professional development to learn subject area content to support 21st century student learning;
- comply with federal and state requirements having to do with teacher licensure and highly qualified status, including meeting the goals set out in the district's Teacher Quality Improvement Plan and working through the continued implementation of the EPIMS system;
- support the continued implementation of the new negotiated evaluation procedures, develop an evaluation instrument for Unit E members, and review the process by which principals are evaluated.

2. Improvement in Management of the School System

During 2008-2009, the Newton Public Schools will continue its administrative development by incorporating several components of strong fiscal and operational oversight along with the strategic planning process. The Strategic Planning for the Newton Public Schools will guide administrative efforts as well as instructional efforts by emphasizing innovation in all information management, effective use of technology (hardware and software), and the setting of high expectations for all staff.

To achieve these goals, we will:

- study and use the report and recommendations of the Citizen Advisory Group to be received in February 2009 as a guide for continued administrative improvements;
- fully analyze the cost structure of our special education program, including information about programmatic alternatives and the costs of providing services through out-of-district placements;
- perform a feasibility study at Angier, Cabot, Zervas and Carr, enabling the School Department to proceed with the School Committee's voted option for replacement and/or renovation of our most needy buildings;
- implement an automated preventative maintenance program centering on HVAC equipment as well as energy efficiency projects (working with the ESCOs) to modernize our equipment and to reduce energy consumption;

- collaborate with the City Public Buildings Department to redesign the current process for maintenance of school buildings;
- implement the new security policy (to be) established by the School Committee, including but not limited to access control for all elementary and middle schools, new locking hardware for all classrooms, and the installation of shades for all classroom doors;
- review all transportation systems for efficiencies as well as for facilities planning, particularly for middle schools in 2010;
- survey school equipment needs and develop multi-year plans for maintaining furniture and equipment throughout the district;
- improve the purchasing function, leading to better services and timely procurement for the schools and to savings in many areas through competitive and collaborative bidding (with a particular focus on food service and annual instructional supply bids);
- develop internal and external efficiencies by reviewing current business practices from Payroll and Accounting to Grants management, searching for improvements while maintaining the high standards of accuracy and accountability.

3. Public Engagement

None of the challenges above can be met without strong, informed public support for the Newton Public Schools among parents, elected officials, and citizens at large. There needs to be clarity about how and why decisions are made. Public involvement can add value on key matters. Citizens have the right to expect from the School Committee and Superintendent a consistent, clear voice articulating the values, priorities, and programs of the Newton Public Schools. The School Committee and the Superintendent will work together to increase capacity to gather input and feedback from parents, staff and community members and to strengthen working relationships with the media and other City officials who represent our community.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- use technology as a tool to enhance communication throughout the school and parent community;
- publish informational articles in the local media and produce "Newton Public Schools News and Views" for New-TV (Superintendent);

- create outreach mechanisms to provide the public with important information about the Newton Public Schools;
- continue development of the School Department <www.newton.k12.ma.us> and School Committee <www.schoolcommittee@newton.k12.ma.us> web sites to provide regular informational updates;
- continue practice of interactive public comment before School Committee meetings;
- continue to provide School Committee Subcommittee and Liaison Reports at School Committee meetings.