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

Commission on Public Schools

Commission on Public Schools

Report of the Visiting Team for
Manchester Essex Regional High School

Manchester, MA

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School and Community Summary

School and Community Summary

The Manchester Essex School District serves the communities of Manchester and Essex, located on Cape Ann in Essex County, 25 miles north of Boston. The towns have a combined population of 8,640 people, 5136 in Manchester and 3,504 in Essex, as of the 2010 Census. In 2000, the two communities voted to regionalize their schools.

The Manchester Essex Regional School District is comprised of four schools. Memorial Elementary and Essex Elementary are neighborhood schools that serve grades PreK-5. The Manchester Essex Regional Middle School serves grades 6 through 8 and shares a new facility, recognized for its commitment to green technology, with Manchester Essex Regional High School, which serves grades 9 through 12.

Demographic Information: DESE School Profile

Core Values, Beliefs, and Vision of the Graduate

Manchester Essex Regional School District Core Values and Beliefs

Whole Child – We believe schools must establish a safe environment conducive to the development of the whole child, which extends beyond academic core to include experiential learning, the arts, cultural awareness, and physical and emotional well-being.

Student Achievement – We believe that challenging standards and differentiated instruction encourage all students to excel and become confident engaged learners who achieve their potential at different rates and on different paths.

Climate – We believe our schools must create an environment of respect and appreciation for individual and cultural differences and instill a passion for responsible social action, both locally and globally.

Community Partnerships – We believe providing a quality education for our children is a shared responsibility, fostered by partnerships among the schools, families, businesses, and the community-at-large.

Resources – We believe our district should provide appropriate resources in order for students to achieve our states vision and mission.

Manchester Essex Regional High School Vision of a Graduate

Empathetic Global Citizen

- Understands and accepts different cultures and beliefs
- Seeks out and participates in authentic cultural experiences
- Participates in meaningful community service
- Demonstrates an awareness of current events
- Recognizes cause and effect within a variety of global networks
- Understands the importance of acting as a responsible citizen

Responsible Collaborator

- Acknowledges and respects perspective of others

- Active and equitable participation in group settings
- Seeks appropriate resources to carry out responsibility as part of a group
- Can identify and work towards a common goal
- Advocates for ideas while resolving conflict within a group

Critical Thinker

- Recognizes and questions implicit/explicit bias
- Evaluates ideas, information and sources for validity, relevance and impact
- Reasons and weighs evidence from multiple perspectives to reach conclusions
- Recognizes patterns and can make inferences
- Draws appropriate conclusions
- Considers multiple perspectives

Effective Communicator

- Mindful of audience interpretation
- Demonstrates responsible digital communication
- Expresses ideas in a purposeful and confident manner both verbally and in writing
- Writes and speaks clearly for a variety of audiences and purposes
- Employs active listening
- Acknowledges multiple perspectives
- Sustains and advances conversation
- Able to present to a variety of audiences

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 ensures equity and honors diversity in identity and thought.
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

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 that 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 comprised 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 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 shows continued progress in addressing identified needs.

Preparation for the Accreditation Visit

Accreditation coordinators and a steering committee comprised of professional staff were appointed to supervise the school's Accreditation process, which includes the self-reflection, the Collaborative Conference visit, the development and implementation of a growth plan, and the Decennial Accreditation Visit. At Manchester Essex Regional High School, a committee of eight members, including the principal, supervised all aspects of the Accreditation process.

Public schools seeking Accreditation through 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, the vision of the graduate, and unique student population. In preparation for the decennial visit, schools are required to complete a Decennial Summary Report to inform the team about their progress since the time of the Collaborative Conference visit.

In addition, the professional staff was required to read and come to a consensus on the summary report to ensure that all voices were heard related to the school's progress on its priority areas for growth.

The Process Used by the Visiting Team

A visiting team of six members was assigned by the Commission on Public Schools to conduct a Decennial Accreditation visit to Manchester Essex Regional High School in Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA. The visiting team members spent four days conducting a virtual visit to the school; reviewed the self-reflection, Collaborative Conference report, and Decennial Summary Report documents; met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents; and visited classes to determine the degree to which the school aligns with the Committee on Public Elementary, Middle, and High Schools' Standards for Accreditation and the degree to which the school is making progress toward their identified priority areas for growth as indicated in the

school's improvement/growth plan.

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. The report also includes an analysis of the conceptual understanding, commitment, competency, and capacity (4Cs), which is a framework used to evaluate the school's ability for continuous growth and improvement as a learning organization.

This report of the findings of the visiting team will be forwarded to the Commission on Public Schools, which will decide on the Accreditation of Manchester Essex Regional High School.

Foundational Element 1.1a - Learning Culture

Foundational Element 1.1a

The school community provides a safe and secure environment through the thoughtful and purposeful approach to social-emotional learning (SEL) for students and staff. The intentional partnership built with Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence created a climate and culture among leadership, staff, and students by using the RULER program of recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotions, which serve as checkpoints for the emotional investment in developing the whole student.The administrative team shares responsibility for student management. They use RULER and the tools for implementation to work with students who are dysregulated to minimize the disruption to their time on learning and build a trusting relationship between staff and students.The increase in awareness of the five pillars of emotional intelligence opened the doors for staff and students to consider risk as a path to learning and growing. Staff is comfortable approaching administrators with new concepts for grading that will foster risk-taking by the student and less focus on the pressures of earning a certain grade average, allowing the student to understand their performance and personal growth better. Students are willing to solve problems using trial and error as opposed to the predictable outcome advised by the teacher. Students are assured that they will eventually get to the solution even if their process is not guaranteed.There is a general perception that if the social-emotional needs of the students are met, the barriers and challenges that get in the way of learning will have a greater chance of resolving themselves in a much shorter duration.

The school has policies and procedures to assure individuals are safe in school, such as entrance into the school, along with other security measures. The student handbook details important information. Policies include bullying, harassment, and discrimination. The school has specific safety protocols and regularly implements drills.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 1.2a - Learning Culture

Foundational Element 1.2a

The school has a written document describing its core values, beliefs about learning,and vision of the graduate that has been successfully articulated and adopted by all stakeholders across the district. A recent review and revision of the core values and beliefs ensure they align with the vision of the graduate and the district's strategic plan. The core values of student-centered learning, student achievement, equity, family and community partnerships, and resources support the full realization of the vision of a graduate and continued commitment to social-emotional learning. Through the meaningful articulation of the school's core values, beliefs about learning, and the vision of the graduate, students can see the relationship between social-emotional well-being and student achievement. This is true for students and staff, empowering them to function at high performance levels.

Rating

Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 2.2a - Student Learning

Foundational Element 2.2a

The curriculum is written in a consistent format for all courses in all departments across the school. During the 2017-2018 school year, curriculum mapping was a professional practice goal for all faculty. Curriculum maps for all courses are accessible to all teachers through Aspen and align to state and national standards. The ongoing goal is to ensure that maps are living documents that are reviewed regularly and updated to meet students' learning needs. MERHS has made substantial progress in developing rubrics for its vision of the graduate and is adding those proficiency standards to its curriculum maps.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 3.1a - Professional Practices

Foundational Element 3.1a

The school has a current school improvement plan. The student-centered plan highlights a meaningful focus on social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies and programming. A culture of partnership and collaboration exists within the school and district, advancing the work of the school improvement plan. The school improvement plan is aligned with district goals. In addition, teacher professional practice and student learning goals align with the school improvement plan.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Elements 4.1a - Learning Support

Foundational Elements 4.1a

The school has intervention strategies designed to support students. The Teacher Assistance Team meets regularly to identify support for struggling students. Staff or parents can refer students. The District Accommodation Plan (DCAP) has interventions teachers can use to support students. The school implemented several intervention programs to help various students. The Academic Center supports regular education students struggling with executive functioning or other academic needs.The Bridge program is a regular education program supporting students returning to school following an extended absence of five or more days. This program has a dedicated student adjustment counselor. The staff works closely with the school counseling department to provide additional support to students when necessary.The SWING program is a sub-separate program to assist high-need students.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Element 5.1a - Learning Resources

Foundational Element 5.1a

The school site and plant support the delivery of curriculum, programs, and services. The school ensures a safe, secure, and healthy environment, and the building and facilities are clean and well-maintained. Small class sizes help teachers maximize space. The learning commons model is used to support library information services. The science labs are updated. The facility meets all applicable federal and state laws and is in compliance with local fire, health, and safety regulations.

Rating
Meets the Standard

Foundational Elements Ratings

Foundational Element Ratings

Foundational Elements	Collaborative Conference School's Rating	Collaborative Conference Visitors' Rating	Decennial School's Rating	Decennial Visitors' Rating
1.1a - Learning Culture	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
1.2a - Learning Culture	Does Not Meet the Standard	Does Not Meet the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
2.2a - Student Learning	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
3.1a - Professional Practices	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
4.1a - Learning Support	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard
5.1a - Learning Resources	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard	Meets the Standard

Priority Area 1

Priority Area

Develop 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. The written curriculum will integrate the school's vision of the graduate. (Standard 1, Principle 1.2, Foundational Element 1.2a, Standard 2, Principles 2.1, 2.2)

Action, Impact, and Growth

Manchester Essex Regional High School (MERHS) developed a vision of the graduate that drives decisions about teaching and learning, programming, and potential areas for school-wide growth. The vision of the graduate was shared and received approval from the school committee. The vision of the graduate is the foundation for the district's strategic planning for improvement for 2021-2024. The district's core values and beliefs were reviewed and updated.

All teachers are committed to student learning goals focused on the vision of the graduate. As part of the teacher supervision and evaluation process, all teachers will collect evidence on how they are implementing the vision of the graduate. School and teacher goals have been linked directly to the vision of the graduate and the district's strategic plan.

In the early months of the 2021-2022 school year, the professional staff participated in a day-long training to review the strategic plan. Teachers had the opportunity to share what struck them about the plan, what seemed achievable and difficult, where they could see themselves in the future, and how the strategic plan will impact the high school. Teachers engaged in a "Back to the Future" protocol. Working in small groups, they envisioned what the school would look like, feel like, and sound like ten years from now. Before concluding the day, teachers began discussing how they would measure student success in the seven domains that have been adopted. A rubric is being developed collaboratively that will provide feedback to learners and their families on each learner's progress in achieving the vision of the graduate. Space has been reserved for teachers' comments and students' next steps.

The identification and adoption of the vision of a graduate have already begun to impact the future of teaching and learning and the goals and aspirations of students. Staff reflected and engaged in discovering how current practices, curriculum, and instruction already include the elements of the vision of a graduate and how they might enhance their lessons to raise conscious awareness of how students can best use the skills in learning and for success. Some teachers identify content and units conducive to specific skills; others expose students to all the skills and dispositions and leave it to the student to thoughtfully apply and reflect on how the skills fit into the learning process and present their knowledge to others. The interactions between staff and leadership, staff and students, and community and the school that the skills embedded in the vision of the graduate, and the aspirations and hopes for the future of the students foster a culture and climate of promise and success for the community as a whole.

The work completed on the vision of the graduate and the thoughtful and purposeful approach to ensuring full implementation resulted in scheduling seven professional development days dedicated to the vision of the graduate and three days to SEL. The time will be used to discover and implement various tools and strategies to integrate the transferable skills and dispositions into daily classroom practice. The first professional development day of the year was dedicated to the vision of the graduate, with an invitation to the staff to share ownership of planning laid the groundwork for broad and sweeping implementation of the skills necessary for students to be successful.

The vision of a graduate is in the early stages of implementation, so the expectations for academic integrity in the practices for developing the domains in curriculum and instruction have yet to be firmly embedded. The professional development days scheduled for the 2021-2022 school year will allow the implementation to evolve

and prepare the school for greater implementation in the 2022-2023 school year. Given the inclusive nature of developing the vision of a graduate, the school will consider opportunities to develop community partners to connect learning to real life and to enhance the acquisition of transferable skills and dispositions beyond the school day. Bringing the vision of a graduate to life is a community effort.

Recommended Next Steps

Develop and implement proficiency rubricswith key performance indicators that clarify quality performance in the skills identified in the vision of a graduate to guide ongoing feedback about progress toward those indicators

Ensure that all skills and dispositions are a part of every student's learning experience through targeted time for collaboration, authentic learning activities, and clearly communicated expectations

Align assessment practices with the vision of the graduate and use the data to inform curriculum and instruction

Fully integrate the vision of the graduate into the school's culture and curriculum

Sources of Evidence
- central office personnel
- classroom observations
- department leaders
- parents
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations
- school board
- school leadership
- school support staff
- school summary report
- student work
- student-led conferences
- teacher interview

Priority Area 2

Priority Area

Increase focus on the use of data to inform teachers about student learning and well-being, and to improve instruction, programs, and services. Data will be used to inform differentiated instructional practices in the classroom. (Standard 3, Principal 3.3)

Action, Impact, and Growth

The school took some steps toward using data to inform student learning and well-being and to improve instruction, programs, and services. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, much of the work in this priority area was paused. Teachers are actively working on creating and revising authentic and project-based assessments to support students in achieving the vision of the graduate. The school is working on developing rubrics for the vision of the graduate, which teachers can use to assess student progress individually. All of these actions culminate in Senior SCORE. Seniors participate in an internship and conclude with a meeting with two to three faculty members, where they will discuss their experiences and connect their experiences with the vision of the graduate.

The result of these action steps can be seen in the district's culture and students' awareness. After all stakeholders responded in a common way about the importance of skills and dispositions articulated in the vision of the graduate, the district is extending it into a district-wide strategy for all schools grades K-12.

Teachers purposefully plan instruction to achieve student learning goals and engage students to achieve skills requisite for the vision of the graduate. Some teachers exposed students to the vision of the graduate through the written vision of the graduate indicators on the board, posters outlining the vision of the graduate, and actively referencing it during instruction. Students can connect their learning to the vision of the graduate and analyze the importance of achieving these standards. The vision of the graduate is moving towards becoming a living, breathing entity within the school but there is still work to do.

Qualitative data indicate the growth from these actions. The teacher evaluation of student learning goals will help compile more data on achievement. Currently, there is student recognition and a nascent understanding of the vision of the graduate, but as the school further embeds the vision of the graduate, significant growth can occur.

Recommended Next Steps

Implement and define student-centered, authentic learning and assessments

Complete documentation of the grades K-12 curriculum, assessments, tools, and common practices for the vision of the graduate

Define and implement measures to assess the effectiveness of SEL integration

Employ a regular, systemic approach to the review of student work, and use the data to inform instruction, revise curriculum, and monitor progress toward the vision of the graduate

Implement consistent school and district data collection and analysis practices across all grade levels to support student learning and growth

Expand the use of active, student-centered learning strategies and authentic, project-based tasks in all classrooms, including honors and Advanced Placement (AP)

Devise a system to report student progress toward the vision of the graduate

Map and deliver a developmentally differentiated professional development plan informed by the outcomes of school-based assessments

Provide professional development focused on student-centered learning and authentic assessment so that students experience this in all grades and subject areas to support the vision of the graduate

Ensure teachers have expertise in differentiated instruction and know how to use data to adjust instruction

Sources of Evidence
- classroom observations
- department leaders
- NEASC survey
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations
- school leadership
- school summary report
- student work
- student-led conferences
- students
- teacher interview
- teachers

Priority Area 3

Priority Area

Find more time built in for interdisciplinary collaboration, collaboration with special education, and opportunities for lesson planning with co-teachers (Standard 3, Principles 3.2, 3.4, 3.5)

Action, Impact, and Growth

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the school's progress in this Priority Area has been limited, and much of the work was deferred to the current and upcoming school year. However, the school planned some next steps, including creating dedicated time in the daily schedule for interdisciplinary planning time.

The school has taken some action towards promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, for example, with the Teacher Assistance Team collaboration and with some of the well-established special education and general education co-teaching partnerships. An interdisciplinary leadership team, including the principal, dean of students, school resource officer, and relevant support staff, meet on Monday mornings to discuss any concerns or needs. A physics and a calculus teacher are piloting an interdisciplinary approach to their courses; the courses are taught back-to-back, and concepts are reinforced in both courses.

Recommended Next Steps

Ensure teachers have the skills to implement effective interdisciplinary collaboration

Investigate evidenced-based professional development opportunities directed at implementing effective interdisciplinary collaboration

Determine the school's capacity for providing interdisciplinary collaboration time within the daily schedule

Use the vision of the graduate to inform the collaborative process

Sources of Evidence
- classroom observations
- department leaders
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations
- school leadership
- school summary report

Priority Area 4

Priority Area

Expand curriculum to ensure that students are able to make real-life connections of knowledge and skills (Standard 2, Principles 2.4, 2.5)

Action, Impact, and Growth

The school is shifting to increase its student-centered learning environment to provide opportunities to engage students in authentic, real-world activities. Teacher goals focus on student-centered learning, personalized, student-centered experiences, and authentic assessment.The school began with an inventory of existing practices to identify areas of strength to build and expand upon, gaps, and a vision for continued growth.

This priority area is tied to the district's strategic plan by incorporating the objective to implement and define student-centered authentic learning and assessments; documenting the K-12 curriculum, assessments, tools, and common practices; conducting school-level assessments of current practice; and developingcommunity partners to provide opportunities for students to connect learning to real life.

Students work individually and collaboratively on engaging real-world problems and tasks that affect their lives and expand their experience. For example, students in psychology class create a study on the correlation between sleep and stress in adolescents, which was published as an article in the school newspaper and shared with administrators. Likewise, students in government class create polls that reflect student demographics on topics of community interest and possible school improvement. Seniors engage in an immersive project in the last quarter of their high school career that allows them to explore an area of interest in a self-directed and authentic way.

There is less emphasis on traditional test assessments and increased opportunities for student choice in many classes. Some teachers at all grade levels still rely on traditional, teacher-centered assessment and instruction strategies.

Recommended Next Steps

Conduct school-level assessments of current practice on engaging students in authentic activities and analyze the data to create a plan for improvement

Embed student-centered learning activities and assessments directly into curriculum documents at all grade levels to ensure systematic progress in this area

Ensure the senior project aligns with the school's vision of the graduate

Develop community partners to provide opportunities for students to connect learning to real-life applications

Sources of Evidence
- classroom observations
- department leaders
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations

- school leadership
- school summary report
- student work
- student-led conferences
- students
- teacher interview
- teachers

Priority Area 5

Priority Area

Continue work on social-emotional learning through the implementation of Yale's RULER program. This work will take time as students move up to high school using the common language of the program. (Standard 1, Principles 1.1, 1.3, Standard 3, Principles 3.2, 3.3, Standard 4, Principles 4.1, 4.3)

Action, Impact, and Growth

Priority Area for Growth #5 acknowledges the school's commitment to students' social-emotional wellness through the continued implementation of the RULER project from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. The RULER Project recommends innovativeapproaches for supporting school communities in understanding the value of emotions, teaching emotional intelligence skills, and building and sustaining positive emotional climates in homes, schools, and workplaces.RULER is an acronym for the five skills of emotional intelligence.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for students socially and emotionally. Through the emotional intelligence lens, the dean of students built relationships with the students and took the time to reflect on the five learnable skills of emotional intelligence: recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotions (RULER). To build consistency and collaboration regarding social-emotional learning among the staff, teachers created a shared professional practice goal on social-emotional learning. As part of the goal, teachers commit to taking part in related training, including trauma-informed practices, and to seek out professional journals and other educational resources to enhance their implementation of the RULER strategies to meet the needs of each learner.

With RULER in practice throughout the school, the vision of the graduate was created with social-emotional dispositions and competencies such as personal accountability, mindfulness of audience, academic integrity, self-care, overcoming academic obstacles and personal barriers to meet individual goals, maintaining work/life balance, social-emotional awareness, demonstrating empathy, and expressing emotions.

The development of the district strategic plan with inclusion of the vision of the graduate creates a systemic leadership model in grades K-12 that fosters the relationship between social-emotional well-being and student achievement and will help students realize their individual, unique and highest potential, achieve academic excellence, value integrity and honesty, and become intellectually curious and critical thinkers. The vision of a graduate then drives the priorities for authentic learning, integration of social-emotional learning into all aspects of the school day, and sets the stage for an inclusive and diverse school culture.

The actions positively impacted the school community. Students and staff promote an SEL culture where practicing mindfulness exercises, such as meditation, are the norm. The skills and tools of RULER practiced by leadership and staff resulted in an easier transition from remote/hybrid learning to in-person learning for the 2020-2021 school year. The growing awareness and practice of these skills and tools impact the interaction between student and teacher, reducing the number of infractions and negative consequences to achieve a safe climate for teaching and learning for all students and staff. A mind shift has taken place that prompts the staff to recognize that the whole child must be considered in all interactions and understanding applied to assist in emotional regulation and the ability for the student to be successful.

Embedding social-emotional learning into the vision of the graduate with the expectations that the skills and dispositions will be threaded throughout the curriculum, and instruction establishes a breeding ground for students to practice and embrace the skills that have been identified. When students present work, they actively consider audience interpretation and academic integrity. They take risks prepared to overcome challenges to meet their goals.

By integrating the vision of the graduate into the strategic plan for the district, ownership for the implementation, growth, and vision for the development of skills that all students will need to be successful is broadly cast across

all stakeholders. District leadership and the school committee will prioritize the development of social-emotional learning in the decisions that will be made for professional development, spending, and resources.

The successful implementation of the RULER system at all grade levels contributed to using a common language for staff and students centered on SEL. RULER firmly embeds SEL practices. The U block gives students additional time to meet with teachers and support staff and is a vital component of SEL. The counseling staff relies on the block to meet with students. However, scheduling time for students and counseling staff to meet is difficult.

The Bridge Program enables students to receive direct support. The Transitions program offers support and direct connections for students with familiar, dedicated faculty members. A rich and vibrant culture of clubs and activities highlights the student-centered approach where students can create clubs. Open paths to any level of courses and a willingness to let students change course levels throughout the year enable students to take risks knowing they are supported and can make changes if needed.

Counseling staff, teachers, and administrators rely on the Teacher Assistance Team to determine meaningful interventions for students with varying levels of need. Each Monday, a weekly check-in meeting with administrators, support staff, and the school resource officer provides valuable time for updates on student trends or emerging issues.

Qualitative data indicate the growth from these actions. For example, faculty and staff feel if students are happy and healthy, they can learn. Students can make connections on how SEL is connected to the vision of the graduate. Students can articulate the importance of SEL and provide examples of how they use it. Students and families appreciate and acknowledge the effort made by the school as they feel cared for by the adults. Teachers feel supported and feel they can take risks for improvement, such as ateacher introducing "ungrading" instead of traditional grades. Students meet with the teacher to discuss their progress and completion of learning objectives.

Recommended Next Steps

Create a grades K-12 SEL leadership model charged with training staff on ways to integrate a variety of strategies to help increase student availability for learning

Investigate a variety of SEL tools, materials, and strategies for staff to integrate into their daily practice

Facilitate opportunities for teachers to teach in nontraditional ways to support student learning and well-being

Develop a structure for school counselors and students to connect as necessary

Create a measurement tool to identify the impact of SEL programming on student learning and well-being

Build a developmental curriculum rooted in the vision of the graduate to prepare students academically, socially, and emotionally for paths to post-secondary success

Sources of Evidence
- central office personnel
- classroom observations
- department leaders
- NEASC survey
- parents
- priority area meetings
- priority area observations
- school board

- school leadership
- school support staff
- school summary report
- student work
- student-led conferences
- students
- teacher interview
- teachers

Part 3 - Reflection on Student Learning

Reflection on Student Learning

Instructional practices are designed to meet the learning needs of each student. The school emphasizes student-centered learning, and the students feel their teachers care about them, their learning, and their well-being. T eachers use a combination of instructional practices to meet the learning needs of students, including whole-class direct instruction, small group collaboration, student-led inquiry, and individual practice and application of skills in and outside the classroom. For students needing additional help, the District Accommodation Plan (DCAP) is used for Tier 1 support. Learning needs and differences are addressed by offering students choices to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. For example, mathematics teachers use a combination of traditional paper assessments and projects to assess students' learning. Students can choose their project topics, and the balance between traditional assessment and projects allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in a format suited for them. Teachers accommodate or modify assessments to meet students' learning needs and preferences. For example, one teacher provided pictorial resources for a project in a world language class, removing the artistic concerns so that the student could focus on the language translation part of the assignment. Students can correct mistakes and/or retake/revise assessments to improve comprehension and grades in some classes; however, this varies by teacher and department.

Students are active learners who have opportunities to lead their own learning. The many elective courses available to juniors and seniors across disciplines are designed for students to guide their learning. For example, in the honors computer-aided design (CAD) class, students complete an assignment with their group. They brainstorm how to solve the problem by working within the constraints the teacher provides. The teacher assesses based on students' reflection on learning rather than solving the problem. Seniors complete an internship and a senior project, which is entirely student-driven. In this culminating experience, students choose their topic and style of report and presentation, which is completed as an immersive project in the last quarter of their senior year. Students lead their learning through choices of group partners and assignments. In English classes, students participate in student-led Socratic Seminars and discussions. Students have choices for essay prompts for writing assignments, and teachers use a combination of traditional, paper-based assessments and more creative projects. For example, one teacher allows students to create public service announcements as a summative assessment. Combining traditional and project-based assessments help to differentiate students' learning needs and preferences; however, this strategy is not universal among all teachers.

Learners regularly engage in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills. STEM and math classes engage students in project-based learning (PBL) that requires them to identify a problem or a need, determine how they might solve the problem or fulfill the need, and apply the skills they are learning to create a solution, something new, or discover correlations in their results. Science labs encourage students to collaborate in small groups to seek solutions through trial and error. Projects in psychology push students to a deep understanding of themselves and others, require them to collect data independently over lengthy periods, interpret the data, and inform or change their thinking about how they function best as humans. From ninth through twelfth grades, students compose biweekly journal entries in English that are progressively demanding from grade to grade and thematically connect to specific units of concurrent study using one-word conceptual prompts, such as electricity or memory. Students respond to other students' entries to support each other with language skills and offer varying perspectives in the off week. The creation of the entry and the response are guided by rubrics and graded with feedback. In a history class, students engage in document-based reading and are asked to derive what powers should be granted to the federal government to solve the problem presented in the readings. However, the ninth and tenth graders participate in more traditional instructional practices.

Learners demonstrate their learning through a variety of assessment strategies that can inform classroom instruction and curriculum for individual teachers. For example, the English elective *Hamlet* offers choice in the summative assessment ranging from a theatrical class performance followed by a reflective discussion, submission of a student-made video, or writing, all of which explore the themes of the play and the connection of those themes to their lives and require different instruction for the way they accomplish the goal of the assessment. In algebra, students demonstrate the acquisition of skills via traditional pencil and paper

assessments and through real-world application of knowledge to a project. Algebra 1 students are challenged to identify the important skills and concepts they learn and design an assessment that targets those skills. Algebra 2 students prepare lessons to co-teach with the ninth-grade teacher who teaches quadratic equations. United States History students, in small groups, read, discuss, and teach the class about specific events in history that contributed to the revolt and subsequent founding of the United States, creating a jigsaw for all students to contribute. Physics students create problems to solve from knowledge acquired, swap problems with other students, and demonstrate learning through both the framing of inquiry and responses. In an art class, foundational elements of color are assessed by engaging students to prove their understanding and execution using a rubric. Writing in English is assessed by peers and teachers to provide feedback for areas of strength and suggestions for improvement. A psychology student creates a public service announcement regarding the findings of her study. Other students' work is published in the school newspaper.Common assessments ensure consistent and equitable learning opportunities across grades or courses. Internal assessment data is reviewed at the department level; however, there has yet to be a systematic approach to using this data specifically to inform curriculum and instruction.

Students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning, receive corrective feedback, and use this feedback in meaningful ways to support their learning. Students are engaged in summative and formative tasks and have opportunities to receive feedback on their learning from teachers and peers. For example, all students in grades nine through twelve complete bi-weekly journal prompts with a peer review protocol to develop their voices and technical skills in writing over four years. Teachers use these journals to provide regular feedback to students on their writing and monitor their progress each year. In an Algebra 2 class, students take a traditional test and produce real-world projects on linear regression. Student presentations are frequently used for instruction and assessment. Student self-reflection and metacognition are increasingly emphasized to align with the vision of the graduate. Students are encouraged to show greater independence and have the confidence to take risks. Computer programming classes emphasize process over product in assessment, as students use teacher and peer feedback to inform their thinking as they navigate challenging, real-world problems. Class time is frequently used for student practice, problem-solving activities, and scaffolded projects, so students receive feedback from teachers and peers before submitting an assessment.Students receive feedback through content-specific rubrics for most summative and some formative assessments. Students are sometimes given opportunities for revision or retakes of their work; however, this varies among teachers and departments.

Learners use technology across all curricular areas to support, enhance, and demonstrate their learning. Though this is not formally a one-to-one device school, students and teachers assume access for all students, and students with long-term or temporary needs are provided with laptop computers. The school uses Google Classroom as its learning platform, with full adoption across all classes and disciplines expedited through the difficulties of remote learning during the pandemic. While the facility with some of the more advanced Google applications varies, most teachers can communicate with students, foster collaboration, and provide feedback using the platform. In turn, students are confident using digital applications for communication, collaboration, and presentations and are comfortable navigating Zoom for meeting and presenting. Flipgrid is a particular favorite among students, allowing them the option to record video feedback to questions and prompts instead of writing. All classrooms are outfitted with SmartBoards and/or projectors and document cameras where appropriate, and STEM classrooms have sophisticated technology such as 3D printers to create models in computer programming courses. A laser cutter is used in mathematics classes to create jigsaw puzzles that bring geometry concepts to life. Math students use Kami to demonstrate how they arrive at the solutions to problems. Students in a government class used Blooket to review excerpts of Democratic and Republican platforms to inform their discussion on the legalization of drugs.

Part 4 - Capacity for Continuous Growth as a Learning Organization

Conceptual Understanding

The school leadership strongly understands the priority growth areas and works with the faculty to build a shared vision based on the school's core values and beliefs about learning. At the time of the collaborative conference visit, the school and community had identified the importance of student wellness as the staff was increasingly seeing the effects of stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues on students. The staff engaged in professional development leading to the implementation of the RULER program, and a structural change was made to the master schedule, adding the U Block as a support period to lessen the stress level of the over-scheduled students and faculty. Thus, the creation of the vision of the graduate and the district's strategic plan reflects this belief in the importance of social-emotional health and wellness in the education of the whole child. This is a clear and firm stand in a district with high expectations for student achievement and a history of success by traditional measures of test scores, graduation rates, and college acceptances. Students, faculty, parents, school board members, and school and district administrators have a sophisticated understanding and passion for the importance of social-emotional learning for the entire school community. This need was magnified during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the work reaped real rewards in a time of great challenge. Students returned to school for a hybrid year, ready to learn, and the entire faculty and leadership team placed the physical, social, and emotional wellness of students as the top priority for students.

Given the extraordinary circumstances, the school has been unable to fully engage in Priority Areas 2, 3, and 4 with less ability for teachers to participate in professional development, make community connections for real-world learning, or find time and energy for data analysis and interdisciplinary collaboration. There has been some progress, but as the school transitions out of crisis mode, time and resources will be needed for professional learning and curriculum development to focus teachers and support staff on these goals. It will be necessary for the school to deeply embed the vision of the graduate and develop a shared conceptual understanding of how these priority areas support this endpoint and optimal and effective learning.

Commitment

Manchester Essex Regional High School has a strong commitment to growth in the priority areas, and stakeholders value the vision of the graduate document as a central focus for the school and district. School and district leaders recognize the pressure for historically high-achieving, successful schools to rest on that success and resist change. With this understanding, leaders have worked hard to ensure that the school's culture is reflective, collaborative, and dedicated to continuous growth and improvement. Most significantly, district leadership and the school committee decided to develop and adopt a district vision of the graduate as the most effective way to implement Priority Area 1. The district strategic plan outlines specific goals and areas for development. The school is empowered through professional development, necessary resources, and encouragement to try new ideas that reflect research-based best practices. In this way, the faculty actively models for students the importance of inquiry, analysis, reflection, collaboration, and the productive struggle necessary for real learning. The pandemic forced an adjustment in the school's priorities over two years, placing greater emphasis on SEL, school safety, and technology integration. As the school moves forward, it will be essential to re-engage all faculty members in each priority area as they provide students new opportunities to learn, practice, receive feedback, and demonstrate growth and achievement of its vision of the graduate.

Competency

The school engaged in extensive professional development in SEL through the RULER program and other professional activities. Traditional professional development was understandably curtailed during the Covid-19 pandemic; however, the professional staff actively engages in school, district, and outside professional

development. There is ample funding for teachers and school leaders to take courses and pursue graduate studies that support individual, school, and district goals. Progress has been made in Priority Areas 2, 3, and 4. A school-wide professional learning initiative and scheduled time and resources for collaboration and implementation will be needed for these practices to become accepted and consistently applied throughout the school.

Capacity

The school has the necessary resources and support to progress in itspriority areas. There is a strong investment in education from the community. District leaders provide collaboration time for faculty and administrators in developing a shared vision for the school. Currently, some changes are being considered to the department leadership structure to facilitate this work, and the professional staff would benefit from more consistently scheduled time for professional collaboration.

The leadership team balances directive leadership with collaboration and teacher agency, creating a positive, professional community where things get done. Creativity and experimentation in research-based best practices are encouraged, and the school is a nurturing environment for growing good ideas. In the most difficult of circumstances educators could have imagined, the staff and students of Manchester Essex Regional High School managed to keep moving forward, remaining focused on the school's core values and vision of the graduate, and turned a crisis into an opportunity to grow and learn.

Additional Information

Additional Information
Changes in Principle ratings since the Collaborative Conference
Standard 1 Principle 1.2

School's rating in the Self-Reflection report: Developing

School's rating in the Summary Report: Implementing

School's explanation: MERHS developed a vision of the graduate that has become the foundation of the district's strategic plan. School and teacher goals are tied directly to the vision of the graduate. As a result, the vision drives decisions about curriculum, instruction, and the student experience.

Standard 2 Principle 2.1

School's rating in the Self-Reflection report: Developing

School's rating in the Summary Report: Implementing

School's explanation: MERHS developed a vision of the graduate that has become the foundation of the district's strategic plan. School and teacher goals are tied directly to the vision of the graduate. As a result, the vision drives curriculum, assessment, and student experience decisions.

Standard 2 Principle 2.2

School's rating in the Self-Reflection report: Developing

School's rating in the Summary Report: Implementing

School's explanation: MERHS connects the vision of the graduate to curriculum maps, instructional practices, and assessments.

Commendations

Commendation

The inclusive nature of building the vision of the graduate for the district through the engagement of all the stakeholders, followed by the inclusion of the vision of the graduate in the strategic plan, and the "Back to the Future" protocol inviting staff to imagine and think big about the future of the school and its students

Commendation

The commitment of the entire school to social-emotional learning and student well-being and its positive impact on school climate, culture, and student learning and achievement

Commendation

The increased emphasis on student self-reflection and metacognition activities in alignment with the school's vision of the graduate

Commendation

The use of special education and general education co-teaching partnerships in English language arts and mathematics to support students

Commendation

The interdisciplinary collaboration pilot for physics and calculus

Commendation

The creation of a definition and shared vision of student-centered learning

Commendation

The use of U Block to address students' individual academic, social, and emotional needs

Commendation

The integration of SEL into the vision of the graduate and daily instruction with students

Commendation

The professional staff's commitment to students' well-being and its correlation to student achievement and the education of the whole child

Commendation

The use of student choice and interests in creating summative assessment options in some classes

The senior final project that allows students an immersive experience in an area of interest that shows their attainment of the school's vision of the graduate skills

The relevance and connection of learning to students' lives

The incorporation of project-based learning as an instructional strategy

The school's extensive elective offerings that support the interests and career goals of students

The development of authentic and relevant assessments that engage students

The frequent use of technology by teachers and students to support instruction, collaboration, differentiation, and assessment

Additional Recommendations

Recommendation

Develop a plan for consistent, systematic revision opportunities across disciplines

Recommendation

Ensure that students meet with school counselors when choosing a class that differs from the teacher's recommendation

Recommendation

Develop instructional strategies that more fully emphasize inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills in grades nine and ten

Recommendation

Develop more opportunities for students to present learning to audiences

Recommendation

N/A

Recommendation

N/A

Recommendation

N/A

Recommendation

N/A

Recommendation

N/A

Recommendation

N/A

FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES

This Initial/Decennial Accreditation Report of the Visiting Team reflects the findings of the school's Summary Report 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 the 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.

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.

To monitor the school's progress, the Commission requires that the principal submit a First Report of Progress and Planning and routine Three- and Six-Year Reports of Progress and Planning describing the school's progress implementing the Priority Areas as well as submitting an updated improvement/growth plan. The Commission may request additional Special Progress Reports if one or more of the Standards or Priority Areas for Growth are not being met in a satisfactory manner, if additional information is needed on matters relating to the school's alignment with the Standards for Accreditation, or substantive changes occur in the school.

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 impacts the change has had on the school's ability to meet 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 on Progress and Planning 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, hosted a Collaborative Conference, developed an improvement/growth plan, and completed a Summary Report. The time and effort dedicated to the Accreditation process, school improvement/growth, the Summary Report, and the preparation for the visit ensured a successful Initial/Decennial Accreditation 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: Ms. Susan Bureau - Alvirne High School

Assistant Chair: Ms. Catherine Knowles - Worcester Public Schools

Team Members

Jacqui Perkins - Carver Middle High School

Nicole Semas-Schneeweis - Whitman-Hanson Regional High School

Matt Strother - Natick High School

Anthony Suppa - Nantucket High School