**New England Association of
School and Colleges, Inc.**

Commission on Public Schools

Commission on Public Schools

Report of the Visiting Team for
North Stonington Public Schools

North Stonington, CT

10/22/2025 - 10/23/2025

Dr. Erin McGurk, Chair

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School and Community Summary

School and Community Summary

North Stonington Public Schools is located in the bucolic town of North Stonington, Connecticut. As of the 2020 census, North Stonington is home to 5,141 residents within a 54-square-mile area. The median household income is $91,932. Major local industries include: agriculture, local government, accommodations, and food services. Forty-nine percent of residents have a college degree.

North Stonington Public Schools has an enrollment of 726 students and a certified full-time staff of 96.1. Due to the small student population, one or two students typically make up several percentage points; portions of demographic data are redacted due to their identifying nature. The per-pupil expenditure is $20,659. The percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch is 20.5 percent. Ninety percent of students are white. Fourteen percent of students in the district are considered "chronically absent" by state definition (missing 10 percent of the total number of days enrolled that year). The average number of days teachers are absent due to personal or sick time is 7.4. The district consists of two schools: North Stonington Elementary School and Wheeler Middle School/High School.

There is a full-time director of special services. The district employs a board-certified behavioral analyst (BCBA), in addition to three registered behavioral technicians (RBTs) and twenty paraprofessionals. There is a school nurse in each building with one health aide who works in both buildings.

The district collaborates with LEARN to fulfill information technology (IT) needs. LEARN provides an IT director and coordinator in addition to one technician. These employees work both remotely and onsite. The district employs one full-time in-house IT technician. The district also has a part-time director of instruction and learning, responsible for curriculum, educator support, and professional development. There is a full-time director of facilities who oversees the custodial staff and collaborates with the Town of North Stonington on building repairs. The district employs a full-time superintendent. The central office is located across the street from the school buildings and can be accessed through an underground tunnel.

North Stonington Elementary School serves approximately 379 students in pre-k through grade six with a full-time certified staff of 42.3 and one principal. A lead teacher provides operational support, in addition to teaching full-time. Three program supervisors serve as content experts and provide coaching and support in special education, English, and math. Teachers in these positions lead their departments in addition to teaching full-time.

Wheeler Middle/Wheeler High School serves approximately 344 students in grades 7 through 12 with a full-time certified staff of 51.7, with one principal and one associate principal. A lead teacher provides operational support in addition to teaching full-time. Six program supervisors serve as content experts, providing department-based support in special education, math, science, English, social studies, and fine and applied arts. Teachers in these positions lead their departments in addition to teaching full-time. There is a full-time athletic director who oversees athletics at Wheeler. Wheeler High School also has co-op sports teams with surrounding towns. The district is presently accepting tuition students from two bordering towns. The district has developed relationships with Voluntown and Preston, as Wheeler is now a school of choice.

Wheeler High School has a four-year graduation rate of 98.2 percent. The college entrance rate is 84.4 percent. Students take advantage of several college and career readiness programs. Wheeler has three pathways: education, engineering, and business. Students who participate take rigorous courses and have the opportunity to intern with local businesses, or in our elementary school in their senior year. There is a work-study program that allows students to earn credit while gaining hands-on experience in the workplace. Wheeler High School partners with the Westerly Education Center and Electric Boat to provide students with vocational training opportunities. The school participates in a dual enrollment program with the New England Institute of Technology, where students work towards an associate's degree while attending Wheeler.

Core Values, Beliefs, and Vision of the Graduate

North Stonington Public Schools Core Values, Beliefs and Vision of the Graduate

Mission

Preparing all students to take their place as culturally and globally competent citizens.

Vision

As a Learning Center of Excellence, North Stonington Public Schools is committed to preparing literate, collaborative, critical thinkers and problem solvers, empowered to embrace and successfully pursue their passions and talents.

Vision of the Graduate

The North Stonington Schools Graduate is empowered through the development of:

Analysis

Collaboration

Communication

Literacy

Respect

Responsibility

Resilence

District Goals

Safe, valued, and sense of belonging-Embed practices and procedures throughout the schools and curriculum experiences that ensure all students, staff, and families feel safe, valued and have a sense of belonging

Innovative Instruction- Design, document and implement innovative instructional opportunities that empower each learner

Transparent and Efficient- Develop and follow efficient and transparent processes to ensure a smooth flow of operations and enable increased focus on learning

Wheeler Middle School/Wheeler High School Mission, Core Values, Beliefs and Vision of the Graduate

Mission

The Mission of Wheeler, in partnership with families and the community, is to provide students with the education that will best help them to live lives of accomplishment and satisfaction in a complex and changing world.

Core Values

We are committed to the belief that ALL children are capable and have a fundamental right to attain high levels of educational achievement so they can lead rewarding lives and demonstrate responsible citizenship.

We believe that in order to have the largest impact upon student learning and to provide opportunities for high-level achievement, it must start with the instructional core, specifically through:

- transforming the learning process through innovative instruction, to encourage life-long learning;
- implementing a complex and culturally- responsive curriculum;
- nurturing a sense of belonging in order to ensure that ALL students feel safe and valued; and
- assessing student work using our school-wide rubrics and using data to drive instruction across ALL grade levels and departments.

Vision of the Graduate

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

Analysis

Collaboration

Communication

Literacy

SOCIAL/CIVIC EXPECTATIONS

Respect

Responsibility

Resilience

North Stonington Elementary School Mission, Core Values, Beliefs and Vision of the Graduate

Mission

In collaboration with families and the community, NSES strives to foster an academically motivated environment that empowers all students to surpass their boundaries and achieve their utmost potential. Our mission is to cultivate a life-long passion for learning while nurturing the development of responsible, motivated and engaged individuals who actively contribute to society.

Core Values

We believe that ALL children deserve a strong educational foundation to help them grow, discover new ideas, and become kind, caring and responsible members of their community. To help every child succeed, we focus on:

- creating exciting, innovative and engaging lessons that encourage curiosity and a love of learning through innovative instruction;
- teaching a rich and inclusive curriculum that helps to foster the development of globally aware citizens;
- nurturing a sense of belonging in order to ensure that ALL students feel safe and valued;
- exploring a variety of ways to monitor learning and adjust our instruction to meet students' needs; and
- collaborating with families and community members to strengthen the home-school connection.

We believe that in order to make our North Stonington Elementary School the best place it can be, we must always look for ways to improve and grow together.

Vision of the Graduate

ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

Collaboration

Communication

Literacy

Problem-Solving

SOCIAL CIVIC EXPECTATIONS

Respect

Responsibility

Resilience

LEARNING CULTURE

Learning Culture

The school provides a safe learning culture that ensures equity and fosters shared values among learners, educators, families, and members of the school community. These shared values drive student learning as well as policy, practice, and decision-making while promoting a spirit of collaboration, shared ownership, pride, leadership, social responsibility, and civic engagement. The school community sets high standards for student learning, fosters a growth mindset, and facilitates continuous school improvement to realize the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.

1. The school community provides a safe, positive, respectful, and inclusive culture that demonstrates a commitment to all students feeling that they belong and are valued and accepted.
1a. The school community provides a safe environment.
2. The school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate drive student learning, professional practices, learning support, and the provision and allocation of learning resources.
2a. The school has a written document describing its core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.
3. The school community takes collective responsibility for the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional well-being of every student and can demonstrate how each student is known, valued, and connected to the school community.
4. The school community's professional culture demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement through the use of research, collaborative learning, innovation, and reflection.
5. The school's culture promotes intellectual risk taking and personal and professional growth.
6. The school has an inclusive definition of leadership and provides school leaders with the authority and responsibility to improve student learning.
7. The school culture fosters civic engagement and social and personal responsibility.

STUDENT LEARNING

The school has a vision of the graduate that includes the attainment of transferable skills, disciplinary/interdisciplinary knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary to prepare learners for their future. Students are assured consistent learning outcomes through a defined curricular experience and have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in a variety of creative ways. Students actively participate in authentic learning experiences while practicing the skills and habits of mind to regularly reflect upon, and take ownership of, their learning.

1. The school has a vision of the graduate that includes the attainment of transferable skills, knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary for future success and provides feedback to learners and their families on each learner's progress in achieving this vision.
2. There is a written curriculum in a consistent format for all courses in all departments that includes units of study with guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills and integrates the school's vision of the graduate.
2a. There is a written curriculum in a consistent format for all courses in all departments.
3. Curriculum ensures that learners demonstrate a depth of understanding over a breadth of knowledge.
4. Instructional practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student.
5. Students are active learners who have opportunities to lead their own learning.
6. Learners regularly engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills.
7. Learners demonstrate their learning through a variety of assessment strategies that inform classroom instruction and curriculum.
8. Learners have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning, receive corrective feedback, and use this feedback in meaningful ways to support their learning.
9. Learners use technology across all curricular areas to support, enhance, and demonstrate their learning.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

Professional Practices

The school maintains and implements a school improvement/growth plan, organizational practices, and productive community relationships to meet and support student learning needs. Educators engage in ongoing reflection, collaboration, and professional development to improve their practice and examine evidence of student learning and well-being to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, programs, and services.

1. The school engages all stakeholders in the development and implementation of a school improvement/growth plan, which reflects the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.
1a. The school has a current school improvement/growth plan.
2. Educators engage in ongoing reflection, formal and informal collaboration, and professional development to improve student learning and well-being.
3. Educators examine evidence of student learning and well-being to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, and programs and services.
4. Collaborative structures and processes support coordination and implementation of curriculum.
5. School-wide organizational practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student.
6. Educators develop productive student, family, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support learning.

LEARNING SUPPORT

Learning Support

The school has timely, directed, and coordinated interventions for all students. The school provides targeted supports to meet each student's individual needs, including counseling services, health services, library/information services, and other appropriate support services to assist each student in meeting the school's vision of the graduate.

1. All students receive appropriate intervention strategies to support their academic, social, and emotional success.
1a. The school has intervention strategies designed to support students.
2. All students receive counseling services that meet their personal, social, emotional, academic, career, and college counseling needs from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.
3. All students receive health services that ensure their physical and emotional well-being from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.
4. All students receive library/information services that support their learning from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.
5. Identified English Language Learners and students with special needs and 504 plans receive appropriate programs and services that support their learning from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning Resources

The school has adequate and appropriate time, funding, and facilities to support the realization of its core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate. The school and school community provide time, funding, and facilities for student learning and support; teacher collaboration and professional growth; and full implementation of curricular and co-curricular programs in the school. The school has appropriate plans, protocols, and infrastructure in place to ensure consistent delivery of its curriculum, programs, and services.

1. The community and district provide school buildings and facilities that support the delivery of high-quality curriculum, programs, and services.
1a. The community and district provide school buildings and facilities that support the delivery of curriculum, programs, and services.
2. The school/district provides time and financial resources to enable researched-based instruction, professional growth, and the development, implementation, and improvement of school programs and services.
3. The community and the district's governing body provide adequate and dependable funding to fully implement the curriculum, including co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities.
4. The school/district has short-term and long-term plans to address the capital and maintenance needs of its building and facilities.
5. The school has infrastructure and protocols in place to ensure effective responses in crisis situations.

Introduction

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 three Commissions: the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS); the Commission on Public Schools (CPS), which is composed of the Committee on Public Elementary, Middle, and High Schools (CPEMHS), and the Committee on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI); and the Commission on International Education (CIE).

As the responsible agency for matters of the evaluation and accreditation of public school member institutions, CPS requires visiting teams to assess the degree to which schools align with the qualitative Standards for Accreditation. The Standards are *Learning Culture, Student Learning, Professional Practices, Learning Support, and Learning Resources.*

The accreditation program for public schools involves a five-step process: the self-reflection conducted by stakeholders at the school; the Collaborative Conference visit, conducted by a team of peer educators and NEASC representatives; the school's development and implementation of a growth/improvement plan; the Decennial Accreditation visit conducted by a team of peer educators and NEASC representatives; and the follow-up program carried out by the school to implement the findings of its own self-reflection, the recommendations of the visiting team, and those identified by the Committee in the follow-up process. Continued accreditation requires that the school participate in the accreditation process over the ten-year cycle and that it show continued progress addressing identified needs.

Preparation for the Accreditation Visit - The School Self-Reflection

Accreditation coordinators and a steering committee composed of the professional staff were appointed to supervise the school's self-reflection and Accreditation process. A steering committee, including the principal, supervised all aspects of the Accreditation process. The steering committee organized an appropriate committee or committees to determine the quality of all programs, activities, and facilities available for young people by completing the school self-reflection.

Public schools evaluated by the Commission on Public Schools must complete appropriate materials to assess their alignment with the Standards for Accreditation and the quality of their educational offerings in light of the school's core values, beliefs, vision of the graduate, and unique student population. The school used questionnaires developed by the Commission on Public Schools 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-reflection.

In addition, the professional staff was required to read and vote on Part 2 of the self-reflection to ensure that all voices were heard related to the alignment of the school to the Standards for Accreditation. All professional staff members were expected to participate in the self-reflection process either by participating on a committee or by participating in discussion and evidence gathering to support the school's alignment to the Standards.

The Process Used by the Visiting Team

A visiting team of nine members was assigned by the Commission on Public Schools to conduct a Collaborative Conference visit to North Stonington Public Schools in North Stonington, Connecticut. The visiting team members spent two days conducting a visit; reviewed the self-reflection documents, which had been prepared for their examination; met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents;

and observed classes to determine the degree to which the school aligns with the Commission on Public Schools' Standards for Accreditation. The team also reviewed the proposed priority areas for the school's growth plan to be developed as part of the Accreditation process.

Each conclusion in the report was agreed to by visiting team consensus. Sources of evidence for each conclusion drawn by the visiting team are included within each section of the report. The report includes commendations and recommendations that, in the visiting team's judgment, will be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning and implement its plan for growth and improvement.

This report of the findings of the visiting team will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Schools, which will make a decision on the Accreditation of the school.

Foundational Element Ratings

Foundational Element Ratings

Foundational Elements	School's Rating	Visitors' Rating
1.1a - Learning Culture	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
1.2a - Learning Culture	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
2.2a - Student Learning	Does Not Meet the Standard	Does Not Meet the Standard
3.1a - Professional Practices	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
3.6a - Professional Practices	N/A	N/A
4.1a - Learning Support	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
5.1a - Learning Resources	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
5.5a - Learning Resources	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 1.1a - Learning Culture

Narrative

The district consistently provides a socially and emotionally safe environment for students and adults. The district takes a proactive approach to build and maintain a warm and respectful environment. For the past four years, the district improvement plan has aimed to ensure that all students and staff feel safe and valued, and that they feel a sense of belonging. This emphasis is supported by daily routines, such as morning meetings, and special events, such as a district-wide wellness day that focuses on social-emotional health and all types of wellness. Advisory meetings at Wheeler Middle School/High School provide opportunities for students to feel connected to their peers and teachers. School counselors, a school psychologist, and a school social worker provide individual support and whole-class lessons that promote social and emotional safety.

The district creates policies and protocols that define and support respectful treatment of all members of the school community. Students are often recognized for kindness and for behaviors aligned with the civic and social expectations of respect, responsibility, and resilience. Parents take pride in believing that their children are learning to be "good people" through the district's emphasis on these core values. Both schools have climate committees that meet regularly, conduct climate surveys each year to gather information from students, staff, and families, and use the survey results to drive decision-making. The district has provided both professional development opportunities and mandatory training for all staff on culturally responsive teaching, trauma-informed practices, and conflict resolution. As a result of significant efforts to promote a safe, positive environment, students and faculty across the district benefit from a warm, respectful, and inclusive learning culture.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 1.2a - Learning Culture

Narrative

The district has a written document describing its core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate. The district has a clearly defined vision of the graduate with academic, civic, and social expectations that include the attainment of transferable skills, knowledge, understandings, and dispositions necessary for future success. At both schools, civic and social expectations are widely displayed and consistently referenced by staff and students alike. Respect, responsibility, and resilience are cornerstones of the district's culture and are prominently displayed within and outside the buildings. All members of the community, including students and parents, emphasized the importance of these characteristics and believe they represent important values in the community. The academic expectations vary slightly across the two schools. Both schools address literacy, collaboration, and communication. Wheeler Middle School/High School addresses the competency of analysis, while North Stonington Elementary School addresses the competency of problem-solving. At Wheeler Middle School/High School, rubrics for the competencies are commonly used throughout the school, with some adaptations to the rubric language within specific departments. Middle school student-led conferences provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their vision of the graduate-related work, and the vision's competencies are deeply embedded in capstone experiences. As the elementary school continues to expand the use of the competencies by more broadly incorporating them into instruction and assessment, the unified approach across the two schools will strengthen the district's ability to ensure that every student has the opportunity to learn, practice, and receive feedback on their progress in achieving these competencies.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 2.2a - Student Learning

Narrative

The district does not yet have written curriculum documents for all courses that include a scope and sequence or curriculum map with units of study that specify expected course outcomes for each student, guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills, and assessments aligned with those outcomes. Considerable work has been done in the past two years to update and complete written curriculum documents at both schools. A curriculum template has been created that includes units of study with guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills; instructional strategies; and assessment practices. There is a district-wide curriculum development cycle and template. While there is much curriculum work to be done, the recently established director of instruction and learning is a part-time position. The director of instruction and learning reviews every document, meets with writers in process, and uploads completed guides to the district curriculum website. The district has made a major shift to create documents in Google Docs to make them more flexible and allow for ongoing adjustments and revisions. Time for vertical alignment and curriculum articulation is limited. Currently, North Stonington Elementary School does not have finalized curriculum documents. Teachers have frameworks from their adopted reading and mathematics programs, and scope and sequence documents provide structure throughout the school year. When the curriculum for all courses across grade levels is articulated in written documents, the district will benefit from greater consistency across sections, and learners will be assured the opportunity to participate in guaranteed learning experiences.

Rating
Does Not Meet the Standard

Foundational Element 3.1a - Professional Practices

Narrative

The district's schools have current school improvement/growth plans that include school-specific goals linked to district goals. The district goals/areas of focus are: 1. safe, valued, and sense of belonging, 2. innovative instruction, and 3. transparent and efficient processes. Both school improvement plans are developed in a consistent format and include sections for action steps and specific evidence demonstrating success. Improvement plans are linked to the teacher evaluation system, which has led to increased discussion of district goals and improved consistency across the district.

The work of the school improvement teams is informed by diverse perspectives, as teachers, teacher leaders, students, and parents meet to review the plan and solicit feedback. During the year, the school improvement teams provide reports on the completion of action steps. The plans inform decision-making in schools and are used to allocate resources, guide priorities, and shape instruction. Program supervisors, building administrators, and the director of instruction and learning meet regularly to evaluate instructional and operational processes.

Professional development often supports school improvement goals. For example, across the district, teachers have received training on restorative practices, which directly support the schools' goals. As a result of the coherent approach to district and school improvement plans, there is shared understanding and investment in identified priorities.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 3.6a - Professional Practices

Narrative

N/A

Foundational Element 4.1a - Learning Support

Narrative

The district consistently provides a comprehensive range of academic, social, emotional, and behavioral supports for students. Both schools have a coordinated multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). The schools use benchmark assessments and diagnostic tools to identify student needs and provide timely intervention. Many classroom teachers implement Tier 1 supports and collaborate with specialists and data teams to determine when Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are needed. The elementary school has reading and math interventionists and also schedules a daily "What I Need" (WIN) block to provide targeted supports. Wheeler Middle School/High School schedules flex blocks, in which students can receive extra help or make up work, as well as academic support classes.

Social, emotional, and behavioral supports are also widely available across the district. Students have access to school counselors, psychologists, a social worker, and a BCBA. Each school uses a referral process and tiered interventions through student assistance teams (SATs) or student concerns teams (SCTs). Attendance committees monitor data monthly and implement intervention plans for students with chronic absenteeism or tardiness. The district also conducts outreach to families in need by connecting them with services such as food assistance, clothing, counseling, and community partnerships. Due to the district's comprehensive range of supports, students routinely receive appropriate intervention strategies to support their academic, social, behavioral, and emotional success.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 5.1a - Learning Resources

Narrative

The district and community provide school buildings that support curriculum, programs, and services. There are an adequate number of classrooms as well as specialized areas, such as gymnasiums, stages, and cafeterias, to serve all students. Collaborative spaces are available and used regularly. Students, staff members, and the community benefit from two relatively modern facilities that were constructed or recently renovated, meeting all applicable federal, state, and local laws. The Wheeler Middle/High School construction project was completed in 2018, relocating the school from across the street and unifying the campus with North Stonington Elementary School. The elementary school underwent a full renovation, completed in 2019. The buildings and grounds are well-maintained, modern, appropriately furnished, clean, and welcoming.

However, the district's IT infrastructure needs to be supported, improved, and modernized. The district suffered a substantial malicious cyber attack only four weeks before the Collaborative Conference visit. With the whole IT network compromised, myriad functions impacting instruction, safety, communications, and business operations were taken offline. School and district leaders are aware of these needs, and the needs have been communicated to the board of education and municipal leaders. Aside from the outage caused by the recent attack, the impacted systems serve students, staff, and the community well. Because of district and community efforts to provide school buildings that support curriculum, programs, and services, students and educators benefit from facilities conducive to teaching and learning.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 5.5a - Learning Resources

Narrative

The district provides a physically safe environment for students and adults. Policies, processes, and protocols to ensure safety are in place. All exterior building doors are locked at all times; visitors must be buzzed in and their state-issued identification scanned by the Raptor system. Staff enter buildings using their identification badges, and students enter only through a monitored entrance during designated arrival times. Both buildings have exterior and interior entrance doors, with a vestibule in between where office staff can check identification. Security cameras cover the inside and entry points of each building, with footage from the middle/high school stored in the cloud.

The newly renovated school buildings meet modern safety construction standards, including classroom door locksets. An electronic pass system is used at the middle/high school to monitor student movement throughout the building. Emergency drills, such as fire and lockdown drills, are conducted each month.Schools regularly revise and review safety procedures and engage in scenario planning and tabletop exercises to prepare for any possible emergencies. Because the district has created protocols and invested in security infrastructure, all members of the school community can work and learn in a physically safe environment.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Standard 1 - Learning Culture

Principle 1.1 - The school community provides a safe, positive, respectful, and inclusive culture that demonstrates a commitment to all students feeling that they belong and are valued and accepted.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The students feel known and cared for by faculty members and administrators, emphasizing the importance of these relationships in their educational experience.
- The school and district create policies and protocols that define and support respectful treatment of all members of the school community, which are published in school handbooks.
- Wheeler Middle School/High School and North Stonington Elementary School align their school handbooks, school improvement plans, and professional development work each year, based on the foundational belief that all students should feel safe and secure in any of the schools' buildings.
- A mental health team at each school, made up of school counselors, psychiatrists, and social workers, meets monthly with students to discuss social-emotional skills and habits; students are also welcome to meet with them on an as-needed, flexible basis.
- Both schools have dedicated time in their schedules to foster connections between students and between staff and students.
    - At Wheeler, an advisory program for all students, grades 7 through 12, is designed to ensure that each student has a trusted adult, and it is regularly evaluated by stakeholders.
    - At North Stonington Elementary, the school uses both morning meeting and town meeting structures to build community.
- The core values of respect, responsibility, and resilience are consistently visible in both schools.
- At Wheeler, mental and emotional health is supported through a Freshman 101 course that teaches students about available resources and how to manage stress.
- As permitted by Connecticut State Statute, Wheeler allows students to take up to 2 mental health days per year without affecting their attendance record.
    - Counselors check in with students who have requested a mental health day immediately following their return.
- Wheeler has an Athletic Leadership Council that works with students to learn leadership styles that work for various teams.
- The student government plans school events that foster a sense of belonging.
- The school emphasizes the understanding of and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
    - At Wheeler, this is evident in the curriculum materials.
    - At North Stonington Elementary, this is seen through morning announcements and bulletin boards displaying diverse people/groups.
- Highly engaged parents, student projects, and volunteerism help build shared ownership of the school community, fostering a sense of belonging.

Principle 1.2 - The school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate drive student learning, professional practices, learning supports, and the provision and allocation of learning resources.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The district's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate purposely drive student learning, professional practices, learning supports, and the provision and allocation of learning resources.
- The staff regularly reviews and renews their commitment to the school's mission and core values each year.
- The school community deliberately ensures that the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate are known and understood by all stakeholders through ongoing communication, prominent visuals inside and outside of the school buildings, assemblies, websites, newsletters, core values song, spirit week, and advisory activities.
- Alignment of school improvement goals with core values, beliefs about learning, and the vision of the graduate helps ensure that professional practices and resource allocation reflect critical district priorities.
- Wheeler regularly ensures the core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate are actively reflected in the student learning and school culture through the development of multiple pathways to success, department assessments, senior capstone projects, advisory, mentorship programs, and community events.
- North Stonington Elementary School focuses town meetings on the core values of respect, responsibility, and resilience.
  - Second Step lessons taught by classroom teachers, the school counselor, and the school psychologist focus on social-emotional learning for all elementary students.
- In grades 5 through 8, students participate in student-led conferences, which support younger learners in reflecting on their growth in the academic and social/civic expectations.

Principle 1.3 - The school community takes collective responsibility for the wellbeing of every student and can demonstrate how each student is known, valued, and connected to the school community.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The schools proactively identify staff members who have a trusting relationship with individual students and seek to make connections so that every student is personally connected to a caring adult.
- The small size of the schools facilitates personalization and the provision of effective support and services.
- Both schools have administrative offices with open-door policies so students can access an administrator as needed.
- At Wheeler, the advisory program is individualized to meet students' needs, and all Wheeler courses measure students' growth through a school-wide social/civic rubric.
- Wheeler conducts bi-monthly student concerns and attendance meetings with administrators, teachers, school counselors, and support staff to better support students who are struggling academically.
- Administrators at Wheeler also hold marking period check-ins with each grade level.
- At the elementary school, town meetings are held throughout the year, focusing on the three social civic expectations: respect, responsibility, and resilience.
- The elementary school has field days, talent shows, and programs like Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) that foster community connections.
- At Wheeler, seniors participate in a "give back" program which benefits the school and local community.
- At Wheeler, students have multiple opportunities to take AP/ECE coursework, and the Reaching Independence through Supported Education (RISE) program allows for internships.
- Wheeler hosts academic support classes at every high school level, as well as a flex period tailored to support a variety of students' needs.
- Senior students participate in a capstone project that includes 60 hours of work experience, journals

reflecting on the experience, a research paper, and a website presented to the school community.
- Wheeler provides modified capstone experiences for some students who may benefit from multiple work experiences instead of just one.
- Faculty members' involvement as club advisors and coaches underscores their commitment to being influential figures in students' lives, both in and out of the classroom.

Principle 1.4 - The professional staff commits to continuous improvement through research, collaborative learning, innovation, and reflection.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The school community embraces a growth mindset as an ongoing process through visual displays in both buildings.
- The Wheeler school regularly asks students to reflect on assessments and teacher feedback as part of the growth mindset process through department performance tasks.
- A growth mindset is supported by the practices of many educators who encourage reflection on and revision of daily work.
- Seniors at Wheeler frequently reflect on their mentors' feedback through experiential hours, research, and website development for capstone projects.
- The school community frequently creates opportunities to build self-awareness and resilience through advisory activities, student-led conferences, shared goal-setting, and community events.
- Educators across the district are committed to using research-based instruction.
- A recent focus at the elementary school has been on implementing strategies aligned with the science of reading.
- The schools employ evidence-based interventions through their MTSS model.
- The schools use effective models for data review, with structures such as data team meetings, professional learning communities, and department- and grade-level meetings providing avenues for collaborative learning and reflection on student performance.

Principle 1.5 - The school's culture promotes intellectual risktaking and personal and professional growth for educators and learners.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The schools consistently promote a growth mindset that acknowledges mistakes as part of the learning process for everyone.
- Posters and displays normalize students persevering to master new skills, with the phrase "The Power of Yet" illustrating the core value of resilience.
- Students at Wheeler are encouraged to pursue new learning experiences through the senior capstone project, which allows them to create a project in an area of personal interest.
- Pathways internships in education, business, and engineering provide opportunities to learn beyond the school walls.
- Elementary students have multiple opportunities to stretch themselves as learners, including participation in Invention Convention, STEAM night, math night, and the Electric Boat program.
- Educators routinely support innovation and respond to student interests by developing new electives, such as ukulele, music theory, coding, and manufacturing.
- Professional growth for educators is supported at every level of experience, from mentoring for new

teachers to leadership opportunities, such as building lead and program supervisor positions.
- The district provides opportunities for administrative aspirants to complete school leadership internships.
- The director of instruction and learning further supports educators through coaching, providing professional learning offerings, and providing support for instructional improvements across the district.
- The district actively promotes the growth of paraprofessionals through tuition reimbursement, which has helped several paraprofessionals earn teaching credentials.
- Social-emotional instruction provides proactive lessons on strategies for emotional regulation and perseverance, and educators routinely work with families to support independence and navigate challenges through self-advocacy and communication.

Principle 1.6 - The school has an inclusive leadership model reflecting the school community.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- North Stonington School District prioritizes an inclusive leadership model that reflects the values and voices of the entire school community.
- Wheeler and North Stonington Elementary operate with leadership teams including teachers, specialists, and support staff who contribute to decision-making in areas such as curriculum planning, professional learning, and student support.
- School improvement teams share leadership to ensure a wide range of perspectives is included, especially those of staff who work directly with students every day.
- The schools host parent forums and listening sessions and focus on inclusivity to ensure that voices from historically marginalized communities are elevated.
- The superintendent and school leaders are notably visible at school events, and parents value the accessibility of all administrators to answer questions and address concerns.

Principle 1.7 - The school culture fosters civic and community engagement.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The school community frequently encourages learning experiences that connect to making an impact on the community through elementary-middle/high school collaborations, such as junior academic chemistry students teaching kindergarten students, junior science students teaching sixth-grade students about caves, and senior students teaching physics to eighth-grade students.
- Wheeler Middle School/High School explicitly encourages social awareness and understanding through the diversity council, which was established to meet the needs of the larger group.
- Wheeler frequently encourages social awareness and understanding of local, national, and global perspectives through exchange student programs, in which students from China, Spain, and Zambia attend school in the district.
- Wheeler consistently encourages discussion of social awareness and understanding of differing perspectives through advisory activities and lessons relating to academic and social concerns.
- The Wheeler peer mentoring system, in which students in grades 9 through 12 sign up to be peer mentors for students in grades 6 through 8, provides many students with opportunities to develop leadership skills and a sense of connection across the district.

- Both schools frequently implement learning experiences designed to make an impact on the community beyond the school campus through Wellness Day, Acts of Kindness fundraiser, Give Back Club, Veterans Breakfast, Pajama Day to raise funds for Connecticut Children's Hospital, Giving Closet, open mic nights, "Walk Your Can a Mile", and community outreach for district events.
- The school community prepares students for learning experiences that will impact their future by inviting the junior and sophomore classes to senior capstone presentations.

Future Areas of Growth In this Standard include:
- Proactively arrange for experiences that highlight the diversity of the world beyond North Stonington Public Schools
- Increase opportunities for professional learning related to new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, that can serve as tools for educators and learners

Sources of Evidence
- central office personnel
- community members
- department leaders
- parents
- school leadership
- self-reflection
- students
- teachers

Standard 2 - Student Learning

Principle 2.1 - The school's vision of the graduate is defined by measurable criteria and learners receive feedback on their progress toward proficiency.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The district's vision of the graduate is defined by measurable criteria, and learners at Wheeler receive feedback on their progress toward proficiency.
- The district's vision of the graduate emphasizes the development of transferable skills, knowledge, understandings, and dispositions for future success.
- Wheeler consistently integrates opportunities for students to practice the skills aligned with the vision of the graduate and to receive feedback on their progress throughout the curriculum and through capstone projects.
- Students in grades five through eight participate in student-led conferences, in which they reflect on some aspects of the vision of the graduate and the core values.

Principle 2.2 - There is a written curriculum in a consistent format for all courses in all departments that includes units of study with guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills and integrates the school's vision of the graduate.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Many courses have written curriculum documents that include units of study with guiding and essential questions, concepts, instructional strategies, and assessments.
- Written curriculum documents are completed for some departments at Wheeler and are a work in progress at the elementary school.
- The district is working to embed opportunities within the written curriculum for all students to see diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences represented in the learning materials and content through field trips, diverse texts, and opportunities to evaluate multiple perspectives across different content areas.
- The written curriculum template at Wheeler uniformly aligns with the school's vision of the graduate, listing the four academic expectations and three social and civic expectations.

Principle 2.3 - The written curriculum emphasizes deep understanding, through aspects such as interdisciplinary learning, project-based learning, and authentic learning experiences.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The written curriculum in some areas emphasizes deep understanding through interdisciplinary learning, project-based learning, and authentic learning experiences.

- The high school's written curriculum embeds the skills and competencies necessary to attain the school's vision of the graduate in some completed units.
- The unit template includes a designated section that identifies the specific competencies developed within each unit, demonstrating intentional alignment between curriculum design and the vision of the graduate.

Principle 2.4 - Instructional practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Teachers consistently demonstrate a commitment to meeting each student's diverse learning needs through various instructional practices such as using IXL to target skills individually, modifying classroom and capstone projects based on student needs, and giving students choices in research topics.
- Teachers across the district use formative, benchmark, and diagnostic assessment tools to identify students' specific learning needs and guide instruction.
- The school systematically plans tiered intervention strategies that meet the needs of each learner through ongoing, six- to eight-week cyclical reviews of formative data and the MTSS process.
- Each school consistently provides dedicated time within the schedule (WIN, flex, and advisory) for students to work on individual skill development, ensuring personalized growth and support aligned with each learner's needs.
- The small class sizes and the presence of paraprofessionals in some settings enhance schools' ability to support each student's learning needs.

Principle 2.5 - Students are active learners who have opportunities to lead their learning.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Learners are often involved in setting goals and reflecting on their progress, as evidenced by participation in student-led conferences for grades five through eight, completing rubrics with justification of their progress, and reflecting on teacher feedback.
- High school students can choose from a traditional pathway or one of three career-focused pathways (business, engineering, or education), tailoring their studies to a specific field and gaining practical experience through internships or hands-on learning.
- Learners are frequently involved in learning opportunities that require the application of knowledge and skills to authentic tasks, such as performance tasks in mathematics, coding projects focused on digital citizenship, and teaching younger students about different science phenomena in real-world contexts.

Principle 2.6 - Learners regularly engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Learners engage in investigation and examination through activities such as kindergarten students practicing vocabulary words to describe real-world weather observations and third-grade students investigating multiplication problems, sharing reasoning, and analyzing errors collectively.

- Learning experiences are structured to help students develop and exercise thinking skills and learning dispositions, fostering independence and depth of understanding, as demonstrated when upper elementary students conduct experiments that result in physical or chemical changes, requiring them to make inferences and apply scientific reasoning and critical thinking.
- Each middle school science unit begins with activities that activate prior knowledge, continues through exploration and investigation through hands-on experiences, and then engages with new content learning.
- High school science students use the claim-evidence-reasoning (CER) framework, in which they make claims and support them with evidence from their observations, fostering analytical thinking and scientific inquiry.

Principle 2.7 - Learners experience a wide range of assessment practices to support and improve learning.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Learners experience a wide range of assessment practices designed to support and improve learning, including reviewing for vocabulary quizzes in upper-level ELA using Blookit to reinforce comprehension and retention, and completing exit tickets in high school mathematics classes to provide immediate feedback and guide subsequent instruction.
- Educators across the district utilize a variety of assessment strategies, including formative and summative assessments, exit tickets, common benchmark assessments, final exams, and performance tasks to monitor student growth throughout the year and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students
- Educators frequently communicate learning objectives and rubrics, providing students with guidelines and expectations before assessments and projects.
- Learners in upper elementary and middle school develop and present a digital slideshow that reflects their learning, sharing their work with families, student mentors, and staff during student-led conferences.

Principle 2.8 - Learners have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning, receive corrective feedback, and use this feedback in meaningful ways to support their learning.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Learners are provided with multiple and varied opportunities over time to demonstrate their learning.
  - Students take traditional tests and quizzes, design presentations, complete research projects, create art, make posters, and participate in role-play situations.
- In grades 9-12, students complete midyear and final assessments aligned with the vision of the graduate.
- Learners receive consistent, systematic, specific, and timely corrective feedback.
  - In a lesson on phonemic awareness, the teacher models correct responses and provides frequent verbal feedback.
  - Teachers regularly use rubrics with targeted feedback in addition to rubric ratings.
- Learners are provided with opportunities and the time necessary to revise and improve their work.
  - In writing workshops, teachers provide feedback about each step of the writing process, as students create outlines and rough drafts.
  - Teachers in math classes use Desmos software to provide immediate feedback on student responses.
- Learners receive teacher and peer feedback, along with self-reflection, to guide next steps in learning.
  - At Wheeler, schoolwide rubrics include prompts for student reflection.

- In grades five through eight, in preparation for student-led conferences, students complete reflections on work samples and reflect on what they need or how their families can support their learning.

Principle 2.9 - Learners use technology across all curricular areas to support, enhance, and demonstrate their learning.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Learners consistently use technology, including 1:1 devices and learning platforms such as the Google Suite, ensuring that all students have access to digital learning opportunities.
- Learners across the schools use digital programs such as Starfall, Nearpod, Desmos, Khan Academy, IXL, Gimkit, Edpuzzle, and CommonLit to support, document, and supplement their learning.
- In some classes, learners use industry-grade software, such as SolidWorks and Adobe products, to complete projects.
- Learners regularly use technology to conduct online research for classroom-based projects.
- All seniors use technology to share work with an audience beyond the school community during their capstone projects.
- Learners have the opportunity to collaborate using technology, such as contributing to a Padlet in art class or collaborating on shared presentations in a health class.

Future Areas of Growth In this Standard include:

Ensure that the school's vision of the graduate is integrated into all curriculum documents and that every unit across all grade levels explicitly embeds the skills and competencies aligned with the vision, supporting a cohesive and consistent educational framework

Promote the sharing of best practices and successful examples of technology and AI integration among teachers to facilitate continuous improvement

Explore additional methods for involving students in the assessment and tracking of their progress and growth toward the achievement of the vision of the graduate, promoting self-directed learning

Ensure all learners consistently engage in rigorous learning by embedding discipline-specific higher order thinking tasks and transferable skills in all units, promoting regular analysis, synthesis, and creative problem-solving

Broaden the use of project-based and authentic learning experiences across the curriculum to allow students more frequent and meaningful application of knowledge and skills

Sources of Evidence
- central office personnel
- classroom observations
- department leaders
- parents
- school leadership
- self-reflection
- student work
- students

- teachers

Standard 3 - Professional Practices

Principle 3.1 - The school engages all stakeholders in the development and implementation of a school growth/improvement plan, which reflects the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of the graduate.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Each school regularly updates and implements a school improvement plan that is directly tied to the three district goals and the vision of the graduate.
- Each school improvement plan outlines specific goals and evidence of success.
  - At Wheeler Middle School/High School, this has led to initiatives such as the advisory program, expansion of the peer mentor program, and student capstone projects across three pathways that prepare students for college, careers, and gainful employment.
  - At North Stonington Elementary School, the adoption of the Bridges Math and HMH Into Reading curricula promotes equity and access through high quality, research-based instruction that differentiates learning and supports all students' academic success.
- Each school improvement plan is created collaboratively, engaging administrators, faculty, parents/guardians, and community partners, and uses both in-person and virtual platforms to ensure broad, accessible participation.

Principle 3.2 - Educators engage in ongoing reflection, formal and informal collaboration, and professional development.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The district provides dedicated time for professional learning.
  - At Wheeler Middle School/High School, a weekly common planning and team time is scheduled for each department and middle school teaching team.
  - At North Stonington Elementary School, grade-level meetings are held once per week.
- Professional discourse, reflection, inquiry, and analysis of teaching and learning are at the core of the school's culture and are reinforced by staff members' commitment to serving in multiple roles to support students.
- Collaboration across schools fosters alignment and consistency in educational practices, supporting the vision of the graduate and acknowledging that each stage of a student's journey builds on the previous one to promote successful graduation and post-secondary outcomes.
- The district provides designated teacher collaboration spaces within schools, facilitating teamwork and planning.
- Teachers engage in formal and informal professional development through district, building, and departmental activities, as well as external opportunities, to maintain currency with best practices.
- The district promotes a culture of sharing best practices, leveraging dedicated shared planning time for teachers to discuss strategies and innovative approaches.
- The district recognizes the importance of consistent grading and assessment practices aligned with the school's beliefs about learning.

- ○ North Stonington Elementary School adopted a standards-based report card at the onset of the 2025-2026 school year.
  - ○ Wheeler Middle School/High School aligned grading criteria and policies within subject-specific departments and across grade levels.
- Peer observation and feedback contribute to improving teaching practices, and the district values effective, timely feedback (within two days) in its evaluation model.
- The practice of annual goal setting, tied to the formative and summative evaluation model, encourages staff to strive for improvement, thereby increasing student learning.
- Administrators and program supervisors play an active role in supporting staff development, including providing opportunities for professional growth aligned with teachers' goals.

Principle 3.3 - Educators examine evidence of student learning and well-being to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, and programs and services.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The district provides weekly common planning and team time for educators to review student work, reflect on their practice, and collaborate on departmental/grade-level goals that guide instruction.
- Data analysis is routine; the district data team, which meets bi-weekly, examines school-wide performance, including the Next Generation Accountability Index, to identify trends and areas for improvement at a macro level, while teachers and grade-level teams regularly review classroom- and student-level data to inform instruction and address individual learning needs.
- Educators examine disaggregated data to identify and respond to inequities in student achievement.
- At Wheeler Middle School/High School, targeted efforts are made to track students' postsecondary plans and outcomes and to gather useful information from graduates using the Naviance platform.
- At North Stonington Elementary School, examination of student achievement data and data from a needs assessment given to teachers and families led to significant changes in programming in mathematics and language arts.

Principle 3.4 - Collaborative structures and processes support coordination and implementation of curriculum.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The district has adopted a four-phase process to ensure a formal, ongoing curriculum cycle of review across all departments.
- At North Stonington Elementary School, teachers are working to formalize their approach to curriculum writing by reviewing their programs and creating documents utilizing the Google Suite.
- Wheeler Middle School/High School promotes vertical articulation within the school with dedicated time once per month for departments to discuss vertical alignment.
- The district is taking steps toward clear alignment between the written, taught, and learned curricula by examining and adjusting scope-and-sequence documents before curriculum revision and by conducting classroom visits to ensure alignment.

Principle 3.5 - School-wide organizational practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- District-wide organizational practices are often designed to meet each student's learning needs.
- Wheeler Middle School/High School offers a range of course levels, including college prep, honors, and advanced placement, to meet the needs of all students.
- Wheeler Middle School/High School provides inclusive learning environments that support heterogeneously grouped courses.
- The district's investment in career and technical education (CTE) offerings and its partnership with the Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative help students earn industry-recognized certifications before graduation and support post-secondary employment opportunities.
- The district's vision of the graduate begins upon a student's entry into North Stonington Public Schools, recognizing each student's unique strengths, potential, and the importance of fostering the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for success in school, career, and life.

Principle 3.6 - Educators develop productive student, family, community, business, and higher education partnerships that support learning.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Educators frequently develop productive partnerships with students, families, communities, businesses, and higher education institutions that support student learning.
- The district fosters community partnerships with local businesses, including General Dynamics, Davis-Standard, Westerly Education Center, and Electric Boat, to support authentic student learning experiences that offer opportunities in fields such as sheet metal work, electrical systems, pipe fitting, and other skilled trades.
- The schools frequently support the community through the Giving Closet, the North Stonington Food Pantry, and the North Stonington Sustainability Committee, which promotes composting of food waste.
- The district recognizes parents as partners in their child's education, and 69.8 percent of parents agree that they are treated as partners.
- The district promotes parent engagement through the parent advisory committee, enabling parents to raise concerns, ask questions, and learn about building-based initiatives.
- CTE programs have developed partnerships with the community and businesses to support students in internship programs.
- Wheeler participates in a dual enrollment program with New England Institute of Technology, which allows students to earn credits toward an associate's degree while in high school.

Future Areas of Growth In this Standard include:

Enhance the district's use of data and data tracking structures to inform curriculum decisions and guide instructional practices more effectively

Further develop internally created professional development opportunities, encouraging teachers and staff to share their expertise and experiences

Sources of Evidence

- central office personnel
- department leaders
- NEASC survey
- parents
- school leadership
- school support staff
- self-reflection
- students
- teachers

Standard 4 - Learning Support

Principle 4.1 - All students receive appropriate intervention strategies to support their academic, social, and emotional success.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The district adequately provides coordinated, timely, and proactive intervention strategies for all students, including those identified as at-risk, to ensure their success and well-being.
- The district has established an MTSS for identified and non-identified students.
  - Classroom teachers and math and reading specialists respond to the students' academic needs by providing Tier 1 support in the classroom at the elementary and middle school levels, and through flex periods and academic support classes at the high school.
  - Teachers at all schools use a Tier 1 checklist of accommodations, closely monitor students, and track data.
  - School counselors, school psychologists, and a school social worker respond to students' social-emotional needs and behavioral interventions.
- There is a well-established procedure across the district for identifying and referring students who need additional assistance.
  - Teachers make formal referrals to the student assistance team at the elementary level to determine appropriate interventions and analyze data on academics and social-emotional well-being.
  - At Wheeler Middle School/High School, teachers refer students to the academic data review team or the student concern team.
- Across the district, outreach to families consistently occurs through all forms (emails, phone calls, and digital tools) to provide available support services to those in need.
- Individual communication is sent to students' families during the MTSS process, and regular newsletters from the counseling department highlight the services provided to students at school.
- When appropriate, referrals to outside resources, such as The Village for Families and Children, for counseling, and 211 Mobile Crisis, are made.

Principle 4.2 - All students receive counseling services that meet their personal, social, emotional, academic, career, and college counseling needs from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Both schools have adequate staff of certified/licensed personnel to deliver counseling services to students through providing a variety of individual, small group, and classroom lessons in all domains of the school counseling curriculum (academic, social-emotional, and college and career readiness) that follow the American School Counseling Association's National Model.
  - There are two school counselors at Wheeler, and one at the elementary school.
  - School counselors in both schools are the team members on planning and placement team meetings, 504 plan meetings, multiple data teams, and student concern meetings.
  - A school psychologist in both buildings and a district social worker also support social-emotional counseling.
- School counselors across the district often hold individual student meetings to provide personal, social, emotional, academic, career, and college counseling.

- All students at the high school meet with their school counselor each year to receive support with course selection to ensure they meet graduation requirements and take classes that align with their career interests.
    - The counselors meet with upperclassmen to begin postsecondary planning, including generating a college list and completing college applications.
    - School counselors and other members of the social support team respond to the social-emotional needs of students in both schools throughout the day such as a crisis.
- Across the district, school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists facilitate collaboration with community and area mental health agencies and social service providers by referring families and students in need to community health providers such as The Village for Families and Children and 211 Mobile Crisis.
- The school counseling department uses graduate follow-up studies to improve programming and curriculum development.
    - It uses Naviance to conduct senior exit surveys, maintain connections with alumni, and review data on how well students were prepared for life beyond high school.
- Throughout a student's career in North Stonington Schools, students have many opportunities to identify career aptitudes and interests through Naviance.
    - The school counselor at the elementary school level begins to utilize Naviance to explore skills and interests and complete personality inventories to align with the appropriate career clusters.
    - At the middle and high school level, counselors will repeat these inventories and surveys as the students' learning and interests grow.
    - This data drives students' post-secondary planning.

Principle 4.3 - All students receive health services that ensure their physical and emotional well-being from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Both the elementary and middle/high school buildings have adequate, certified/licensed personnel and support staff to deliver appropriate health services to students through staffing a full-time nurse in both schools, and a shared full-time health aide to facilitate routine care and triage.
- The district also has a substitute nurse to ensure each building is staffed at all times when the full-time nurse supports another school.
- School health services provide preventative care, including annual vision, hearing, and postural screenings, and direct intervention, including management of chronic conditions, care for injuries, and medication administration.
- School nurses in both buildings conduct training sessions for teachers on individual student needs, including EpiPen training, glucose monitoring, automated external defibrillator (AED) training, and seizure protocols.
- School health services in both schools use an appropriate referral process when medical specialists and outside agencies are needed to support optimal well-being.
- School health services have well-established emergency protocols for immediate crisis response and coordination with emergency medical services, fire, and police.

Principle 4.4 - All students receive library/information services that support their learning from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Both schools have certified/licensed personnel and support staff possessing professional expertise in literature, research, technology, and inquiry.
  - There is a full-time certified library media specialist at the elementary school.
  - The middle school/high school is currently staffed by a part-time certified library media specialist alongside two part-time library aides.
- The library/information services ensure personnel and staff are actively engaged in implementing the school's curriculum and instructional practices, and support teachers in enhancing student learning by providing books and digital resources to support the learning process at both buildings.
- The media center at the high school sent out a survey to teachers about the types of books and resources they would like for upcoming lessons, such as a book on the Korean War for a social studies lesson.
- The library media specialist at the elementary school also serves as a resource for teachers seeking literature to support the curriculum they are implementing.
- The library media specialist adequately provides professional support to classroom teachers to ensure high-quality instruction on information literacy, research techniques, citing sources, and accessing literature from a variety of genres while supporting students for various research assignments in core academic subjects.
- The library media specialists in both buildings have a well-established system for being responsive to students' interests and needs to support independent reading and lifelong learning by helping all students explore their reading interests, recommending book selections, and building independent reading habits.
- The library media specialist at the elementary level strives to assist students in becoming active learners who have opportunities to lead their learning by supporting students in coding with Dash, Sphero, LEGO, and Ozobots to build their computational thinking and problem-solving skills.
- At Wheeler, the media center houses a student-run broadcast center that multiple classes use to get hands-on experience with digital media production.
- Across the district, media centers are developing up-to-date technology, materials, supplies, and furnishings, with collections that support the curriculum, reflect the diversity of the student body, and offer a comprehensive range of cultures and backgrounds.
- The library aides at the middle school/high school have been analyzing the literature to update dated copies of books and replace them with new ones.
- They also have reading spotlights highlighting current novels that explore themes and characters that resonate with today's students.
- Both library media centers have physical settings that encourage collaboration among students, provide opportunities for inquiry, and support authentic learning through a variety of round tables that facilitate group discussions and projects in classes and during study halls.
  - The elementary library media center is located in the center of the building; it is a well-decorated, colorful space with a large rug for the class to listen to read-alouds.
- The middle school/high school library media center is open and available to students and adults before, during, and after school from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm.
- The Wheeler library media center is also open before, during, and after school.

Principle 4.5 - English language learners and students with special needs and 504 plans receive appropriate programs and services that support their learning from adequate, certified/licensed personnel.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Support services have adequate, certified/licensed personnel and support staff to meet students' needs, with one certified TESOL teacher to support the four English language learners, administer testing, and support students in the classroom.

- The district also has special education teachers, paraeducators, school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, BCBAs, math and reading interventionists, and contracts for other services, such as support for students with hearing impairments when an identified need exists.
- There is a well-established collaboration process among all educators, counselors, targeted services, and other support staff to meet each student's goals through successfully carrying out the 504 and IEP processes.
- The student's team includes a variety of support staff to facilitate data-driven discussions to review progress, adjust goals, and develop new strategies to ensure student success.
- All team members meet regularly, both formally and informally, to review student progress.
- Student support services provide appropriate and challenging educational experiences, including individual goals focused on life skills and transitional readiness, to ensure students are prepared to enter the world as contributing members of their community.
- Student support services provide inclusive learning opportunities and instruction by integrating students identified as having special education needs with their typical peers across a full range of academic classes, from honors to dual enrollment.
- A unified sports class provides students with disabilities opportunities to engage in athletics alongside their peers.

Future Areas of Growth In this Standard include:

Standardize the use of Tier 1 data collection tools so that all teachers consistently and accurately document in-class interventions they have tried to ensure the referral process and data review meetings are more efficient and equitable

Ensure the sustainability and quality of the Wheeler library media center program following the reduction of the full-time certified/licensed library media specialist position

Formalize career awareness or exploration activities at the early elementary school level

Sources of Evidence
- central office personnel
- classroom observations
- department leaders
- facility tour
- parents
- school leadership
- school support staff
- self-reflection
- student work
- students
- teachers

Standard 5 - Learning Resources

Principle 5.1 - The community and district provide school buildings and facilities that support the delivery of high-quality curriculum, programs, and services.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- The middle school/high school building was built in 2018, and the elementary school was renovated in 2019; both meet all applicable federal and state codes.
- The schools are very clean, fully air-conditioned, well-maintained, and a point of obvious pride for students, staff, and the community.
- The buildings are generally well-sized and well-designed to support student learning and the curriculum.
- The school facilities, in conjunction with the school schedule, allow for small class sizes.
- Appropriate space is allocated for breakfast and lunch at both schools.
- Appropriate spaces are provided for services such as school counseling, nursing, and specialized instruction.

Principle 5.2 - The community and the district's governing body provide time to enable research-based instruction, professional growth, and the development, implementation, and improvement of school programs and services.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Both schools provide time for teachers to support research-based instruction, collaboration, and students' learning needs.
- Teachers collaboratively analyze data and information on student strengths and needs, and plan together.
- The effectiveness of these collaborative planning sessions is augmented by the presence of program coordinators, administrators, reading specialists, and other experts.
- The district provides all teachers with five full days and four half days of professional development time.
- The recent addition of a 0.5 FTE director of instruction and learning enhances the structure of professional development time.
- The district provides a variety of assessment tools and platforms (such as IXL Math), which generate useful data for staff members in revising curriculum and making decisions about MTSS.

Principle 5.3 - The community and the district's governing body provide adequate and dependable financial resources to fully implement the curriculum, including co-curricular programs and other learning opportunities and employ a review process of its financial practices.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Despite the district's relatively small size, North Stonington Public Schools offers a wide range of curricular and co-curricular programming.
- The schools offer MTSS academic supports, advanced coursework, makerspaces, computer labs, and an ample variety of sports and clubs.
- Class sizes are generally very small, offering teaching staff the opportunity to make many personal connections with students.
    - In elementary school, classes with more than 18 students are rare.
    - In middle school/high school, classes rarely exceed 14 students, and many are much smaller.
    - The schools provide staff for a variety of general education and special education support services.
- Classrooms, learning spaces, and co-curricular offerings are provided with appropriate resources to support learning.
- The district ensures that all funds collected and disbursed are audited in accordance with state and local requirements and that all generally accepted accounting procedures are adhered to.
- As relatively new construction/renovation projects, both schools have modern furniture and fixtures in most classrooms and common areas.
- Students and staff members have ample access to technology for teaching and learning, as well as for operational functions.
- Beginning in the fifth grade, Chromebooks are assigned to students on a one-to-one ratio.

Principle 5.4 - The community and the district's governing body has short-term and longterm plans to address the capital and maintenance needs of the school building, facilities, and technology.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Regular maintenance of critical mechanical systems is scheduled and repairs are appropriately funded, at times through shared funding with the Town.
- Enrollment data and projections are consistently used in the budget planning process to adequate staff and equip the schools with necessary learning resources

Principle 5.5 - The school has infrastructure and protocols to provide a physically safe environment for students and adults.

Areas in which the school aligns with this principle include:

- Each school uses two always-locked entry doors at both main entrances, with a security checkpoint between them.
- Schools use the Raptor system for all visitors and require all volunteers to be fingerprinted.
- Fire alarm systems are inspected annually.
- The All-Hazards Safety Plan is updated annually as required by law.
- The superintendent and director of facilities participate in tabletop scenario planning with the fire department, ambulance personnel, first selectman, and highway department.
- The district safety committee includes teachers, nurses, and psychologists from both schools, as well as the athletic director, a secretary, all administrators, a parent, the superintendent, the fire marshal, and a state

police representative.
- The crisis team meets regularly to review and revise procedures and to debrief after each incident.
- Safety goggles, eye-wash stations, and sinks are provided in middle school/high school science laboratory classes that use chemicals.
- Safety data sheets, a chemical inventory, and safety procedures are maintained.

Future Areas of Growth In this Standard include:

Develop and implement a long-term technology plan with input from relevant stakeholders that addresses infrastructure, security, staff and student devices, and other pertinent needs

Develop and implement a capital improvement plan with input from relevant stakeholders that addresses long-term replacement and upgrades of critical infrastructure and equipment

Ensure that the tunnel below Route 2 is safe for use and in compliance with applicable codes

Plan and improve the condition of the outdoor running track, which does not currently meet high school competition standards

Sources of Evidence
- central office personnel
- classroom observations
- community members
- facility tour
- parents
- school leadership
- self-reflection
- students

Priority Areas

Priority Area

The Collaborative Conference visiting team concurs with the Priority Area identified by the school.

Priority Area #1 Goal Statement: The school district will further align instructional and assessment practices with the vision of a graduate to the extent that all students experience and reflect upon progress every day. (1.2, 2.1)

School Response - Schools across the district are at different stages of aligning instruction and assessment with the vision of the graduate. Wheeler has made strong progress, having established clear vision of the graduate competencies and embedded them into curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Rubrics have been developed and are used across multiple departments and disciplines, supporting consistent evaluation and meaningful student reflection. Teachers are becoming more confident in using these tools to help students understand their growth.

At the elementary school, the vision of the graduate was more recently developed through collaborative staff discussions. The resulting competencies—respect, responsibility, resilience, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and literacy—align with Wheeler and district goals. The school also revised its mission and vision to reflect these values. Students and staff have a solid awareness of social/civic expectations: respect, responsibility, and resilience. However, an understanding of literacy, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving as they relate to the school vision of the graduate is more limited at this time. Moving forward, the vision of the graduate will be more deeply integrated into daily instruction and assessment.

Initial steps include incorporating key vision of the graduate language into a new standards-based report card and developing formative and summative assessments to measure progress across grade levels. These tools will encourage students to reflect on their development, particularly in communication, collaboration, literacy, and problem-solving.

The district will continue to provide opportunities for students to build and demonstrate respect, responsibility, and resilience. A key next step is for staff to define what proficiency looks like for each competency, ensuring consistency and shared expectations. The ultimate goal is a unified, student-centered system where the vision of the graduate is woven into every aspect of learning.

Visiting Team Response - The district has a clearly defined vision of the graduate with academic, civic, and social expectations. At both schools, civic and social expectations are widely displayed and consistently referenced by staff and students alike. Respect, responsibility, and resilience are cornerstones of the district's culture and are prominently displayed within and outside the buildings. All members of the community, including students and parents, emphasized the importance of these characteristics and believe they represent important values in the community. The academic expectations vary slightly across the two schools. Both schools address literacy, collaboration, and communication. Wheeler Middle School/High School addresses the competency of analysis, while North Stonington Elementary School addresses the competency of problem-solving. At Wheeler, rubrics for the competencies are commonly used across departments, with some adaptations to the rubric language within specific departments. Middle school student-led conferences provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their vision of the graduate-related work, and the vision of the graduate competencies are deeply embedded in capstone experiences. As the elementary school continues to expand the use of the competencies by more broadly incorporating them into instruction and assessment, the unified approach across the two schools will strengthen the district's ability to ensure that every student has the opportunity to learn, practice, and receive feedback on their progress toward these competencies.

Action Steps

- For each of the academic expectations in the vision of the graduate, identify the specific ways the skills in

that area are currently being developed in the elementary curriculum and learning experiences
- Identify aspects of the vision of the graduate that may require additional focus or the development of expanded learning opportunities
- Articulate age- and grade-appropriate expectations for elementary students in each area
- Develop strategies for students to get feedback on their development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions identified in the vision of the graduate
- Ensure the core values, beliefs about learning, and finalized vision of the graduate are actively reflected in the school culture and guide the school's policies, procedures, decisions, and resource allocations
- Develop and implement a formal process to assess and communicate individual learner progress toward achieving the district's vision of the graduate to learners and their families
- Develop an annual report on whole-school progress toward learners' achievement of the vision of the graduate

Priority Area

The Collaborative Conference visiting team concurs with the Priority Area identified by the school.

Priority Area #2 Goal Statement: The school district will develop a written curriculum for all courses that integrates the district's vision of the graduate and includes scope and sequence, units of study with guiding and essential questions, concepts, content, opportunities for all students to see themselves and others represented, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and skills, by June 2027. (2.2a, 2.2, 2.3)

School Response - Schools across the district are at varying stages in the curriculum documentation process. At Wheeler, many courses have a written curriculum in place, providing a strong foundation for consistent instruction and alignment with district goals. However, some departments still need to update their documents. Wheeler is working to refine the curriculum to better reflect what happens in the classroom. In contrast, the elementary school currently has more limited documentation, primarily due to its recent focus on implementing new core instructional programs.

Over the past three years, the elementary school has adopted new, research-based programs in reading, writing, and mathematics. During this time, the staff has dedicated significant energy to learning these programs and aligning instructional and assessment practices to ensure high-quality implementation. With those programs now more firmly established in daily practice, the elementary school is prepared to shift its focus toward comprehensive curriculum documentation that reflects both the content of these programs and the school's instructional priorities.

District-wide, curriculum is understood as a living, evolving resource. At all grade levels and in all subject areas, curriculum development is a continuous process as we strive to provide innovative, research-based, and inclusive learning opportunities for every student. This ongoing work ensures that our instructional practices remain responsive to student needs, aligned with standards, and reflective of best practices in teaching and learning.

Visiting Team Response - The district does not yet have written curriculum documents for all courses that include a scope and sequence or curriculum map with units of study that specify expected course outcomes for each student, guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills, and assessments aligned with those outcomes. Considerable work has been done in the past two years to update and complete written curriculum documents at both schools. A curriculum template has been created that includes units of study with guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills; instructional strategies; and assessment practices. There is a district-wide curriculum development cycle and template. The director of instruction and learning reviews every document, meets with writers in process, and uploads completed guides to the district curriculum website. The district has made a major shift to create documents in Google Docs to make them more flexible and allow for ongoing adjustments and revisions. However, time for vertical alignment and articulation of the curriculum is limited. Currently, North Stonington Elementary School does not have finalized curriculum documents. Teachers have frameworks from their adopted reading and mathematics programs, and scope and

sequence documents provide structure throughout the school year. When the curriculum for all courses across grade levels is articulated in written documents, the district will benefit from a higher level of consistency across sections, and learners will be assured the opportunity to participate in guaranteed learning experiences.

Action Steps

- Conduct and regularly update an audit of the status of curriculum development of all courses across the two schools
- Develop and implement a schedule for completing and/or revising courses, identifying district priorities for this work
- Provide professional development to educators on the process of curriculum writing to establish a common vocabulary and common expectations for the documents
- Create a process for curriculum writing that leads to the development of a scope and sequence or curriculum map with units of study that include expected course outcomes for each student, guiding/essential questions, concepts, content, and skills, and assessments aligned with those outcomes
- Identify opportunities within each department's curriculum where students can develop, practice, and receive feedback on their acquisition of the skills identified in the vision of the graduate

Priority Area

The Collaborative Conference visiting team concurs with the Priority Area identified by the school.

Priority Area #3 Goal Statement: The school district will maximize available technology to accelerate learning for students and enhance the work of staff. (2.5, 2.9, 3.2)

School Response - The district is committed to providing students with meaningful access to technology that enhances learning. We currently operate a one-to-one Chromebook program in grades five through twelve and provide approximately ten Chromebooks in each classroom from kindergarten through grade four. While maintaining a healthy balance between screen time and non-screen activities, we aim to use Chromebooks to create authentic and engaging learning opportunities. In other words, we do not want students to simply complete digital versions of worksheets; instead, we aim to cultivate experiences that promote critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving.

To ensure that technology accelerates learning, we plan to carefully analyze Chromebook usage at each grade level. Based on this analysis, we will develop plans that maximize the impact of technology and align device usage with instructional objectives. A critical component of this work will be expanded teacher training that emphasizes meaningful, integrated one-to-one device instruction. High-quality instruction ensures that technology is used as a tool for exploration and innovation, not just substitution. This approach will help bridge equity gaps, prepare students for the digital world, and maintain learning experiences that are student-centered and engaging.

In addition to Chromebooks, the district has invested in numerous interactive whiteboards. To realize their full potential, we are committed to supporting teachers in using these tools for innovative instruction that captures student interest and promotes active participation. We also encourage educators to explore how technology can improve efficiency in curriculum planning, instructional preparation, and assessment—particularly through the practical use of artificial intelligence.

At the district level, our Google Suite account provides powerful tools, including Gmail, Google Calendar, Google Classroom, Google Docs, and other applications. These platforms open doors for collaboration, real-time feedback, organization, and creativity. We are dedicated to helping both students and staff take full advantage of these tools so that technology becomes a catalyst for deeper learning, more efficient workflows, and stronger connections across our school community.

Visiting Team Response - Across visiting team observations of classroom instruction (more than 100 visits over two days), students used technology to accelerate learning less than half the time. While students in grades five and later all have one-to-one Chromebooks, it is not yet clear whether the schools or the district have established expectations for teachers to integrate technology into daily instruction consistently. Students and staff seem comfortable with and appreciative of the technology available, and, recent cyberattack notwithstanding, these devices and services have been reasonably reliable. The wide variability in how instructional technology is implemented indicates that further training, support, and accountability for its use should be the district's next work. A team of stakeholders would be best positioned to develop these expectations and to design differentiated training for teachers, both initially and on an ongoing basis. These plans and training should focus on both hardware (Chromebooks, interactive whiteboards, etc.) and software, such as the district's current instructional platforms (e.g., IXL), including effective and ethical applications of artificial intelligence.

Action Steps

- Create a shared vision for technology integration into the curriculum, and embed appropriate technology tools/resources into the curriculum, created or revised going forward
- Cultivate and communicate policies for the use of AI by students and staff
- Build staff capacity for instructional technology use by providing professional development, particularly around the use of AI
- Engage in a software audit, making sure that purchased programs are utilized meaningfully to enhance student learning

Priority Area

The Collaborative Conference visiting team concurs with the Priority Area identified by the school.

Priority Area #4 Goal Statement: The school district will ensure that adequate technology, including hardware and software, is available to support cutting-edge student learning and staff work. Our technology infrastructure will support learning and safety, and our technology department will be structured to best meet our technology needs. (5.3, 5.4)

School Response - Just one year ago, a district technology committee created a sustainable technology plan that focused on the hardware side of instructional technology. Before this committee, several attempts were made to do so, but without reliable financial support, any long-term plan was unsustainable and never materialized. Until this past year, there was no clear plan for updating technology, and many staff members were using dated devices and software. The current board of education supported that plan and even included infrastructure upgrades, such as switches and security cameras, to improve school operations. However, much of this was done as a one-time purchase, and the longevity of the plan is still a bit compromised under such conditions. Today, the district aims to continue implementing a sustainable technology plan annually and is making every attempt to stay current with infrastructure updates, the best that they can, including the addition of switches, a firewall, and cloud-based cameras, as well as the elimination of old servers that have caused havoc in the district these past few years. Additionally, a district tech committee has prioritized our software subscriptions and aims to continually assess their value to student learning and district operations.

Our IT department has undergone a significant transformation since last winter, and we want to ensure it has the current structure and processes to support technology in the school district moving forward. One of the biggest things lacking in our current model is the identification of a tech leader within the new IT department and the creation of written processes and procedures that can be followed, clearly defining technology jobs and procedures to ensure the plan is maintained for years to come. A first measure must include identifying a leader from the tech team who can help improve communication between the IT department and school buildings, and create systems to ensure smooth functionality in the distribution and long-term maintenance of our district technology. This long-term technology plan is vital for clarifying roles and responsibilities. It will ensure funding

and the necessary support for timely infrastructure updates so we can maintain an effective 1:1 status and fidelity to instructional tech now and in the future.

Visiting Team Response - In 2024, the district created its "Three-Year Sustainable Technology Plan." This plan has specific sections for Chromebooks, teacher laptops, docking stations, printers, and interactive whiteboards. However, the plan does not address "backend" infrastructure. In light of the district's recent malicious cyberattack, there is now greater awareness of the need for a long-term plan to address the backbone of the district's technology. While reports from district leadership make it clear that the need is well understood, it does not appear that substantial conversations have occurred on these topics in the past. A multi-year plan for technology infrastructure is needed. These will be substantial financial investments for the district and, thus, collaboration with the municipality will be important. Once the district creates, implements, and monitors a long-range plan that bolsters the security and operability of the network, staff members and students will benefit from more reliable access to technology tools for teaching, learning, and operations.

Action Steps

- Create a shared vision for technology infrastructure within the district
- Create and implement a five-year plan for incremental upgrades and replacements of technology infrastructure, including firewall, switches, security cameras, student devices, staff devices, and software
- Assess and, if necessary, revise the IT staffing agreement with LEARN in response to the five-year plan and vision for technology infrastructure in the district

Commendations

Commendation

The multiple ways the district focuses on safety and belonging for each student's education

Commendation

The robust development of the core values, beliefs about learning, and vision of a graduate to support all students in learning critical skills and dispositions

Commendation

The thoughtful execution of the senior capstone project

Commendation

The positive district-wide focus on social-emotional learning and school climate that has significant benefits for students

Commendation

The strong community connections and collaboration across both schools throughout the school year

Commendation

The multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning, receive corrective feedback, and use this feedback in meaningful ways to support their learning

Commendation

The notable presence of district and school leaders at school events that fosters a sense of connection with students and families

Commendation

The collaborative leadership style that promotes a high level of engagement in school improvement efforts from staff members and families

Commendation

The flexible learning pathways that ensure all students have access to a well-rounded education

Commendation

The collaborative structures among faculty and staff that support effective curricular alignment with district goals

The specific, measurable criteria used by the high school to effectively define the vision of the graduate and consistently provide learners with feedback on their progress toward proficiency, ensuring that students understand expectations and can track their own growth

The efforts to embed the vision of the graduate into high school curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices, notably through the capstone pride project for seniors, which provides structured opportunities for learners to apply and practice key skills in authentic, meaningful contexts

The engagement of educators in ongoing reflection, collaboration, and professional development that contributes to improved student learning

The strong commitment to student-centered learning, fostering a culture of engagement and inclusivity

The dedication of all staff to foster a community of belonging

The comprehensive support systems and structures for students requiring intervention

The educators' ownership of all learners and dedication to enhancing their sense of belonging, that results in seeing each learner as an individual with the ability to succeed

The comprehensive support systems for learners who require academic support, including unidentified students and identified students with special needs and with 504 plans

The collaborative structures in place among faculty and staff that support the students' academic success and well-being

The robust school counseling curriculum that addresses all domains, academics, social-emotional, and college and career readiness

The allocation of time throughout the year for various types of data team meetings to track student progress and ensure social-emotional and academic success

The district's dedication to keeping the parents informed about the learning going on in the classroom and about resources available to enhance student learning and engagement

The abundant and varied curricular and co-curricular offerings available to students

The small class sizes that promote strong relationships between students and between students and staff

The time and fiscal resources allocated to promote research-based instruction, teacher collaboration time, and data analysis to promote student learning

The clean, well maintained, and fully air conditioned school buildings that support student learning

The time and fiscal resources allocated to curriculum development and revision

FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES

This Collaborative Conference Report reflects the findings of the school's Self-Reflection and those of the visiting team. It provides a blueprint for the faculty, administrators, and other officials to use to improve the quality of programs and services for students in this school. The faculty, school board, and superintendent should be apprised by the building administrators yearly of progress made in aligning with the Standards for Accreditation.

The Commission expects school officials to use the results of the Collaborative Conference Report as well as the school's identified Priority Areas for Growth to draft a school improvement/growth plan, and to review and implement the findings of the Self-Reflection and and Collaborative Conference Report. An outline of the next steps in the Accreditation process is included in the Commission's Accreditation Handbook, which is available on the Commission's website.

A school's initial/continued Accreditation is based on satisfactory progress implementing the school's improvement/growth plan based on the Priority Areas validated by the visiting team and recommendations identified by the Commission as it monitors the school's progress and changes which occur at the school throughout the decennial cycle. The school will complete a Summary Report and host a Decennial Accreditation visiting team two years after the Collaborative Conference to show progress implementing the school's Priority Areas. The Decennial visiting team will identify recommended next steps as well as additional recommendations for the school to continue to align with the Standards for Accreditation and to improve outcomes for students.

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

The visiting team would like to express thanks to the community for the hospitality and welcome. The school community completed a Self-Reflection that clearly identified the school's strengths and areas of need. The time and effort dedicated to the Self-Reflection and preparation for the visit ensured a successful Collaborative Conference visit.

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES
Commission on Public Schools

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty days of occurrence any substantive change in the school which has an impact on the school's ability to meet any of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The Report of 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

Roster of Team Members

Chair(s)

Chair: Dr. Erin McGurk - New England Association of Schools & Colleges

Assistant Chair: Elizabeth Pimental - Smithfield High School

Assistant Chair: Dr. Anthony Gasper - Consolidated School District of New Britain

Team Members

Ashlee Burns - Cranston High School East

Melissa Danielson - Branford High School

Julie Ercolani - Plainville High School

Tawana Graham-Douglas - Plainville Community Schools

Matthew Piros - Sage Park Middle School

Jennifer Renkiewicz - Odyssey Community School