# New England Association of Schools and Colleges

## Committee on Public Secondary Schools

## Report of the Visiting Committee for
### Ellington High School

### Ellington, Connecticut

September 23 – September 26, 2012

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# STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS

## THE DISTRIBUTION, USE, AND SCOPE OF THE
## VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges considers this visiting committee report of Ellington High School to be a privileged document submitted by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to the principal of the school and by the principal to the state department of education. Distribution of the report within the school community is the responsibility of the school principal. The final visiting committee report must be released in its entirety within sixty days (60) of its completion to the superintendent, school board, public library or town office, and the appropriate news media.

The prime concern of the visiting committee has been to assess the quality of the educational program at Ellington High School in terms of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Neither the total report nor any of its subsections is to be considered an evaluation of any individual staff member but rather a professional appraisal of the school as it appeared to the visiting committee.

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# INTRODUCTION

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) is the oldest of the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States. Since its inception in 1885, the Association has awarded membership and accreditation to those educational institutions in the six-state New England region who seek voluntary affiliation.

The governing body of the Association is its Board of Trustees which supervises the work of six Commissions: the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), the Commission on Public schools which is comprised of the Committee on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS), the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI), and the Commission on American and International Schools Abroad (CAISA).

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

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

The accreditation program for public schools involves a threefold process: the self-study conducted by the local professional staff, the on-site evaluation conducted by the Committee's visiting committee, and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own self-study and the valid recommendations of the visiting committee and those identified by the Committee in the Follow-Up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school be reevaluated at least once every ten years and that it show continued progress addressing identified needs.

## Preparation for the Evaluation Visit - The School Self-Study

A steering committee of the professional staff was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Ellington High School, a committee of seven members, including the principal, supervised all aspects of the self-study. The steering committee assigned all teachers and administrators in the school to appropriate subcommittees to determine the quality of all programs, activities and facilities available for young people. In addition to faculty members, the self-study committees included parents, students, and members of the EHS support staff

The self-study of Ellington High School extended over a period of 20 school months from January 2011 to August 2012. The visiting committee was pleased to note that parents, students, and members of the Board of Education joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations.

Public schools evaluated by the Committee on Public Secondary Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their adherence to the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's mission, learning expectations, and unique student population. In addition to using the Self-Study Guides developed by a representative group of New England educators and approved by the Committee, Ellington High School also used questionnaires developed by The Research Center at Endicott College to reflect the concepts contained in the Standards for Accreditation. These materials provided discussion items for a comprehensive assessment of the school by the professional staff during the self-study.

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

**The Process Used by the Visiting Committee**

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

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

- review of the school's self-study materials

- 25 hours shadowing 16 students for a half day

- a total of 30 hours of classroom observation (in addition to time shadowing students)

- numerous informal observations in and around the school

- tours of the facility

- individual meetings with 32 teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning

- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers

- the examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

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

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

## SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SUMMARY

Ellington High School serves the community of Ellington, Connecticut in Tolland County. Incorporated in 1786 on land that was once known as the Great Marsh, Ellington is a growing community with rural charm and suburban convenience located 15 minutes from Hartford. Ellington has a population of 14,829 (2009 estimate) which represents a 148% growth since 2000. It covers 34.6 sq. miles in Tolland County with a population density of 435 people per square mile. With over 3,000 acres under cultivation, Ellington remains one of the largest agricultural production towns in Connecticut.

The median resident age is 36.9 years compared with the median Connecticut age of 37.4. In 2009 the estimated median household income was $84,636 with an estimated per capita income of $35,860. The estimated median house or condo value is $278,121. Ellington is 95.4% White, 1.4% Hispanic, 1.2% Asian, 0.9% African American and 0.79% other. 467 residents are foreign born. The average household size is 2.5 people, with 66.8% family households, 6.3% households with unmarried partners. Of the population 25 years and over in Ellington, 91.8% have high school diplomas or higher, 32.1% hold a bachelor's degree or higher, 11.9% hold a graduate or professional degree, and 3% are unemployed. Twelve percent of Ellington residents reported income below the poverty level in 2009, with 1.2% of residents reporting income below 50% of the poverty level. Compared with other towns in Connecticut, the median household income is above the state average; the unemployed percentage is below the state average. The African American, Hispanic and foreign-born population percentage is significantly below the state average.

The Connecticut State Board of Education classifies its districts according to District Reference Groups (DRGs). The most affluent and low-need districts, as measured by these indicators, are grouped in DRG A while the poorest, highest-need districts – including Connecticut's five biggest cities – are grouped in DRG I. Ellington is in District Reference Group (DRG C).

The district includes a total of six schools. In addition to Ellington High School with a student population of 785, Ellington Middle School (grades 7-8) has 410 students, Windermere School (grades K-6) has 875 students, and Center School and Crystal Lake School, the two elementary schools (grades PK-4) in the district have student populations of 436 and 213, respectively. These numbers represent a 96.1% of the estimated student population of the town. Additionally, in the 2010-2011 school year, five students attended Ellington High School through Open Choice, a statewide program that offers students from Hartford the opportunity to attend public schools in suburban towns at no cost to the student's family. Its purpose is to improve academic achievement, reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation, and provide a choice of educational programs for children. Based on data from 2008-2009, the Ellington School District ranked 165th out of 169 towns in terms of per pupil expenditures, spending $10, 768 per pupil. In comparison, the DRG average is $12, 448 and the state average is $12, 805. In the same year, 62.7% of local revenue was allocated to the education budget, including school construction. The district-wide student population increased 10.2% in the five years previous to that, whereas at the high school it increased 12.7%; current projections indicate that this growth will continue. Ellington High School daily attendance rate averages 96% for students and 98% for teachers.

Of the total student population at Ellington High School, 375 are male and 403 are female. In alignment with the town's continued growth, school enrollments are projected to grow at between 6% and 7% by 2012, with

a projected student total for 2012 estimated at 829. At Ellington High School, 7.6% of students are identified as minorities; 1.4% of students come from homes where English is not the primary language, and .4% of the student population is not fluent in English. The percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals is 4.5%. The cumulative four-year dropout rate for the class of 2008 was 7.1% and 91.2% of that year's graduates went on to pursue higher education. Of the students graduating from Ellington High School, 52% enroll in four-year colleges, 30% enter two-year colleges, 5% enroll in vocational or other training schools, 2% enter the military, and 11% enter the work force.

There are 66 teachers at Ellington High School, with the average class size at 17 in the four core academic courses (English, social studies, mathematics and science). Students are required to take more than the state minimum number of credits for graduation in health, science, and world language, and the total number of credits required for graduation (22) is also more than the state minimum (20). Students attend school for 182 days for a total of 1,022 hours of instruction.

Incoming Ellington High School students are placed in level one or level two courses in the four core academic areas. Eighteen percent of students are enrolled in honors classes, 2.7% are enrolled in a total of eight Advanced Placement courses, and 2.4% take courses in cooperation with the University of Connecticut. Of the students who took Advanced Placement tests, 92.9% received a score of 3 or higher thus earning college credit for that course. Approximately 9.4% of students receive special education services; 69.2% of those students receiving special education services spend over 79% of their time with their non-disabled peers. No students at Ellington High School receive services in a gifted or talented program. All students are required to accrue four credits in English, three credits in social studies (which must include one-half credit in Civics and one credit in U.S. History), three credits in mathematics, three credits in science (one of which must be biology), one-half credits in health and one credit in physical education, with the remainder of courses being electives chosen by students. World language offerings include French, Spanish and Latin, and there are a number of other elective courses in business, family and consumer science, and technology education.

Ellington High School has an advisory program that is mandatory for all students. Students are randomly placed into groups of 10-12 and assigned to a certified staff member who is their advisor. The groups meet approximately 15 times per year for one-half hour meeting. The goal of the advisory program is to ensure that each student has an adult member of the school community with whom they can make connections and who, in addition to their guidance counselor, oversees their entire high school experience. It is also through the advisory program that students complete a portfolio, or collection of work samples from each course they took over their high school career. These work samples include assessments that were scored using the school-wide analytic rubrics that assess the four academic learning expectations. Students need to achieve a score of 3 (proficient) or better for each of these academic expectations, and their score is reported on their report cards.
Ellington High School also offers a number of extra-curricular activities. Examples include the Opening Knight Players (drama club), National Honor Society, Student Council, Knight Writers (literary magazine) and band. In addition, 45% of students play on at least one of our 22 athletic teams.

Ellington High School has established partnerships with local businesses through the Cooperative Work Experience (CWE) program. Through CWE, participating juniors and seniors take their academic courses in the morning and leave to work at jobs in the afternoon. Ellington High School students also have opportunities to participate in magnet school programs thought the International Baccalaureate Program, the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, the Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science, and the Partnership and Bridge Programs at the nearby community colleges.

Ellington High School actively solicits parents to be part of our ongoing educational process. Our annual Open House is held the first full week of school, during which parents follow their child's schedule, meet each of their child's teachers, and receive information about course objectives and grading policies. In October, a night of "mini-conferences" is held for parents to meet individually with their child's teachers for updates on their academic progress. A parents' advisory group meets six times per year and advises the administration on school climate, communication, and other topics. The Ellington Drug Abuse Prevention Council (DAPC) is a group comprised of parents, teachers, students and administrators that plans, organizes and implements activities to discourage drug and alcohol use among our teens. A subgroup of DAPC is The Parent Connection, a liaison between schools, recreation, police, community, social, civic, and faith-based groups to assist in this task. The Ellington High School newsletter is sent via email twice per month and is posted on our website along with a

calendar of events. We also have an automated notification system to provide all members of the school community with updates regarding emergencies, school closings.

Students are recognized for their accomplishments through quarterly Student Spotlight Breakfasts, seasonal athletic awards banquets, and the annual Academic Awards Ceremony. Ellington High School regularly posts special achievements in the department pages of the EHS Website as submitted by faculty members, and a bi-weekly newsletter in which student achievements are mentioned is sent to parents.

**Note: The School and Community Summary was prepared by the staff of Ellington High School**

# Core Values and Beliefs
# Ellington High School

We believe in creating a challenging academic environment. All students should gain the skills and knowledge to prepare them for a lifetime of learning in a rapidly changing global community. We expect all members of our learning community to demonstrate responsibility, integrity, respect, cultural understanding, and ethical behavior.

# 21st Century Learning Expectations

**Academic**

Ellington High School Students:

- Create, perform or respond effectively
- Read effectively
- Write effectively
- Reason effectively, think critically and solve problems
- Utilize real-world digital and other technology effectively
- Collaborate effectively

**Civic and Social**

Ellington High School Students:

- Value and demonstrate personal responsibility, character, cultural Understanding and ethical behavior

# 1 Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations

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

1. The school community engages in a dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive process informed by current research-based best practices to identify and commit to its core values and beliefs about learning.

2. The school has challenging and measurable 21st century learning expectations for all students which address academic, social, and civic competencies, and are defined by school-wide analytic rubrics that identify targeted high levels of achievement.

3. The school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations are actively reflected in the culture of the school, drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment in every classroom, and guide the school's policies, procedures, decisions, and resource allocations.

4. The school regularly reviews and revises its core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations based on research, multiple data sources, as well as district and school community priorities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Ellington High School community does engage in a dynamic, collaborative and inclusive process informed by current research-based best practices to identify and commit to its core values and beliefs about learning. All stakeholders in the school community, including members of the faculty, board of education, students, and parents, participated on the Core Values and Beliefs (CV&B) committee, which reviewed current research on 21st century learning skills, such as the *21st Century Skills Crosswalk.* Although the initial draft did not pass, the committee reviewed faculty feedback and revised the statement to reflect its strong belief in the importance of character education, which more accurately articulates the community's values and beliefs. The resulting final document is clearly visible throughout the school, appearing in all school publications, is displayed in every classroom and public space, and is posted on the school website. Therefore, faculty, students and parents can readily reference the CV&B. As a result of a well-structured CV&B statement, the school and community truly have a shared vision of the school's core values and beliefs and learning expectations. (self-study, teacher interviews, teachers, school board, students, student shadowing, parents, Endicott survey, student work)

The school's measurable 21st century learning expectations for all students address academic, social, and civic competencies and are defined by school-wide analytic rubrics that identify targeted

high levels of achievement. However, at this time, the faculty is still discussing the level of achievement on each rubric that should be required for graduation. The learning expectations were based on widely accepted definitions of 21st century learning skills. Each of the expectations is delineated in the school's seven analytic rubrics, with clearly and consistently marked levels of achievement. The learning expectations are consistent with the school's core values and beliefs about learning. Therefore, students will be well prepared for the higher levels of achievement demanded by the 21st century environment. (*Ellington High School Program of Studies,* students, teachers, teacher interviews, self-study, student work)

The school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations are actively reflected in the culture of the school and guide school policy. However, the Core Values and Beliefs statement does not consistently drive curriculum, instruction and assessment in every classroom, or guide procedures, decisions or resource allocations. The Core Values and Beliefs document was created within the last school year, and the EHS community will need to develop a decision-making process around curriculum, instruction, and assessment that is driven by the expressed desire to create graduates who are communicators, critical thinkers, innovators, collaborators, and honorable individuals. Currently, students are engaged in a wide variety of activities that reflect the Core Values and Beliefs, including community service initiatives and other student-led groups such as A Better Society and the Rise Above leadership group. In addition, students use technology to create visuals that exhibit the Core Values and Beliefs throughout the school, and collaborate in a video presentation of daily announcements. Students describe an inclusive environment, in which individuals of various grade levels and social subgroups interact without friction. Faculty and students demonstrate a culture of mutual respect in which learning is valued and student voice is encouraged. Furthermore, recent changes in school policy also reflect the Core Values and Beliefs and 21st century learning skills [e.g. the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative and consolidation of levels in core academic classes]. Although curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices appear to be aligned with the Core Values and Beliefs and 21st century learning expectations, changes to curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices are not widely evident. Each department is assigned primary and secondary responsibilities in assessing the seven 21st century learning expectations. While all departments are attending to their primary responsibilities designated in the *Program of Studies*, few departments are assessing students in the secondary learning expectations. Despite the implementation of the BYOD initiative, current infrastructure does not support widespread use of personal electronics, and training for integration of technology into the classroom is limited. Likewise, differentiated instruction training, necessitated by the consolidation of levels in core classes, has not been accessible to all teachers. Shared understanding about the spirit of the Core Values and Beliefs document contributes to a positive school culture, but is not yet being effectively used as a vehicle of change. (*EHS Program of Studies*, panel presentations, department leaders, teachers, self-study, students, student shadowing, classroom observation, facility tour, student work)

Ellington High School has recently reviewed and revised its core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations using models from other schools, the *21st Century Skills Crosswalk*, and community and faculty feedback. While Ellington High School's learning expectations align with the district goals, these goals and priorities are not part of the ongoing conversation about the school's core values and beliefs. Teachers do use data to inform instruction, but this is a department-based process rather than a school-wide focus. Professional Learning Groups (PLGs), which meet by department, are scheduled two times per week during common planning time, providing teachers with the opportunity to meet the needs of their students through activities such as examining student performance data, creating and revising common formative assessments, and sharing instructional best practices. Information gleaned from the PLGs will be vital to any revision process of the Core Values and Beliefs.

The continuation of a formal review process will provide a gauge by which to measure whether the school is consistently aligned with its Core Values and Beliefs and 21st century learning expectations. (school leadership, self-study, teachers, department leaders, teacher interview)

**Commendations**
1. The inclusive, thorough, and dynamic process for creating the Core Values and Beliefs which allowed revision based on faculty feedback
2. The prominently displayed Core Values and Beliefs documents throughout the school building, in publications, and on the website
3. The clear and consistently designed 21st century learning expectations and accompanying school-wide rubrics aligned to the Core Values and Beliefs
4. The positive school culture that reflects the Core Values and Beliefs
5. The revision of the Core Values and Beliefs and subsequent policy changes such as consolidation of leveled core classes

**Recommendations**
1. Develop and implement a system for using the Core Values and Beliefs to drive decision-making related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment
2. Continue to develop and implement a formal process for regularly reviewing Core Values and Beliefs and learning expectations

# 2  Curriculum

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

1. The curriculum is purposefully designed to ensure that all students practice and achieve each of the school's 21st century learning expectations.

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

3. The curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through:
   - inquiry and problem-solving
   - higher order thinking
   - cross-disciplinary learning
   - authentic learning opportunities both in and out of school
   - informed and ethical use of technology

4. There is clear alignment between the written and taught curriculum.

5. Effective curricular coordination and vertical articulation exist between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with sending schools in the district.

6. Staffing levels, instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and the resources of the library/media center are sufficient to fully implement the curriculum, including the co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities.

7. The district provides the school's professional staff with sufficient personnel, time, and financial resources for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum using assessment results and current research.

**CONCLUSIONS**

At Ellington High School (EHS) the written curriculum is inconsistently designed to ensure that all students practice and achieve each of the school's current learning expectations. Teacher interviews and student work show that while students work on some 21st century learning expectations in some disciplines, they are not consistently practicing all 21st century learning expectations in all of their classes. Student and teacher interviews revealed that teachers who are more comfortable with the 21st century learning rubrics use them frequently, while other teachers only use them in a modified state or in a limited capacity. There is no direction in the curriculum guides about when teachers should use the rubrics, resulting in teachers making individual choices about when students have opportunities to practice and achieve each of the school's 21st century learning expectations. The student portfolio is designed to include student work that has been evaluated using all of the 21st century rubrics; however, the portfolio currently only serves as a collection of artifacts from the curriculum without a clear and purposeful design driven by guaranteed experiences outlined in that curriculum. As a result, some students are adequately practicing and achieving the school-wide learning expectations, but not all students have the same experience. (curriculum documents, teacher interviews, curriculum committee, student work, self-study)

The written curriculum documents are not composed in a common format and there is a lack of consistency from one curriculum guide to the next. While some curriculum guides are thorough and are driven by essential understandings, others are not. Review of written curriculum guides indicates that not all curricular areas are commonly or directly linked to 21st century learning expectations, and there is no evidence of common assessment in the written documents. While some courses list instructional strategies, the connections between the strategies and the 21st century learning skills are vague. Many of the curriculum guides consist of suggestions rather than clear expectations, and there is a wide variety in format. Key concepts are referenced; however, how the concepts are to be taught and assessed is not explicitly stated. The school has started to upload curriculum documents in an electronic format, but no curricular documents are posted on the school's website for public review. Because the curriculum documents are written in multiple formats, there is no guarantee of consistent implementation within or between the disciplines. (curriculum documents, teacher interviews, curriculum committee meeting, observations)

While the written curriculum documents are inconsistent in format, the taught curriculum at EHS emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem-solving, higher order thinking, cross-disciplinary learning, authentic learning opportunities both in and out of school, and informed and ethical use of technology. Parents and students indicate that the curriculum at EHS is challenging and adequately prepares students for the future. Student work demonstrates that there is an emphasis in all departments on the ethical and informed use of technology when students are asked to use word processing, PowerPoint, internet to conduct research, and a variety of other computer-based projects. Classroom observations and teacher interviews show that most classes use collaboration, class discussion, peer activities, and student-centered learning activities. Problem-solving and higher order thinking skills are emphasized in both the academic and honors curricula. Student work demonstrates that reading and writing is taught across disciplines and that there is a consistent emphasis on 21st century skills. The community service component of the student portfolio demonstrates authentic learning outside of school. EHS has made depth of understanding and application of knowledge a school-wide priority, and students understand that they are expected to demonstrate a mastery of the aforementioned skills. (curriculum documents, teacher interviews, student shadowing, parents, board of education, observations, student work)

There is little evidence of alignment between written and taught curriculum. Teachers state that they do not typically have adequate planning or professional development time allocated to review and revise curriculum and common assessment tools, although the district supported major efforts by teachers who took the initiative to develop written curriculum guides in the lead-up to the decennial visit. Still, some of the curriculum guides are outdated, inconsistent, and incomplete. Many teachers have revised curricula on their own and implemented their own changes, which leads to the lack of alignment between what is written and what is taught. Therefore, consistency is lacking within and between disciplines, courses, and grade levels. Teachers do not have adequate data to develop an aligned curriculum, so not all students are held to the same standards or are measured equally. There is limited curricular leadership and as a result, teachers do not have adequate support or guidance in relation to developing a cohesive written and working curriculum. (curriculum documents, teacher interviews, observations, curriculum committee)

There is limited curricular coordination and vertical articulation between and among all academic areas within the school as well as with the sending school in the district. Interviews with principals from other district schools revealed that there is only sporadic vertical articulation between the middle school and high school. Limited personnel are available to conduct articulation meetings and to develop a curriculum that allows students to transition between grades and schools without redundancies and gaps. During interviews, teachers expressed concerns that they presented materials to students that had been previously taught in a prior grade or a different class. The lack of a structured and consistently implemented written curriculum has contributed to this confusion. Teachers and administrators have also expressed a concern that professional development in this domain is limited. While there is evidence that the EHS math department has made strides in curricular articulation, there are still disciplines that are experiencing curricular repetition. Therefore, as a result of the lack of curricular articulation, concepts are being omitted or retaught and there are gaps between concepts taught in the middle school and those taught in the high school. (curriculum documents, teacher interviews, curriculum advisor meeting, administrator interviews, board of education, observations, curriculum committee)

Instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and the resources of the library media center are sufficient to implement the curriculum including after-school programs and learning opportunities. Teachers have access to multiple computer labs and use them to aid instruction. Many classrooms have interactive white boards and students and teachers were observed utilizing them during lessons. Teachers would benefit from an increase in computer labs (both the number and capacity of the labs) as well as from a wireless connection that covers the entire building. The foods lab and broadcasting studio are state of the art. The automotive repair facility has adequate tools to teach basic auto repair, welding, and machining. The computer-aided drafting facility also has adequate resources. Staffing levels, however, are inadequate. There is insufficient staff to insure that curriculum is being developed, revised, and implemented in a consistent manner and aligned with standards and 21st century learning expectations. The curriculum assistants do not have adequate planning time to work on curriculum with staff members. Building administrators also do not have time to work with staff on curricular needs. There is need for direct leadership to provide adequate curricular oversight. In addition, there is a level of frustration in the community about students' inability to access elective courses due to insufficient staffing; students are frequently turned away from taking elective courses and placed in study halls. Overall, the district's inability to support staffing for curricular leadership and for elective access has adversely impacted the ability to implement curriculum and to provide diverse learning opportunities to all students. (curriculum guides, teacher interviews, student shadowing, observations, school tour, student work)

The district does not provide the school's professional staff with sufficient personnel or time for ongoing and collaborative development, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum. Multiple teacher interviews indicate that the process for revising curriculum is entirely voluntary, with teachers who take the initiative during the summer earning compensation once the document is submitted. There is insufficient professional development time allocated for curriculum work. A majority of the teachers interviewed expressed a frustration that while professional learning group (PLG) sessions were originally intended to discuss curriculum, this time is often taken to complete other administrative tasks. While there are financial resources available for the writing of curriculum, there are limited personnel to facilitate curriculum revision, and there is minimal time provided for staff to work in this area. The EHS faculty has recognized that the consistency of the school curricula is an area of need. Furthermore, the two- year and five-year targeted plans recognize that the development and alignment of curricula must be a work in progress that will require conscious and deliberate effort to achieve the identified goals. As a result of insufficient personnel and time, the curricular revision needs are not being adequately addressed. Current curriculum documents are not written in a common format, are incomplete, and are not directly connected to rubrics or 21st century learning expectations. (curriculum documents, teacher interviews, administrator interviews, board of education, observations, curriculum committee)

**Commendations**
1. The academic and elective programs that provide an opportunity for students to succeed and develop 21st century learning skills
2. The efforts of the faculty to deliver a rigorous taught curriculum that emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem-solving
3. The facilities and resources that promote learning as well as the availability and integration of technology that prepares students to be competitive in the 21st century
4. The efforts of individual faculty members to make improvements to existing curriculum documents
5. The availability of adequate instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, and facilities to fully implement the curriculum
6. The awareness of the faculty that curriculum revision and alignment must be a priority in upcoming years

**Recommendations**
1. Review and revise the curricula to ensure that all students have guaranteed opportunities within and across the disciplines to practice and achieve each of the school's 21st century learning expectations
2. Create and implement a written and unified curriculum format in all disciplines
3. Initiate a formal curriculum review and revision process in order to align the written and taught curricula
4. Create formal opportunities for staff members to interact within and across departments to discuss articulation of the curricula, including opportunities with teachers from the sending school
5. Address the need for department-level curricular leadership to ensure the alignment between written and taught curricula
6. Provide professional development and training in the areas of developing, evaluating and revising written curricula
7. Assure that the curriculum work involves all teachers across all disciplines

# 3 **Instruction**

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

1. Teachers' instructional practices are continuously examined to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations.

2. Teachers' instructional practices support the achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations by:
   - personalizing instruction
   - engaging students in cross-disciplinary learning
   - engaging students as active and self-directed learners
   - emphasizing inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking
   - applying knowledge and skills to authentic tasks
   - engaging students in self-assessment and reflection
   - integrating technology.

3. Teachers adjust their instructional practices to meet the needs of each student by:
   - using formative assessment, especially during instructional time
   - strategically differentiating
   - purposefully organizing group learning activities
   - providing additional support and alternative strategies within the regular classroom.

4. Teachers, individually and collaboratively, improve their instructional practices by:
   - using student achievement data from a variety of formative and summative assessments
   - examining student work
   - using feedback from a variety of sources, including students, other teachers, supervisors, and parents
   - examining current research
   - engaging in professional discourse focused on instructional practice.

5. Teachers, as adult learners and reflective practitioners, maintain expertise in their content area and in content-specific instructional practices.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Many of the teachers at Ellington High School (EHS) continuously examine their instructional practices to ensure consistency with the school's core values, beliefs, and 21st century learning expectations. The core values and beliefs are posted throughout the school and referenced in many areas including the EHS website, placing emphasis on the academic and social expectations of the

mission. Seventy-six percent of the staff indicated that teachers continuously examine their instructional practices to ensure consistency with the core values and beliefs about learning. EHS teachers' varying instructional strategies reflect the school's emphasis on providing high quality instruction for all students, and teachers observed during student shadowing or classroom visits employed instructional strategies that align with the school's 21st century learning expectations. Each department has assumed a primary responsibility for assessing student progress toward these expectations by using specific school-wide rubrics. Scheduled Professional Learning Group (PLG) time provides opportunities to collaborate and continuously examine instructional practices, but teachers report this time is often mandated for other initiatives. As a result, the school's expectations for student learning can only be achieved when teachers have the time to continuously examine instructional practices for alignment with the school's core values, beliefs and 21st century learning expectations (self-study, Endicott survey, classroom observations, teachers).

Although teachers' instructional practices support the achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations, there is an inconsistent understanding of personalized instruction among the teachers. Some teachers provide opportunities that personalize instruction to match individual interests, as evidenced by project and/or activity choices in environmental science, family and consumer science, and math. However, not all students believe that their teachers are aware of their learning needs or recognize teachers' efforts to personalize their learning experience. According to the Endicott survey, only 36 percent of students feel that teachers are aware of their learning needs. Teachers and students have indicated that cross-curricular connections are not embedded into the instruction, as formal shared classes are difficult to schedule and are logistically challenging. Self-directed learning in some subject areas is part of the learning strategies employed. Several examples of student work and classroom observations reveal that teachers require students to complete independent research. Teachers also encourage students to work in groups in order to gain a broader perspective as part of the learning process. In music, English, and science, students are actively engaged in their learning because teachers design lessons that require a high level of engagement through student performing, designing, or using hands-on materials. Teachers and students in honors and Advanced Placement courses report successful engagement of students as active and self-directed learners; in courses where levels have been consolidated, teachers express a challenge in delivering these types of activities. Discussions with teachers reveal that they encourage both inquiry and problem-solving, particularly in the sciences and mathematics. Student work reveals numerous assignments emphasizing the application of knowledge and skills to authentic tasks. Self-assessment and reflection by students takes place in some areas, notably in English, science, and the student portfolio, but is not in evidence across the disciplines. EHS classrooms provide technology to support and enhance their instructional practices. Despite the limited wireless access, the recently adopted Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy provides unique opportunities for instruction such as the use of SmartPhone applications to record oral assignments in a world language class. Several teachers are using online course management systems such as Edmodo to create virtual learning environments for students. Many students benefit from teachers' efforts to personalize instruction. However, some students will require more emphasis on personalization in classroom activities to support their efforts to achieve all of their academic expectations. (teacher interview, self-study, students, teachers, student work, classroom observations, Endicott survey)

Teachers adjust their instructional practices to meet the needs of each student. A review of student work reveals strategic differentiation such as purposeful grouping, modified reading, and alternative assessments, but teachers indicate the need for additional formalized training. Formative assessments such as exit slips, dry erase boards, and department-generated Common Formative Assessments (CFAs) are used to drive instruction; however, samples of student work reveal a lack of

meaningful feedback. As a general practice, teachers are available for extra help. Faculty members at EHS have made great efforts to develop instructional practices that are meaningful and purposeful to the students. However, when differentiation strategies are not used school-wide, the consequence can be a compromise of instructional quality. (student work, teachers, classroom observation)

Some teachers use student achievement data from a variety of formative and summative assessments to improve their instructional practices. Teachers indicate that they informally reflect upon the results of department developed common assessments with their department colleagues, but not all teachers have common planning periods. Some teachers report that PLG time is used for the discussion of common assessments, but most teachers report that they do not have sufficient time to fully analyze collected data and discuss instructional approaches based on assessment results due to other administrative priorities. Teachers do not formally meet across content areas to review and discuss student work or instructional best practices. On the whole, the faculty has only begun to engage in professional discourse focused on instructional practice that is driven by the analysis of assessment data obtained through common assessments and the use of school-wide rubrics. Lack of consistent and widespread use of formative and summative assessment data impedes practices that improve instruction and student learning. (teacher interview, teachers)

Nearly all teachers, as adult learners, engage in professional development to maintain expertise in content-specific instructional practices. According to the Endicott survey, 88.1% of the staff stated that they maintain expertise in their content area; teachers hold membership in content-specific and general education professional organizations. Teachers report that they are contractually reimbursed $75 for professional development yearly; 25 staff members report attending between one and three professional development workshops during the 2010-11 school year. A strong commitment to professional development in content and related instructional practices at EHS enhances the quality of instruction as well as the level of student learning, engagement, and personalization. (Endicott survey, teachers, self-study)

**Commendations**
1. The teacher familiarity and continued efforts to align instructional practices with the school's Core Values and Beliefs and 21st century learning expectations
2. The collaboration time allotted to teachers through Professional Learning Groups to examine best instructional practices
3. The innovative use of some technology as an effective instructional tool
4. The use by some teachers of the analysis of student data from a variety of formative and summative assessments to improve and modify teacher instruction
5. The commitment of teachers in maintaining expertise in content areas and best instructional practices
6. The district and school commitment to professional development in content and related instructional practices

**Recommendations**
1. Redirect the focus of PLG time to discussion of instructional practices and strategies in response to assessment data
2. Provide opportunity for and emphasis on the creation and implementation of cross-disciplinary connections

3. Employ student self-assessment and reflection strategies on a school-wide basis to improve personalization of instruction
4. Construct and implement professional development opportunities for the delivery of differentiated instructional strategies
5. Analyze results of formative and summative assessments as a source of data to review, reflect on, and improve instruction

# 4 Assessment of and for Student Learning

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

1. The professional staff continuously employs a formal process, based on school-wide rubrics, to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations.

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

3. Professional staff collects, disaggregates, and analyzes data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement.

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

5. Prior to summative assessments, teachers provide students with the corresponding rubrics.

6. In each unit of study, teachers employ a range of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessments.

7. Teachers collaborate regularly in formal ways on the creation, analysis, and revision of formative and summative assessments, including common assessments.

8. Teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to ensure students revise and improve their work.

9. Teachers regularly use formative assessment to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning.

10. Teachers and administrators, individually and collaboratively, examine a range of evidence of student learning for the purpose of revising curriculum and improving instructional practice, including all of the following:
    - student work
    - common course and common grade-level assessments
    - individual and school-wide progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations

- standardized assessments
- data from sending schools, receiving schools, and post-secondary institutions
- survey data from current students and alumni.

11. Grading and reporting practices are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning.


**CONCLUSIONS**

Ellington High School (EHS) staff continuously employs a formal process, based on school-wide rubrics, to assess whole-school and individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations. School-wide rubrics have been developed and implemented by all staff and are administered a minimum of once per semester. They are collected in a student portfolio and demonstration of evidence of proficiency (level 3 on the rubrics) is required for graduation beginning with the class of 2013. Students report that they understand the process of collection as well as the attainment of proficiency on the school-wide rubrics. Each department has both a primary and secondary responsibility for a school-wide rubric. There is evidence that the principal has reported whole school results about the achievement on the learning expectations to the school community. EHS has a strong formal process in place and is therefore able to report whole-school and individual student progress in achieving 21st century learning expectations. (self-study, student shadowing, student work, teacher interviews)

To a limited degree, the school's professional staff communicates individual student progress in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations to students, their families, and the school community. Student progress in achieving the 21st century learning expectations is reported twice a year on student report cards as a comment that lists the student score on the school-wide rubric. Explanation of the standard for assessment is not currently included. At Open House, families who visit their child's advisory teacher also receive information about portfolio requirements and processes. The school community is apprised of student progress in achieving the 21st century learning expectations through both a principal's and superintendent's newsletter. While efforts to communicate student progress have been made, more meaningful communication of student progress could be achieved through the clear explanation of the standards on the report card and in the newsletters. Consequently, parents and students need a better understanding of the feedback they are receiving on progress toward achieving 21st century learning expectations. (self-study, teachers, students, principal)

The professional staff at Ellington High School collects, disaggregates, and analyzes data in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. In their professional learning groups (PLGs) and at other times, staff sometimes uses data to inform instruction and to address inequities in student achievement. Over the past few years, staff felt that less time has been allotted in PLGs for data analysis and the discussion of student work. Rather, PLGs have been focused on administrative directives. Staff is expected to use data regarding student performance in the development of Student Achievement Target Plans (SATPs) that provide personalized instruction and intervention strategies to improve individual student achievement. In addition, a universal literacy screening is administered to all ninth grade students for the purpose of identifying students in need of further intervention. In many departments, teachers use data collected from student performance on formative assessments such as Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) practice exercises or writing samples assessed using the school-wide rubric to strategically group students for small group instruction based on the needs identified. Although staff collects significant amounts and various forms of data, the loss of focused

PLG time and an increasing number of new initiatives significantly hinder progress in reducing inequities in student achievement. (self-study, teachers, student work, Endicott survey)

Prior to each unit of study, according to the Endicott survey, approximately half of teachers communicate to students the school's applicable 21st century learning expectations and related unit-specific learning goals to be assessed. In some classrooms, 21st century learning expectations are posted along with essential questions. Course objectives are clearly identified along with 21st century learning expectations in syllabi, but unit objectives are often missing. Consequently, students frequently do not have a clear understanding of the applicable 21st century learning expectations and unit-specific learning goals prior to each unit of study. (classroom observations, self-study, Endicott survey, teachers)

Prior to summative assessments, EHS teachers provide students with corresponding rubrics. School-wide rubrics are widely used as well as departmental rubrics and those designed for particular assessments. Some teachers provide exemplars of student work along with the rubrics. Students report that they understand teacher expectations for their performance in advance. This widespread use of rubrics provides students with a clear understanding of performance expectations on summative assessments. (self-study, Endicott survey, students, student work, teachers)

Teachers at Ellington High School consistently employ a wide range of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessment. Student and teacher interviews, the examination of student work, and the results of the Endicott survey revealed abundant evidence demonstrating a variety of both formative and summative assessment strategies. Students and teachers repeatedly cited the use of daily warm-ups, exit slips, student discussions, homework, thumbs up/down, and quizzes as formative assessments. Summative assessments included objective tests, essays, and projects but also authentic learning assessments including the school store's retail assessment, video productions and announcements, theater productions, culinary competitions, re-building cars, and art portfolios. As a result of the wide variety and range of formative and summative assessments, students at EHS are able to demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills in numerous, engaging, and authentic ways. (teachers, students, student work, self-study)

Teachers collaborate informally and irregularly to create, analyze, and revise formative and summative assessment. The regularity of meetings and writing of assessments is inconsistent across departments. Several departments report the use of common summative assessments (world language, math, physical education, science), and others incorporate common formative assessments to identify progress toward identified skills (English, social studies, science, math, physical education, and business education). In the Endicott survey, 84% of teachers expressed that they collaborate on the development of assessments. Over the past several years, the focus of PLG time in departments has been redirected to new initiatives with less time allocated for focused collaboration related to common assessments. While staff at EHS seek opportunities to collaborate in the creation, analysis and revision of formative and summative assessments, effectiveness is limited by scheduling and other administrative directives infringing on PLG time. (teachers, student work, self-study, Endicott survey)

EHS teachers provide specific, timely, and corrective feedback to ensure students revise and improve their work. Some teachers give specific feedback on the quality of work measured against the rubric and provide opportunities to revise their work before it is formally assessed. Sixty-eight percent of students report that their teachers offer suggestions to improve their work. However, written feedback on student work submitted to the committee was observed to be more general than specific in nature. Fifty-seven percent of students report teachers assess their work in a reasonable amount of

time, though some expressed frustration about getting work back in order to place it in their portfolio. As a result of receiving timely and corrective feedback before their work is formally assessed, students are able to progress towards and reach higher levels of achievement on their assessments. (teachers, students, student work, Endicott survey)

EHS teachers regularly use formative assessments to inform and adapt their instruction for the purpose of improving student learning. Teachers use the results of their formative assessments to adapt their instructional strategies for the next lesson to ensure that all students understand the topics and skills. Eighty-eight percent of EHS teachers report that they review formative assessments for the purpose of improving student learning on a regular basis. Evidence exists that while some teachers collaborate regularly to determine necessary changes in instructional practice, the time provided for PLGs is often used for other purposes and tasks. Therefore, while teachers regularly use formative assessment to improve student learning in their own classroom, conflicting priorities do not allow for effective collaborative review of formative assessments. (teacher interviews, Endicott survey, student work)

Teachers collectively examine student work to improve instructional practice. Many staff members seek time to discuss student progress as evidenced by teacher interviews and the Endicott survey in which 65% state they examine a wide range of student work and assessments. While there are sporadic examples of common assessments within the disciplines, the school community is not using this strategy in a systematic way. Examples of common formative assessments include those administered in social studies in Grades 9 &10 (CAPT) and Grade 11 & 12 (document-based questions), in math classes where students self-assess their performance using a rubric, and in science where common lab reports and rubrics are used across the department. The analysis of individual student work samples by teachers and departments is inconsistent. Some departments norm their rubrics and summative assessments using student work samples, but this is rare. Several departments administer common course and grade-level assessments. Teachers report using common summative unit assessments, midterms, and final exams in physical education, math, English (Grades 9/10), and business education. Other departments report strong similarities or common sections of summative assessments. Administrators and teachers examine data from standardized assessments, individually and collectively. Departments review CAPT scores, often by strand. As a result of data analysis, many departments have planned interventions to better prepare students as well as to remediate those who did not meet standards. Needs demonstrated in the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) data from the incoming 8th grade classes have led to the development of two new courses: Math Support and Reading Support. Teachers also receive CMT scores for their students identifying those performing at basic or below basic levels. In many areas, EHS is improving instructional practices through both individual and collective examination of student data; however, curriculum decisions do not appear to be driven by such processes. (teachers, student work, self-study, school leadership)

Grading and reporting practices have been recently reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with the school's core values and beliefs about learning. Student progress toward achieving the 21st century learning expectations is indicated by a score and comment reporting performance on school-wide rubrics. The mathematics and business departments have aligned their grading practices and core values and beliefs with course objectives. Ellington High School has made strides to revise their grading and reporting practices to
include 21st century learning expectations, but no systematic approach to examine grading practices on a regular basis is currently in place. Consequently, inconsistencies may exist among teachers, departments, and staff in the evaluation of student achievement and reporting of progress. (teacher interviews, course syllabi, report cards)

**Commendations**

1. The development and implementation of school-wide rubrics to assess student performance in achieving the 21st century learning expectations
2. The efforts by the staff collectively and individually to collect, disaggregate, and analyze data to respond to student inequities
3. The widespread use of rubrics to communicate performance expectations to students
4. The various and engaging types of formative and summative assessments utilized in classrooms
5. The use of formative assessment data to inform classroom instruction
6. The recent review of grading practices

**Recommendations**
1. Provide clear communication of standards to be assessed by school-wide rubrics on student report cards
2. Ensure that PLG time is regularly used for meaningful, consistent collaboration to improve formative and summative assessment practices
3. Develop and implement a process that ensures all staff explicitly communicate unit objectives and 21st century learning expectations prior to a unit of study
4. Use data collected from standardized, formative, and common assessments to drive curricular change
5. Reduce inconsistencies in assessment based on the recent review of grading practices

# 5  School Culture and Leadership

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

1. The school community consciously and continuously builds a safe, positive, respectful, and supportive culture that fosters student responsibility for learning and results in shared ownership, pride, and high expectations for all.

2. The school is equitable, inclusive, and fosters heterogeneity where every student over the course of the high school experience is enrolled in a minimum of one heterogeneously grouped core course (English/language arts, social studies, math, science, or world languages).

3. There is a formal, ongoing program through which each student has an adult in the school, in addition to the school counselor, who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school's 21st century learning expectations.

4. In order to improve student learning through professional development, the principal and professional staff:
   - engage in professional discourse for reflection, inquiry, and analysis of teaching and learning
   - use resources outside of the school to maintain currency with best practices
   - dedicate formal time to implement professional development
   - apply the skills, practices, and ideas gained in order to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

5. School leaders regularly use research-based evaluation and supervision processes that focus on improved student learning.

6. The organization of time supports research-based instruction, professional collaboration among teachers, and the learning needs of all students.

7. Student load and class size enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students.

8. The principal, working with other building leaders, provides instructional leadership that is rooted in the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations.

9. Teachers, students, and parents are involved in meaningful and defined roles in decision-making that promote responsibility and ownership.

10. Teachers exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning.

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

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

**CONCLUSIONS**

Ellington High School (EHS) community members consciously and continuously strive to build a safe, positive, respectful and supportive culture that fosters school pride.  Student and faculty handbooks are updated annually to include information related to rules and procedures that support a safe school environment as well as to outline the expectations for student behavior. The Endicott survey indicated that approximately 82% of the students feel safe at school and nearly 70% of the students responded that they are proud of their school.  During interviews, students reported that their teachers care about their learning and respect them.  The students stated that EHS has taken steps to raise awareness of and address bullying behaviors in a variety of ways.  Examples include implementing anti-bullying lessons during advisory, showing videos on this topic, and implementing Anti-Defamation League programs called "Just Kidding Hurts" and "Use Another Word" to help build student awareness. The students also reported that the 2011 Spirit Week was an outstanding event supporting a positive school climate. Therefore, the positive school climate reflects school pride and shared ownership in EHS. (self-study, parents, teachers, classroom observations, student interviews, teacher interviews, Endicott survey)

Student grouping patterns at EHS foster some heterogeneity where every student over the course of the high school experience is enrolled in at least one heterogeneously grouped core course. Recently, the course leveling system at EHS has changed from five instructional levels to three: Advanced Placement (AP)/UConn Early College Experience (ECE), Honors and Academic in the four core content areas of English, math, science, and social studies. Numerous course offerings in the elective areas such as business, world language, technology education, family and consumer sciences, health and physical education, music, and art are heterogeneously grouped. Students at EHS are required to earn a one-half credit in a world language class ensuring that all students will take at least one course in a heterogeneously grouped class. Aside from world language, all other core content area courses a student will experience at EHS do not consistently offer heterogeneously grouped classes. (self-study, parents, teachers, classroom observations, program of studies)

There is a formal, on-going program at EHS through which each student has an adult in the school, in addition to the school counselor, who knows the student well and assists students in achieving the school's learning expectations.  EHS established an advisory program during the 2008 – 2009 school year that provides each student with an adult mentor over the course of a student's four years at the high school. Advisory meets approximately every other week for 30 minutes.  Each advisor is assigned 10 - 14 students and stays with that group of students throughout their four years of high school.  Beginning with the class of 2013, the portfolio is a graduation requirement. The comprehensive portfolio assessment provides each EHS student with the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in academic areas such as those measured by the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), establish academic goals, reflect upon progress over time, and showcase unique talents and skills. During student interviews, many students reported that advisory time was used to put entries in their portfolios and/or discuss a topic of interest. Therefore, the current advisory program allows time for students to begin to personalize their educational experience, connect with an adult, and meet the portfolio graduation requirement. (students, teachers, Endicott survey, observation)

In order to improve student learning through professional development, the principal and professional staff at EHS engage in professional discourse for reflection and analysis of teaching and learning, use resources outside of the school to maintain currency with best practices, and dedicate formal time to implement professional development.  There are multiple opportunities for professional learning and discourse at EHS including weekly professional learning group (PLG) meetings, monthly faculty meetings, monthly department meetings and monthly faculty advisory meetings. EHS dedicates three full days to professional development each school year. At times, the director of curriculum has planned recent professional development topics. Some examples of topics include: data driven decision making (DDDM); best practices in differentiated instruction; technology literacy; reading strategies, and curriculum development. According to the Endicott survey, 76.1% of staff agrees that the school's professional development programs enable teachers to acquire and use skills to improve instruction and assessment. The district also sets aside a $75 yearly stipend per teacher to allow staff members to attend outside professional development programs.  During interviews, teachers stated that PLG time is often used for administrative agenda topics and not planned to meet individual department needs. There is a lack of cohesiveness between themes and areas of focus for professional development among staff members. While it is clear that the principal and faculty are committed to improving student learning, there is insufficient cohesion or prioritization of initiatives over time to target particular student learning needs. Some teachers indicated that professional development topics shift often and there is limited time for implementation. Without a clear, long-term plan for targeted professional learning as well as time to implement each initiative well, increasing student learning outcomes will remain challenging. (self-study, teachers, survey)

EHS's leaders use research-based evaluation and supervision processes. School leaders use an updated district-wide professional growth and teacher evaluation plan initiated during the 2011-2012 school year to evaluate all certified faculty. The initial revised teacher evaluation plan for EHS was based on the readings, research, and discussions that took place during administrative summer retreats and administrative council meetings. The Professional Growth Committee, comprised of teachers and administrators from throughout the district developed the final plan. The plan includes formal observations, mini-observations, professional growth plans, and mid-year update and summative report meetings. There is a clear process in place for evaluation of staff based on the 2010 Common Core of Teaching (CCT) and CCT Performance Profiles. EHS has implemented a model that addresses a full range of teacher status: non-tenured, continuous professional growth, and intervention process. The document outlines the integration of the Teacher Educator and Mentoring (TEAM) program for beginning teachers. The process is reflective and collaborative. Although a new teacher evaluation model is being implemented, its impact on student achievement is not yet evident. (self-study, teachers, administration)

The organization of time at EHS supports research-based instruction, professional collaboration among teachers, and the learning needs of all students.  EHS implements a modified six day block schedule.  Each class meets four out of the six days and provides three 57-minute class sessions and one 85-minute class session.  The block schedule allows for the implementation of research-based instructional strategies and opportunities for teachers to spend more in-class time to go more in depth on a particular topic. In addition, the schedule allows most teachers the opportunity to meet at least weekly in PLGs by content area.  PLGs allow for teacher collaboration, reviewing CAPT/CMT assessment results, creating common formative CAPT assessments, reviewing the School Improvement Plan, and creating Student Success Target Plans. However, teachers and administration reported that PLG time is not always used to accomplish these tasks. Although the EHS schedule provides opportunities for formal collaboration time for teachers to help meet student learning needs, this time

is not consistently used for the purpose of increasing student achievement. (parents, students, teachers, classroom student shadowing)

Student load and class size at EHS enable teachers to meet the learning needs of individual students. Specific subject areas are structured to have lower student/teacher ratios because of student learning needs, number of work stations, and other criteria. In core academic area classes, the average class size is approximately 20 students, but individual class sizes fluctuate. According to the Endicott survey, approximately 69% of the students report that their class sizes are reasonable. Almost 63% of the staff reports that student load and class sizes enable them to meet the learning needs of individual students. Sixty-two percent of parents say that the number of students in their children's classes allows the teachers to meet students' individual learning needs. Consequently, students, teachers, and parents identify that the student/teacher ratio at EHS supports student learning. (self-study, parents, teachers, administrators, students, classroom observations)

The principal of EHS, working with other building leaders, provides leadership. The principal and assistant principal have spearheaded many initiatives including a new bell schedule, the "Bring Your Own Device" policy, a reduction in the number of course levels, implementation of an advisory program, the school-wide portfolio as a graduation requirement, a new teacher evaluation plan, the Student Achievement Target Plans, differentiated instruction, data-driven decision teams, Scientific Research Based Interventions, PLGs, and 21st century learning expectations progress reporting. School administrators reported that each fall they work with the curriculum assistants to develop a school instructional plan that outlines goals, a timeline, person responsible and result indicators, with input from all faculty. However, many teachers stated that there is a need to improve communication between administration and the staff regarding the vision and direction of new initiatives. Teachers indicated frustration in the large number of new initiatives and directives being implemented each year and the lack of support and time to implement them effectively. While the building principal leads the implementation of many initiatives and mandates, teachers are unclear as to the purpose for the changes and how they align with the school's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations. (teacher interview, administrator interview, School Culture and Leadership Committee)

Mechanisms are in place at EHS to allow teachers, students, and parents to be involved in the decision-making process. Parents are able to serve as members of the parent advisory group, while students have the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process through Student Council meetings and the Principal's Student Advisory council. The principal shares school topic information and asks for input from parents and students during the meetings. As reported by building administrators, input from teachers is sought through surveys, meetings and email. For example, administrators received teacher input on the following issues: consolidation of levels, scheduling issues, core values and beliefs, and course rigor guidelines. However, many teachers report that the lack of a meaningful role in the decisions results in minimal ownership and responsibility for the change. The Faculty Voice committee was created at the end of the 2010-11 school year to increase teacher involvement in the decision-making process; however, attendance has declined over the past year. Although there are some mechanisms in place for teachers to be involved in decision-making, a perception exists that input is not always valued and minimizes teacher responsibility for and ownership of decisions. (School Culture and Leadership Standards committee, teacher interview, administrators, parent meeting, Two-Year and Five-Year Plans)

Teachers at EHS exercise initiative and leadership essential to the improvement of the school and to increase students' engagement in learning. Teachers take the initiative at EHS to lead and engage students in a variety of extracurricular activities. A Better Society (ABS) led by a social studies

teacher focuses on activities important to students. "Cool Schools", spearheaded by a science teacher, is a program on a local television network. Teachers coach and advise other programs like peer mediation and a peer advocate group. Several teachers also choose to advise student initiated clubs and activities for no compensation. According to the CEA School Climate Survey, 96% of teachers report that, "Teachers share a high level of commitment to student learning." Recently, there has been an increase in the number of AP courses offered at EHS. Since the 2008-09 school year, five new AP courses were offered, including AP Spanish, AP psychology, AP environmental science, AP studio art, AP music theory. It is clear that the teachers are strongly vested in the students' engagement in learning and assume leadership roles that provide a variety of learning opportunities for the students. (School Culture and Leadership Standards committee, teacher, student, Two-Year and Five-Year Plans)

The school board, superintendent, and principal regularly collaborate in making decisions that directly impact students' abilities to achieve EHS's learning expectations. The superintendent and district principals meet monthly at the Administrative Council meetings to discuss issues that directly impact students. These include but are not limited to brainstorming sessions regarding the review of the electronic devices policy, teacher evaluation and budget concerns. Acting as a liaison between the board and the high school, a school board member served on the committee to write the Core Values and Beliefs. A school board member serves on the curriculum committee along with teachers, administrators and the director of curriculum. Additionally, board members are directly involved in the decision-making process on several new initiatives that include the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, introduction of new AP course offerings, the reduction of levels from five to three, and new textbook purchases. The school board works closely with the Board of Finance on the budget approval. As a result, when the school board, superintendent, and principal collaboratively make decisions regarding student learning, the educational programs at EHS are enhanced. (administrators, teacher, school board)

The Ellington school board and superintendent provide the principal with sufficient decision-making authority to lead the school. According to the high school principal's job description, which was last amended in March 1997, "The principal is responsible to the superintendent of schools. He is charged with providing leadership in developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising the high school program, ensuring that it is compatible with district philosophy." The major responsibilities focus on educational leadership, curriculum and instruction, school climate, implementing school policy, and community relations. The principal is responsible for supervision and evaluation of all staff. He regularly reports test score results to the board of education. The principal participates at district-wide curriculum meetings and administrative council activities. The principal interviews new hires along with staff and works with the superintendent to develop the budget. In addition, the principal regularly communicates with parents through newsletters and at parent advisory group meetings. Because the principal is provided the necessary autonomy to run the daily and long-term operations of the school, his leadership decisions can be responsive to the needs of the school. (Policy 2138.1, teacher, administrator)

**Commendations**
1. The student and staff pride in the Ellington High School community
2. The supportive learning environment
3. The positive teacher-student relationships
4. The schedule that provides for formal collaboration time for most teachers
5. The consolidation of course levels one, two, and three to one academic course level

6.  The board of education and superintendent who provide the principal with decision-making authority to lead the school
7.  The formal advisory program
8.  The heterogeneously-grouped world language course required of all students
9.  The establishment of the Teacher Voice Committee

**Recommendations**
1.  Improve communication strategies between administration and teachers before, during and after the inception of new initiatives
2.  Develop and implement a plan to increase the instructional leadership capacity beyond the current structure of curriculum assistants
3.  Expand heterogeneous core course offerings for all students
4.  Develop and implement a systematic and on-going professional development plan that clearly focuses on a limited number of high leverage improvement strategies to improve student learning and instruction
5.  Develop and implement a plan that ensures teachers have meaningful roles and responsibilities in the decision-making process
6.  Formulate a plan to ensure that the principal shares instructional leadership and ownership by redefining the role of PLGs in the school community

# 6 School Resources for Learning

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

1. The school has timely, coordinated, and directive intervention strategies for all students, including identified and at-risk students, that support each student's achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations.

2. The school provides information to families, especially to those most in need, about available student support services.

3. Support services staff use technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for each student.

4. School counseling services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
   ▪ deliver a written, developmental program
   ▪ meet regularly with students to provide personal, academic, career, and college counseling
   ▪ engage in individual and group meetings with all students
   ▪ deliver collaborative outreach and referral to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers
   ▪ use ongoing, relevant assessment data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21st century learning expectations.

5. The school's health services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
   ▪ provide preventative health services and direct intervention services
   ▪ use an appropriate referral process
   ▪ conduct ongoing student health assessments
   ▪ use ongoing, relevant assessment data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's 21st century learning expectations.

6. Library/media services are integrated into curriculum and instructional practices and have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who:
   ▪ are actively engaged in the implementation of the school's curriculum provide a wide range of materials, technologies, and other information services in support of the school's curriculum
   ▪ ensure that the facility is available and staffed for students and teachers before, during, and after school
   ▪ are responsive to students' interests and needs in order to support independent learning
   ▪ conduct ongoing assessment using relevant data, including feedback from the school community, to improve services and ensure each student achieves the school's

21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations.

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


**CONCLUSIONS**

The school has developed several paths for students who have been identified as at-risk by test scores such as the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), The Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), grades, and/or attendance to receive interventions. The school has timely, coordinated, and directive intervention strategies for all students, including identified and at-risk students that support each student's achievement of the school's 21st century learning expectations. Additionally, the Student Achievement Target Plan (SATP) provides the faculty with opportunities to meet and brainstorm strategies to support individual at-risk learners. Educators use these discussions to develop Scientific Research Based Interventions (SRBI) for individual learners.  The school counselors administer an interest inventory on all freshmen, which evolves into a Personal Plan for Progress (PPP). The school counselors review a checklist of approved activities with students that are derived from the school counseling curriculum. Students with a need for advanced interventions with regard to motivation, truancy, academic underachievement and/or emotional recovery are placed in the Program for Alternative Learning (PAL). This program is designed to help learners recover academic credit and strengthen their ability to reenter the typical educational program as soon as success therein is attainable. A study skills program exists on an ad-hoc basis to support students in developing social and learning skills. Ellington High School has made great efforts to meet the needs of all students in the school. Therefore a significant number of students are provided opportunities for support in meeting the school's 21st century learning expectations. (self-study, panel presentation, teacher interview, students, central office personnel, school support staff, Endicott survey)

The school provides information to families, especially to those most in need, about available student support services. Ninth graders participate in orientation sessions where support services are reviewed. Counseling and support services facilitate informational sessions at orientation and open house. An informational newsletter about students' educational experience is sent to all student households. The new learning management system, FinalSite, is used to facilitate communication between home and school, and within the school  (namely between special and regular education) including interactive collaboration and communication opportunities to learners, i.e. blogs, collaborative websites, and chats. Community informational events are offered throughout the year, covering a range of topics, such as drug and alcohol awareness, learning disabilities, college preparedness, and financial aid. Multi-pronged communications help all Ellington High School (EHS) families learn about services that support students' learning. (self-study, panel presentation, teacher interview, parents, central office personnel, school leadership, school support staff, Endicott survey)

Support services staff use technology to deliver an effective range of coordinated services for

each student. Special education case managers employ many assistive technologies to support students as they progress toward their individualized 21st century learning goals. Strategic Enrollment Management System (SEMS) Tracker helps faculty coordinate differentiated services, aligning instructional programs with student IEPs and 504 plans. The school uses Kurzweil software to support learners who require auditory support when reading. Additionally, Discover software helps guidance counselors inventory student interests. Dragon software provides voice-to-text recognition. BoardMaker Studio is used for developing writers to help them construct text using symbols. Naviance is emerging as a system-wide vehicle for the state-mandated Student Success Plan (SSP), and online portfolio management. FinalSite (learning management system) provides a growing number of collaborative options to the entire learning community, including message boards, blogs, and a vehicle for electronic messaging. The use of assistive technology at EHS delivers effective and coordinated services to help all learners progress toward their 21st century learning expectations. (classroom observations, self-study, student shadowing, panel presentation, teachers, students, department leaders, central office personnel, school leadership, school support staff, Endicott survey)

School counseling services have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who deliver a written, developmental program that is explicitly articulated in the school curriculum documents. There are four counselors on staff, creating a ratio of 200:1 for the department. They collaborate with school psychologists, a part-time social worker, and a part-time grant funded substance abuse counselor. A school-to-career counselor provides additional services on a part-time basis. Counselors meet individually with students according to a structured and delineated grade-level schedule to provide personal, and academic counseling. They engage in group meetings throughout each student's four-year career, aligning programming with developmental and academic needs. Counselors deliver collaborative outreach and referral to community and area mental health agencies and social service providers as needed. The school counselors use ongoing assessments to measure student participation in counseling curriculum activity. The counseling program regularly administers surveys, and collects information from a variety of constituencies, including the school community. School counselors currently monitor student progress in the Personal Plan for Progress (PPP), but may need to explore its alignment with the portfolio as the Connecticut-mandated Student Success Plan (SSP) is implemented. The school counseling program consistently delivers a wide range of academic and social support services which allow students to pursue a course of action that meets their personal learning needs as well as the school's 21st century learning expectations. (self-study, student shadowing, facility tour, teacher interview, teachers, parents, central office personnel, school support staff, Endicott survey)

The school's health services do not have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide preventative health services and direct intervention services. This shortage is, in part, a result of the district's growing population of students with multiple disabilities requiring services to students through 21 years of age. The time-specific and involved nature of services cuts into the health services required for 21st century learning expectations. While the referral process and ongoing student health assessments are appropriate, staffing limitations constrain staff availability. Health personnel maintain visitation data indicating that the school nurse spends 60% of her time with students in her office and responding to emergencies, which limits her ability to tend to her significant administrative responsibilities. The health services facility has been impacted by an increase in other student services mandated by students with multiple disabilities. The nurse must also respond to the needs of drop-in visits regarding the management of 504 plans. The school nurse also performs instructional classroom and small group teaching duties at the site-based preschool program. (The nurse has additional duties as the District Nursing Supervisor.) The strain on the health professional does not allow for adequate for care for students at EHS. (self-study, facility tour, school board,

community members, department leaders, central office personnel, school leadership, school support staff, Endicott survey)

Library/media services are partially integrated into the EHS curriculum and instructional practices, but the school does not provide sufficient staff to sustain the necessary instructional partnerships, and develop an integrated library program to support all learners' progress toward their 21st learning expectations. The school librarian strives to embed the district's information literacy curriculum into the school curriculum. The library provides a comprehensive array of print books and databases in support of the school's curriculum. The librarian is responsive to students' interests and needs in order to support independent learning and readers' advisory. The facility is not available for students and teachers before and after school. During the school day, the school librarian simultaneously supervises three physical spaces (the library presentation room, the writing center, and the library itself). Many collateral duties interfere with her primary responsibility to integrate library media services into the curriculum and instructional practices. The library provides one of the few wireless access points in the building, which could, if the library were adequately staffed, provide as many as sixty students with computing power under the school's new Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy. The library's staffing limitations reduce the number and timeliness of services available to EHS learners. (classroom observations, self-study, student shadowing, facility tour, student work, teacher interview, teachers, students, central office personnel, school leadership, school support staff, Endicott survey)

Support services for identified students, including special education and Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), have an adequate number of certified/licensed personnel and support staff who collaborate with teachers, as needed, following a consultancy model. This model is a shift away from co-teaching, which was a transitional program designed to support the school's move from self-contained to inclusionary special education services. The consultancy model option, which is still in its infancy, is expected to provide special education support distributed across a larger population. Changes are being monitored in individual student achievement and more global patterns like significant increases or decreases in CAPT scores to assess the impact of these changes. Communication logs in SEMS Tracker provide extensive documentation of detailed exchanges between district, home, and classroom personnel. Ongoing assessment informs special education instructional planning. To support all learners' ability to attain the school's 21st century learning expectations, the special education department outsources services that it cannot provide internally. For example, a neuropsychologist was hired one day per week to meet learner needs. Outside evaluators are frequently hired upon request. Outreach work with external service agencies supports learners through the adult services transition. All students, including special education and Section 504 of the ADA, benefit from many student facilitated co-curricular programs, including job shadowing, peer tutoring (tutoring center, National Honor Society, community service), and Unified Sports that provide inclusive learning academic and co-curricular learning opportunities. The district does not provide sufficient staffing for the high school's English Language Learning (ELL) population. It employs one district-level coordinator who manages thirty-five K-12 students who are not equally distributed among five schools. The coordinator's 9-12 caseload, which is likely to grow as the elementary students move up through the grade levels, constrains the high school's ability to ensure that all ELL students achieve the school's 21st century learning expectations. Services for identified students, including special education and Section 504 students, adequately support students' ability to meet 21st century learning expectations, but staffing limitations in ELL limit opportunities for those students. (classroom observations, self-study, facility tour, teacher interview, teachers, students, central office personnel, school leadership, school support staff, Endicott survey)

**Commendations**

1. The student/parent handbook that delineates counseling services and timeline for service delivery

2. The Student Achievement Target Plan that supports SRBI

3. The PPP that supports the transition to implement state mandated SSP, and formalize portfolio review

4. The PAL program that supports at-risk learners at differentiated levels

5. The adoption of the FinalSite learning management system that improves school to home and school to school communication

6. The effectiveness of the school counseling and special education departments

7. The database that supports coordination between support services and instructional departments

8. The Naviance program that will facilitate communication between home and school

9. The implementation of the Personal Plan for Progress (PPP)

10. The resourcefulness of the school librarian in finding ways to deliver comprehensive services

11. The special education department that delivers a comprehensive array of support services

**Recommendations**

1. Ensure that the health services department, through adequate staffing, can provide both preventative health services and direct intervention services

2. Provide adequate library staffing that supports the EHS curriculum before, during and after school

3. Evaluate and report on the impact of the special education consultancy model

# 7 Community Resources for Learning

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

1.  The community and the district's governing body provide dependable funding for:
    - a wide range of school programs and services
    - sufficient professional and support staff
    - ongoing professional development and curriculum revision
    - a full range of technology support
    - sufficient equipment
    - sufficient instructional materials and supplies.

2.  The school develops, plans, and funds programs:
    - to ensure the maintenance and repair of the building and school plant
    - to properly maintain, catalogue, and replace equipment
    - to keep the school clean on a daily basis.

3.  The community funds and the school implements a long-range plan that addresses:
    - programs and services
    - enrollment changes and staffing needs
    - facility needs
    - technology
    - capital improvements.

4.  Faculty and building administrators are actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget.

5.  The school site and plant support the delivery of high quality school programs and services.

6.  The school maintains documentation that the physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.

7.  All professional staff actively engage parents and families as partners in each student's education and reach out specifically to those families who have been less connected with the school.

8.  The school develops productive parent, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support student learning.

**CONCLUSIONS**

      The community and the district's governing body provide dependable funding for a wide range of programs and services, ongoing professional development, and curriculum revision. There are concerns with regards to the funding of adequate professional and support staff. In addition, an adequate range of technology support and adequate equipment, instructional materials, and supplies are available. The program of studies is extensive and offers breadth as well as depth. Co-curricular activities are numerous, as are the services in place to help students. The cooperation among the Board of Finance, the Board of Education, and parents has improved communication of educational budgeting priorities and has resulted in the passage of the last three years' budgets on the first referendum. Budgets for the last three years have supported the school's programs and services. It is noted that teacher contractual concessions were implemented in FY10 in support of maintaining instructional staffing. Professional development budgets have increased an average of 15% over the last three budget cycles. Curriculum revision has seen a slight reduction over the past three years, with a reduction of 3.4% between FY09 and FY10, with no change in funding in FY11. While there is generally sufficient teaching staff, there are concerns about funding of professional and support staff in the areas of elective area teachers, curricular leadership, library, health services, and counseling. The expenditures for technology equipment, services and supplies show an increase of 27.5% and 25% in FY10 and FY11 respectively. The equipment budget experienced a decrease of 41% from $9,713 in FY09 to $6,000 in FY10. Staff notes that additional network support hours are needed to handle the volume of technical issues arising with the increased use of technology assets. Ellington High School (EHS) is the recipient of dependable funding for a wide range of programs and services, equipment, and instructional supplies required for the effective delivery of curriculum and the successful education of students. (self-study, teachers, students, staff, school board, parents, budget, administrators, Endicott survey)

      Custodial and maintenance services in the high school are efficiently scheduled, coordinated, budgeted, and supervised by the district business director. The school regularly replaces equipment used to maintain the building. The maintenance budget has been consistent and is sufficient to provide personnel, supplies, equipment, and repairs needed to maintain the facility within approved standards. An electronic system of submitting work orders and tracking the progress and completion of work requests is currently under development for the district. EHS is clean, and it is clearly evident that there is a high level of attention to detail concerning the cleanliness and preservation and maintenance of the physical complex. The level of custodial staffing is appropriate and effective for a school of this size, and the management of the school complex cleaning and maintenance is efficiently done. Consequently, the EHS physical plant is well maintained and provides a clean, safe, healthy environment conducive to the school's educational core values and beliefs. (self-study, facility tour, teachers, students, parents, observation, inspection and maintenance files)

      There are individual long-range plans written for enrollment changes and staffing needs, district facility needs, technology, and capital improvements, but there is no formal written plan related to anticipated changes in programs and services. The superintendent is carefully monitoring projected population increases over the next decade and has articulated a preliminary plan to address this issue across all levels of the district. It is anticipated that the enrollment increase at EHS could result in the renovation of interior spaces in the current building to accommodate special programs and electives. However, there is no written long-term plan to address these potential needs. Ellington's district written plans include short-term plans for district instructional goals based on the Connecticut Mastery Test and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, a three-year technology plan, and a five-year capital improvement plan. After collecting input from faculty, parents, students, standardized test

scores, and Connecticut state education initiatives and reports, the principal works with the superintendent on program changes, additional services, and staffing needs. A Long Range Facilities Master School plan developed by the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) identified a number of concerns regarding facilities and 21st century classroom needs, and that plan has remained at the discussion level with the board of education. Consequently, there is a need to develop a long-range plan for the high school facility to renovate educational programming spaces that are essential to support student learning. While the current facility serves most educational needs of the EHS community, the impact of an anticipated enrollment increase may strain the community's resources. (self-study, panel presentation, facility tour, teachers, school board, central office personnel, school support staff, Endicott survey)

Faculty and building administrators are actively involved in the development and implementation of the budget. According to the Endicott survey, 59.7% of staff feels they have input into the development of the budget. The budget process begins each fall when the principal gives curriculum assistants, the athletic director, and individual faculty of small departments their current budgets. Budgets are reviewed and changes discussed during department meetings, and individual department members are asked to present their budget needs with documentation to support increases or one-time equipment purchases. Formal departmental budget requests are then submitted to the principal. The principal meets with curriculum assistants and then district administrators to review and discuss large or unique requests for funds to meet specific requirements that may have arisen. This budget is then submitted to the superintendent of schools in November. The superintendent and all district school principals then present a proposed budget to the board of education in January; in turn, the board of education reviews and then presents a budget to the Town of Ellington's Board of Finance in April. Throughout this process, the board of finance provides detailed information on the impact of the town budget on tax rates to the community. Town residents vote on the budget in a May referendum. This referendum has passed on the first vote for the last three years. This is attributed, in part, to the efforts of the superintendent, the board of finance, and the board of education to communicate the education budget requirements to the town and keep the electorate informed as to the town's low level of educational spending. Ellington ranks 166 of 166 Connecticut towns in per pupil expenditures ($10,768 per student compared to the Connecticut state average of $12,805). As a result of the faculty and administrative input, the school budget does reflect the needs of the school. (self-study, teachers, school leadership, board of education, Endicott survey)

The school site and plant support the delivery of high quality school programs and services. A major renovation of the high school building was completed in 2005. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) review completed in 2009 found the facility to be in compliance with applicable regulations. NESDEC completed a study in 2008 that included growth projections for the next decade. The school offers sufficient classroom and laboratory space; library and auditorium; athletic facilities that include a gym, weight room, tennis courts, two football fields, a baseball field, a softball field, a cross-country course, an outdoor track and soccer field, and several multi-use fields. Science teachers did note a faint chemical odor in the storage room of the science department that raises concern among members of the department. In addition, concerns were raised regarding the adequacy of the gymnasium to accommodate the expected increase in student enrollment and the over-scheduling of athletic facilities for both town and school use. Computers throughout the building were replaced in 2010, and all software and technology assets are considered up-to-date. There are thirty interactive white boards installed in classrooms in the building, and most classrooms have installed projection systems. Available classroom space is currently at a utilization rate of 77%. Although the NESDEC study does not project enrollment to exceed building capacity through the 2017-18 academic year, the report did suggest the need to explore the expansion of the high school facility. The EHS building and grounds

are sufficiently maintained and upgraded in a manner that supports the programs and services required for student learning. (self-study, facility tour, teachers, parents, students)

The school maintains all documentation that the physical plant and facilities meet all applicable federal and state laws and are in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations. The documentation is located in the central administration building or on the equipment itself. This includes the storage of chemicals, lists of chemicals housed in the facility, and the maintenance of fire alarms and fire extinguishers. The ventilation, temperature control, and air quality are checked monthly. Following an extensive renovation in 2005, issues reported by OCR were resolved thoroughly and in a timely manner. By maintaining applicable documentation and remaining in compliance of federal and state laws regarding fire, health, and safety regulations, EHS is providing a physical plant and facility conducive to education. (self-study, facility, school support staff)

The professional staff has programs and methods to engage parents and families as partners in each student's education and to reach out to families who are less connected with the school. Parents are invited to 8th grade orientation, college planning night, financial aid workshops, open house, and mini parent-teacher conferences. All parents have direct access to faculty and staff through the district website, email, and individual teachers website pages. The district utilizes a telephone and email system to alert parents to delays, closings, and other district-wide issues. Parents receive midterm progress reports, quarterly report cards, as well as a bi-weekly newsletter from the principal. The school administration monitors students' attendance and three warning letters are sent home prior to a student losing credit in a course. Once a student has lost credit in a course, the student can appeal to have his or her credit restored; parent participation in the appeal process is mandatory. If phone calls or emails are not an effective means of communication for the parents, meetings are called, certified letters mailed, or home visits are scheduled. EHS administrators facilitate a parent advisory committee in which parents and administrators discuss student achievement, the school's core values and beliefs, the advisory program, topics related to teaching and learning, and ways to relay information to all parents. As a result, parents and families have multiple opportunities to become educational partners in support of student learning. (self-study, panel presentation, teachers, parents, school support staff, Endicott survey)

EHS develops productive parent, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support student learning, but the elimination of the school-to-career experience has had a negative impact on the level of interaction with the community. In addition to a bi-weekly newsletter sent by the principal, EHS maintains a website with calendar, event listings, clubs, teacher and department pages. Internships and partnerships with area businesses and professionals have been promoted, but due to lack of staffing to coordinate the program, internship opportunities have not been readily available in recent years. Student support services have taken over the coordination of the job shadow program, with roughly 4% of the overall student population participating. Juniors and seniors have the opportunity to earn college credit through the University of Connecticut's Early College Experience, the College Career Pathways Consortium of Northern Connecticut, and the High School Partnership Program. The added graduation requirement to earn a minimum of thirty community service hours has aided in enhancing the students' connection to their school and community. The current process of community partnerships will continue to support student learning. (self-study, panel presentation, students, parents, school support staff, Endicott survey)

**COMMENDATIONS**

1.  The efficient allocation of resources in an austere budget climate
2.  The conscientious maintenance of the physical plant and facilities, including regular inspection and compliance with laws and regulations
3.  The efforts of district administration to understand enrollment projections and their potential impact
4.  The communication and cooperation amongst the board of finance, the board of education, and parents in recent budgeting processes
5.  The clean and safe facility, including well maintained outside spaces, that allows the school community to function in a healthy environment
6.  The programs to engage parents as partners in their child's education
7.  The partnerships between the school and higher educational institutions
8.  The role of the community service requirement in promoting partnerships with the community


**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1.  Increase the level of technology support staff to address the volume of repairs and updates associated with the growth of technological assets
2.  Develop and implement a plan to increase the number and operating capacity of computer labs
3.  Address concerns related to the funding of professional and support staff in the areas of elective area teachers, curricular leadership, library, and health services
4.  Develop and implement a long-range plan for the high school facility and educational programming spaces to accommodate anticipated growth in enrollment
5.  Resolve concerns in the storage area of the science department
6.  Increase partnerships with area businesses by revitalizing a school-to-career program

## *FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES*

This comprehensive evaluation report reflects the findings of the school's self-study and those of the visiting committee. It provides a blueprint for the faculty, administration, and other officials to use to improve the quality of programs and services for the students in Ellington High School. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should be apprised by the building administration yearly of progress made addressing visiting committee recommendations.

Since it is in the best interest of the students that the citizens of the district become aware of the strengths and limitations of the school and suggested recommendations for improvement, the Commission requires that the evaluation report be made public in accordance with the Commission's Policy on Distribution, Use and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report.

A school's initial/continued accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing valid recommendations of the visiting committee and others identified by the Commission as it monitors the school's progress and changes which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle. To monitor the school's progress in the Follow-Up Program the Commission requires that the principal of Ellington High School submit routine Two- Year and Five-Year Progress Reports documenting the current status of all evaluation report recommendations, with particular detail provided for any recommendation which may have been rejected or those items on which no action has been taken. In addition, responses must be detailed on all recommendations highlighted by the Commission in its notification letters to the school. School officials are expected to have completed or be in the final stages of completion of all valid visiting committee recommendations by the time the Five-Year Progress Report is submitted. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards are not being met in a satisfactory manner or if additional information is needed on matters relating to evaluation report recommendations or substantive changes in the school.

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

The Commission urges school officials to establish a formal follow-up program at once to review and implement all findings of the self-study and valid recommendations identified in the evaluation report. An outline of the Follow-Up Program is available in the Commission's *Accreditation Handbook* which was given to the school at the onset of the self-study. Additional direction regarding suggested procedures and reporting requirements is provided at Follow-Up Seminars offered by Commission staff following the on-site visit.

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

# Ellington High School
## NEASC Accreditation Visit
## September 23-26, 2012


## Visiting Committee

Paul Daigle, Chair
Retired Superintendent
New England Association of School & Colleges
North Falmouth, MA 02556

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**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**

**Commission on Public Secondary Schools**

**SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY**

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

- elimination of fine arts, practical arts and student activities

- diminished upkeep and maintenance of facilities

- significantly decreased funding

- cuts in the level of administrative and supervisory staffing

- cuts in the number of teachers and/or guidance counselors

- grade level responsibilities of the principal

- cuts in the number of support staff

- decreases in student services

- cuts in the educational media staffing

- increases in student enrollment that cannot be accommodated

- takeover by the state

- inordinate user fees

- changes in the student population that warrant program or staffing modification(s) that cannot be accommodated, e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students or students with limited English proficiency

**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**

**Commission on Public Secondary Schools**

**List of Commendations and Recommendations**


## Commendations:

### Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations
1. The inclusive, thorough, and dynamic process for creating the Core Values and Beliefs which allowed revision based on faculty feedback
2. The prominently displayed Core Values and Beliefs documents throughout the school building, in publications, and on the website
3. The clear and consistently designed 21st century learning expectations and accompanying school-wide rubrics aligned to the Core Values and Beliefs
4. The positive school culture that reflects the Core Values and Beliefs
5. The revision of the Core Values and Beliefs and subsequent policy changes such as consolidation of leveled core classes

### Curriculum
1. The academic and elective programs that provide an opportunity for students to succeed and develop 21st century learning skills
2. The efforts of the faculty to deliver a rigorous taught curriculum that emphasizes depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem-solving
3. The facilities and resources that promote learning as well as the availability and integration of technology that prepares students to be competitive in the 21st century
4. The efforts of individual faculty members to make improvements to existing curriculum documents
5. The availability of adequate instructional materials, technology, equipment, supplies, and facilities to fully implement the curriculum
6. The awareness of the faculty that curriculum revision and alignment must be a priority in upcoming years

### Instruction
1. The teacher familiarity and continued efforts to align instructional practices with the school's Core Values and Beliefs and 21st century learning expectations
2. The collaboration time allotted to teachers through Professional Learning Groups to examine best instructional practices
3. The innovative use of some technology as an effective instructional tool
4. The use by some teachers of the analysis of student data from a variety of formative and summative assessments to improve and modify teacher instruction
5. The commitment of teachers in maintaining expertise in content areas and best instructional practices
6. The district and school commitment to professional development in content and related instructional practices

**Assessment of and for Student Learning**
1. The development and implementation of school-wide rubrics to assess student performance in achieving the 21st century learning expectations
2. The efforts by the staff collectively and individually to collect, disaggregate, and analyze data to respond to student inequities
3. The widespread use of rubrics to communicate performance expectations to students
4. The various and engaging types of formative and summative assessments utilized in classrooms
5. The use of formative assessment data to inform classroom instruction
6. The recent review of grading practices

**School Culture and Leadership**
1. The student and staff pride in the Ellington High School community
2. The supportive learning environment
3. The positive teacher-student relationships
4. The schedule that provides for formal collaboration time for most teachers
5. The consolidation of course levels one, two, and three to one academic course level
6. The board of education and superintendent who provide the principal with decision-making authority to lead the school
7. The formal advisory program
8. The heterogeneously-grouped world language course required of all students
9. The establishment of the Teacher Voice Committee

**School Resources for Learning**
1. The student/parent handbook that delineates counseling services and timeline for service delivery
2. The Student Achievement Target Plan that supports SRBI
3. The PPP that supports the transition to implement state mandated SSP, and formalize portfolio review
4. The PAL program that supports at-risk learners at differentiated levels
5. The adoption of the FinalSite learning management system that improves school to home and school to school communication
6. The effectiveness of the school counseling and special education departments
7. The database that supports coordination between support services and instructional departments
8. The Naviance program that will facilitate communication between home and school
9. The implementation of the Personal Plan for Progress (PPP)
10. The resourcefulness of the school librarian in finding ways to deliver comprehensive services
11. The special education department that delivers a comprehensive array of support services

**Community Resources for Learning**
1. The efficient allocation of resources in an austere budget climate
2. The conscientious maintenance of the physical plant and facilities, including regular inspection and compliance with laws and regulations
3. The efforts of district administration to understand enrollment projections and their potential impact
4. The communication and cooperation amongst the board of finance, the board of education, and parents in recent budgeting processes
5. The clean and safe facility, including well maintained outside spaces, that allows the school community to function in a healthy environment

6.      The programs to engage parents as partners in their child's education
7.      The partnerships between the school and higher educational institutions
8.      The role of the community service requirement in promoting partnerships with the community

## Recommendations:

### Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations
1.      Develop and implement a system for using the Core Values and Beliefs to drive decision-making related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment
2.      Continue to develop and implement a formal process for regularly reviewing Core Values and Beliefs and learning expectations

### Curriculum
1.      Review and revise the curricula to ensure that all students have guaranteed opportunities within and across the disciplines to practice and achieve each of the school's 21$^{st}$ century learning expectations
2.      Create and implement a written and unified curriculum format in all disciplines
3.      Initiate a formal curriculum review and revision process in order to align the written and taught curricula
4.      Create formal opportunities for staff members to interact within and across departments to discuss articulation of the curricula, including opportunities with teachers from the sending school
5.      Address the need for department-level curricular leadership to ensure the alignment between written and taught curricula
6.      Provide professional development and training in the areas of developing, evaluating and revising written curricula
7.      Assure that the curriculum work involves all teachers across all disciplines

### Instruction
1.      Redirect the focus of PLG time to discussion of instructional practices and strategies in response to assessment data
2.      Provide opportunity for and emphasis on the creation and implementation of cross-disciplinary connections
3.      Employ student self-assessment and reflection strategies on a school-wide basis to improve personalization of instruction
4.      Construct and implement professional development opportunities for the delivery of differentiated instructional strategies
5.      Analyze results of formative and summative assessments as a source of data to review, reflect on, and improve instruction

### Assessment of and for Student Learning
1.      Provide clear communication of standards to be assessed by school-wide rubrics on student report cards
2.      Ensure that PLG time is regularly used for meaningful, consistent collaboration to improve formative and summative assessment practices
3.      Develop and implement a process that ensures all staff explicitly communicate unit objectives and 21$^{st}$ century learning expectations prior to a unit of study

4.     Use data collected from standardized, formative, and common assessments to drive curricular change
5.     Reduce inconsistencies in assessment based on the recent review of grading practices

## School Culture and Leadership
1.     Improve communication strategies between administration and teachers before, during and after the inception of new initiatives
2.     Develop and implement a plan to increase the instructional leadership capacity beyond the current structure of curriculum assistants
3.     Expand heterogeneous core course offerings for all students
4.     Develop and implement a systematic and on-going professional development plan that clearly focuses on a limited number of high leverage improvement strategies to improve student learning and instruction
5.     Develop and implement a plan that ensures teachers have meaningful roles and responsibilities in the decision-making process
6.     Formulate a plan to ensure that the principal shares instructional leadership and ownership by redefining the role of PLGs in the school community

## School Resources for Learning
1.     Ensure that the health services department, through adequate staffing, can provide both preventative health services and direct intervention services
2.     Provide adequate library staffing that supports the EHS curriculum before, during and after school
3.     Ensure that ELL staffing is adequate to service the increased ELL population
4.     Evaluate and report on the impact of the special education consultancy model

## Community Resources for Learning
1.     Increase the level of technology support staff to address the volume of repairs and updates associated with the growth of technological assets
2.     Develop and implement a plan to increase the number and operating capacity of computer labs
**3.**     Address concerns related to the funding of professional and support staff in the areas of elective area teachers, curricular leadership, library, and health services
4.     Develop and implement a long-range plan for the high school facility and educational programming spaces to accommodate anticipated growth in enrollment
5.     Resolve concerns in the storage area of the science department
6.     Increase partnerships with area businesses by revitalizing a school-to-career program