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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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October 29, 2008

Andrew Keough
Principal
Wellesley High School
50 Rice Street
Wellesley, MA 02481

Dear Dr. Keough:

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools, at its September 28-29, 2008 meeting, reviewed the evaluation report from the recent visit to Wellesley High School and continued the school's accreditation in the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

The Commission wished to commend the school on the following:

- the identification of high academic expectations for student learning
- the fundamental values shared by the school and the community that are reflected in the mission statement
- the rich range of courses in academic departments that go beyond courses required for graduation
- teachers' use of technology to enhance and support curriculum
- the variety of electives that allows students to apply their skills in project-based activities
- the development of a professional study group that provides time for department faculty members to consult regarding curriculum and instruction
- the commitment of the faculty to implementing the school's writing expectation across all disciplines
- the teachers' efforts to personalize instruction, engage students, provide students with opportunities to become self-directed and reflective learners, to engage in higher order thinking skills, and to apply what they have learned
- the creation and implementation of a teacher evaluation process that is valued by the faculty and has a positive effect on instructional improvement
- the varied assessment strategies individual teachers have developed that allow students to demonstrate competency

The Commission was equally pleased to commend:

- the principal's cooperative and collaborative relationship with the school committee, superintendent, school leadership, and faculty
- the teachers' leadership roles and responsibilities through the creation and work of various committees
- the involvement of students, faculty members, staff, and parents in shared decision-making
- the school's celebration of student success
- the school climate created by positive student behavior and the efforts of faculty and staff members to create a positive environment for learning
- the guidance department's use of the seminar program to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students
- the variety of programs offered to ensure that all students have the opportunity to meet the academic expectations despite individual challenges, e.g. the WHS Bridge Program, transitions, METCO, diversity leadership, and culture and climate committees
- the many ways parents and community organizations support faculty and students
- the numerous benefits students, faculty members, and staff are provided through the close relationship between the school and local institutions of higher education
- the significant financial support the school has garnered from the community

Nevertheless, the Commission expressed serious concern regarding the school's adherence to the Standards for Accreditation on Curriculum, Assessment of Student Learning, and Community Resources for Learning. Concerns include, but are not limited to, the following:

Curriculum:

- the overall lack of commitment to the academic expectations in the school's mission as the basis for the written, practiced, and learned curriculum
- the lack of a formal written curriculum in most subject areas
- the outdated written curriculum which exists in a few subject areas
- the limited extent to which classroom teachers reference the academic expectations in the school's mission in course syllabi and outlines
- the lack of collaboration in the development of a formal, coherent school-wide curriculum that is grounded in school-wide learning expectations
- the redundancies which occur among courses and differences in learner expectations for the same courses due to the teachers' limited collaboration
- the over reliance on teacher-developed curriculum
- the limited time available for the professional staff to collaborate within and across departments in the design, review/revision of the curriculum
- the lack of curriculum coordination and articulation between and among academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools, a problem exacerbated by the lack of a district-wide written curriculum
- the lack of a consistently challenging curriculum for level three (college prep) students that ensure ample opportunity to employ higher order thinking and problem solving skills

- the negative impact of the inadequate level of funding on providing sufficient personnel and professional development programs to ensure that curriculum is developed, evaluated, reviewed/revised, and aligned with the academic expectations for student learning in the school's mission statement

Assessment of Student Learning:

- lack of faculty commitment to the consistent use of school-wide rubrics to assess achievement by all students in the school of the academic expectations in the mission
- the absence of a formal process to ensure that teachers use the school-wide rubrics on a consistent basis to assess student progress in achieving the academic expectations in the school's mission statement
- students' lack of familiarity with the school-wide rubrics and how their assignments provide opportunities to achieve the academic expectations in the school's mission statement
- the use of only anecdotal information to assess achievement of the school's social and civic expectations as stated in the mission
- the lack of teacher understanding of the construction of rubrics as evidenced by use by some teachers of rubrics that do not measure learning goals but simply delineate the number of points that can be accrued
- the absence of well-designed and fully funded professional development offerings in the area of assessment
- the lack of dedicated time to review student assessment results
- the absence of a formal process to communicate individual students and school achievement of the academic expectations based on local assessments using school-wide rubrics

Community Resources for Learning:

- the limited degree to which the outdated facility, which is in extremely poor condition, supports the school's educational programs and services
- the need for a number of teachers, some of whom travel long distances, to share classrooms given space utilization issues which impacts their abilities to prepare/set up materials and equipment
- the congested and overcrowded corridors
- the lack of adequate storage space resulting in classrooms that are cluttered and hallways that are used as storage areas
- the inadequate number of electrical and computer outlets throughout the facility
- the scattered housing of special education classes throughout various areas of the facility which limits teacher collaboration and their ability to accommodate all of the high school's special education students
- the significant number of roof leaks
- the insufficient number of science labs resulting in other areas being used for lab work which are inappropriate and potentially unsafe
- the missing toilet seats in some student restrooms
- the cracked flooring tiles
- the presence of peeling paint on both interior and exterior walls
- the presence of moldy ceiling tiles
- numerous holes and/or cracks in interior walls
- the peeling insulation around exposed pipes

- the poor drainage in the sinks in science labs which are shut off for extended periods of time
- the inconsistent temperatures
- undersized teacher workspaces
- the lack of ground fault interrupters in science classrooms
- the undersized media center which limits student and faculty access and usage

The Commission wished to affirm the findings of the decennial evaluation report which documents the extent to which the condition of the facility continues to negatively impact teaching and learning, places a number of constraints on the professional and support staffs, and affects the safety and morale of the building occupants.

Given these concerns, the Commission voted to place the school on warning for the Standards on Curriculum, Assessment of Student Learning and Community Resources for Learning.

The Commission requests that school officials submit a Special Progress Report by July 1, 2009 indicating how the following recommendations have been addressed:

- engage the faculty in an in-depth, research based discussion of the use of school-wide learning expectations and related rubrics to serve as the foundation of the school's curriculum
- develop and implement a school-wide, detailed written curricula for each course in each department that prescribes content, integrates relevant school-wide learning expectations from the mission, identifies course specific learning goals, and provides suggested instructional and assessment strategies, including the use of the school-wide rubrics
- describe steps taken to eliminate redundancies in course curriculum and differences in learner expectations for the same courses
- describe deliberate steps taken to ensure that the curriculum for level three (college prep) students provides ample opportunities to employ higher order thinking skills and problem-solving
- implement a professional development program that involves faculty members in all phases of curricular development and revision and builds teacher expertise concerning assessment methodologies, including the development and use of rubrics, formative assessments, and data analysis
- ensure that the entire school community is informed regarding which subject areas are responsible for providing learning experiences and assessments in support of each academic expectation in the mission
- describe steps taken to ensure that all teachers use school-wide rubrics to assess achievement by all students of the academic expectations in the mission for which their department has assumed responsibility
- ensure students' understanding of school-wide rubrics and how their assignments provide opportunities to practice and achieve school-wide learning expectations from the mission

- describe the school's plan to assess individual student achievement of the academic expectations in the mission using school-wide rubrics and to report individual student and school achievement of the academic expectations in the mission
- develop and implement a process to ensure that new teachers receive comprehensive curriculum documents and assistance in meeting the requirements of the courses
- review the materials fees in certain classes to determine the appropriateness of the charges and their impact on student enrollments
- involve the librarian in the planning and implementation of curriculum
- develop and implement a plan to provide an inclusive program for the severely disabled students on the school campus
- develop and implement a plan for maintenance and up-keep of the current facility
- review the adequacy of the formula used to determine the number of custodians and maintenance personnel

Finally, given the condition of the facility, including a number of longstanding space, health and safety concerns, the Special Progress Report should also include a detailed plan, including a timeline and information regarding funding, to resolve both in the short-and long-term all identified facilities issues as noted above to ensure the well-being of all building occupants who currently work and learn under adverse conditions.

Consistent with Commission policies, the school's warning status will not be removed until the school can demonstrate that it has satisfactorily completed these and other evaluation report recommendations related to the cited Standards areas of concern.

All accredited schools must submit a required Two-Year Progress Report, which in the case of Wellesley High School is due on October 1, 2010. Information about the proper preparation of the Two-Year Progress Report was provided to school representatives at the Follow-Up Seminar and is included in *Directions for the Preparation of the Two-Year Progress Report* which can be found at <http://cpss.neasc.org>. In that report school officials are required to respond, among other things, to two types of recommendations: (1) highlighted recommendations from notification letter(s) and (2) report recommendations from the school's decennial evaluation report.

With regard to the reporting of action taken on evaluation report recommendations school officials should indicate the status of each recommendation by classifying it in one of five categories: Completed, In Progress, Planned for the Future, Rejected, or No Action. In addition, for each valid recommendation in the evaluation report there should be a brief description of the action that has been taken to address the recommendations, including anticipated dates of completion where applicable. Special care should be taken to include appropriate information to justify the Rejected or No Action status of any recommendation.

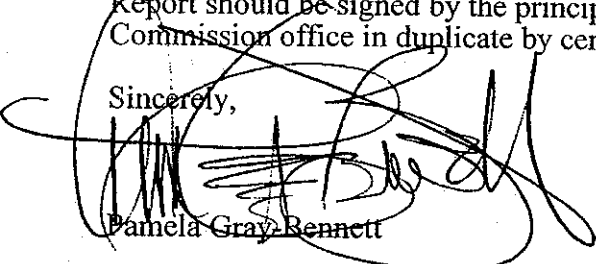
In addition to providing information on action taken to address each evaluation report recommendation, the Two-Year Progress Report should also provide detailed explanations regarding the manner in which each of the following highlighted recommendations has been addressed:

- publish, post, and discuss the mission statement and expectations for student learning with students, parents, and faculty and staff members and solicit their input in its future revision
- illustrate deliberate use of the mission and expectations for student learning to inform decision-making and future planning regarding all aspects of the school
- describe how the school ensures that students enrolled in level three courses have a challenging curriculum with ample opportunities to employ higher order thinking skills and problem solving techniques
- describe steps taken to increase and monitor teachers' use of instructional strategies that support student-centered learning
- allocate time for interdepartmental collaboration to improve integration of curriculum and opportunities for students to make logical connections among the subjects they study
- develop and implement a protocol and provide dedicated time for the review of student work and assessment results by teachers
- based on a review of student selection and placement data as well as student performance data assess the effectiveness of current student grouping patterns in enabling all students to achieve the academic expectations in the mission
- create a formal, ongoing program through which each student in the school has an adult member of the school community in addition to the school guidance counselor who will personalize the student's educational experience
- develop and implement a new teacher orientation and induction program
- develop and implement a formal information skills curriculum
- provide up-to-date and appropriate print and non-print materials in the media center to fully support all areas of the curriculum, the learning needs of students, and the instructional needs of teachers

The Commission congratulates the school administration and faculty for completing the first two phases of the accreditation program: the self-study and the evaluation visit. The next step will be the follow-up process during which the school will implement valid recommendations in the evaluation report. The Commission's Follow-Up Seminars should help you and your faculty develop a schedule for implementing valid recommendations. In addition, the Commission's *Accreditation Handbook* provides information on follow-up procedures.

The school's warning status will be next reviewed when the Commission considers the Special Progress Report. Consistent with the Commission's follow-up procedures, the Special Progress Report should be signed by the principal and chair of the Follow-Up Committee and sent to the Commission office in duplicate by certified mail, return receipt requested.

Sincerely,



Pamela Gray-Bennett

PGB/pt

cc: Bella Wong, Superintendent, Wellesley Public Schools
Michael Young, Chairperson, Wellesley School Committee
Elaine B. Bessette, Chair of the Visiting Committee
Thomas R. Moore, Chair, Commission on Public Secondary Schools