

NEWTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS Systemwide Goals 2004-2006

The Newton Public Schools are committed to meeting the learning needs of all students, thereby increasing student achievement and each student's ability to transfer and apply knowledge in the future as citizens, as well as in the present as students in our schools and community. The Newton Public Schools will meet this high standard of excellence by continuing to ensure that the K-12 curriculum offers a coherent course of study, yet remains flexible enough to allow for differentiation according to children's needs; that the diversity that exists within the school population is recognized; that teachers' judgment in making sound instructional decisions for the students they meet every day is respected; and that the school system's core value of respect for human differences permeates our work (see attached mission statement).

With the cooperation of all members of the school community, the system seeks to hold true to this shared vision and its values while it sets out to accomplish the goals specific to 2004-2006 as outlined below.

We have identified four key areas that are of primary importance to the Newton Public Schools going forward. In naming these, we are not suggesting that they are the only significant topics for us to address, nor that all the earlier goals are completed and no longer part of the school system's agenda. Rather, we are seeking a strategic focus to help the School Committee and the Superintendent address fundamental issues facing the Newton Public Schools today.

1. Improvement in Teaching and Learning

The ultimate goal of a Newton education is to prepare all students for successful lives and constructive citizenship. At all levels this requires a focus on the academic/educational and the personal/social development of the "whole child."

At the elementary level, this has been accomplished through the existence of neighborhood schools and grade level teams. At the secondary level, this requires a grade 6-12 program that emphasizes strong academic challenge, and also offers students balance in their school and personal lives through co- and extra-curricular activities. The program should be rigorous but not rigid, coherent but not inflexible, continuing the elementary schools' emphasis on standards-based instruction that acknowledges individual differences and student diversity. The curriculum should articulate learning expectations across grade levels, so that previous learning is reinforced by subsequent instruction. At the same time, schools need to be attentive

to the social/emotional needs of students and create structures and programs to ensure that students are personally connected to the adults who work with them.

To achieve this goal, we will focus our efforts on the secondary level in the following manner (while continuing to support small learning teams at the elementary level):

- articulate consistent learning expectations at our schools, while allowing for innovative and creative teaching styles;
- provide professional development focusing on defining curriculum content in grades 6-8, in alignment with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks;
- provide professional development for teachers in the use and integration of technology into the curriculum, and support as they work to incorporate these new skills into their teaching practice;
- support teachers' continuing development of a repertoire of effective instructional classroom strategies, such as differentiated instruction in grades 9-12, for meeting the academic needs of all students;
- integrate four major concepts at the high schools to promote a high quality standards-based learning environment that attends to the individual needs of students: smaller learning communities, time and learning standards, other structured learning time, and graduation requirements;
- implement a pilot advisory program in the 9th grade at both high schools; and
- utilize *Critical Friends Groups* as the model to promote teacher dialogue and examination of student work.

2. Workforce/Organizational Development

The most important interactions that occur in our school system are those that take place every day in classrooms between teachers and students. Nothing is more crucial to the Newton Public Schools going forward than recruiting, retaining and nurturing highly qualified teachers who are prepared to give their best to Newton students. This goal is especially crucial as our school system, like others around the nation, is experiencing a significant turnover in our workforce. With many retirements and new professionals joining our staff, we must find ways to carry on Newton's tradition of excellence, to pass the baton to the next generation of educators. A strong professional development program, along with a constructive system of supervision and evaluation, is key to realizing this goal. Additionally, Newton must anticipate the impending national crisis in educational leadership: with fewer mid-career educators aspiring to administrative and leadership roles in public schools.

Newton must groom, recruit and retain exceptional educators to take on the leadership challenges that exist in many areas of the system.

Organizationally, our goal is to create the conditions under which teachers and administrators can do their best work and students can do their best learning. To that end, the central administration should function increasingly as a service center for the schools rather than their command and control center. In addition, the administration should be structured and staffed in such a way to free the superintendent to attend to the other major priorities outlined in this document.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- comply with Federal standards to employ a “highly qualified” staff by providing standards-based professional development, streamlining Human Resource procedures, and utilizing new professional development software;
- continue efforts to develop leaders among our existing staff by enrolling a new cohort in the observing/analyzing teaching course, and by offering leadership seminars to last year’s cohort;
- enhance the model for mentoring new teachers by placing a greater emphasis on building-based efforts;
- strengthen our process for recruiting, retaining and nurturing the staff by introducing efficient and effective hiring practices, and offering support groups for minority staff;
- implement a new teacher evaluation instrument as a tool for the continuous improvement of classroom instruction; and
- use feedback from principals and new information technology tools to guide the Education Center in our effort to provide timely and accurate services to the schools.

3. Physical Assets

Providing high quality education requires systematic attention to a school system’s capital stock, including its buildings and equipment. Our school system’s physical plant is aging and has historically been under-maintained. This trend must be reversed by developing a comprehensive plan for the renovation, replacement, and wise use of Newton’s school buildings—and for their ongoing maintenance. These efforts need to be appropriately coordinated with City departments and officials.

Also vital is the updating of our strategic plan for the acquisition, maintenance, and periodic upgrading of technology, both for instructional purposes and for the school department’s own management. Given past difficulties in acquiring funds for

technology, it is important to identify a predictable, steady, renewable revenue stream dedicated to technology.

To achieve these goals we will:

- review and analyze the school system population and all demographic factors to determine the optimum size, grade levels, and locations for elementary schools;
- create an Elementary School Building Task Force to establish a current priority order of renovation and/or replacement of elementary schools;
- utilize our reliable multi-year forecasting tool for enrollment projections, including ten-year forecasts to allow long-term planning;
- utilize appropriate consulting input to evaluate all current facilities (buildings) and needs;
- identify and document capital needs (CIP) with City officials in order to support regular improvements to school buildings;
- develop a thoughtful maintenance plan including an automated preventive maintenance program; implement and evaluate the School Dude program during FY05;
- continue to collaborate with the City Public Buildings Department to streamline day-to-day maintenance response to provide improved, timely service to schools;
- review and update safety and security policies and protocol for all schools;
- continue to implement the existing technology plan;
- develop a long-range plan including: acquisition options including leasing, regular upgrades to network, equipment, and software, management tools, and effective instructional uses of technology; and
- refine and continue to implement copyright, safety and security policies for the use of technology in the district.

4. Public Engagement

None of the challenges above can be met without strong, informed public support for the Newton Public Schools among parents, elected officials, and citizens at large. There needs to be clarity about how and why decisions are made. Public

involvement can add value on key matters. Citizens have the right to expect from the School Committee and Superintendent a consistent, clear voice articulating the values, priorities, and programs of the Newton Public Schools. The School Committee intends to develop a communications plan that will help make the Committee more visible and accessible to all constituencies and more effective at sharing its own views. The School Committee and the Superintendent will work together to increase capacity to gather input and feedback from parents, staff and community members and to strengthen working relationships with the media and other City officials who represent our community.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- create outreach mechanisms to provide the public with important information about the Newton Public Schools, including but not limited to newsletters and school calendars;
- visit every school during the year and attend PTO meetings at every school with opportunities for interaction with staff and parents (School Committee);
- engage the public through public forums, school improvement surveys, and other tools;
- continue Superintendent's coffees to discuss NPS issues with parents in residential settings;
- continue development of the School Department <www.newton.mec.edu> and School Committee <www.newtonpublicschools.com> web sites, to provide regular informational updates, an interactive communications tool for teachers and parents, and highlights of school activities and accomplishments; and
- extend outreach and connections beyond school and parent groups to key community organizations by attending meetings or offering presentations/discussions with the goal of creating meaningful opportunities for interaction (School Committee).

Goals Approved by School Committee September 27, 2004

RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIFFERENCES

Mission Statement

The Newton Public Schools will provide a climate that actively promotes social justice where children perform at the highest levels. To that end, the Newton Public Schools will work:

- To provide—and be self-reflective about—authentic, effective, challenging and creative instruction that is responsive to different learning styles and improves student achievement. Respect for human differences places the learner at the center of the teaching and learning and fashions instruction that builds upon the learner’s unique strengths and addresses his/her needs;
- To encourage the broadest understanding and acceptance of human differences (including differences in socio-economic class, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, language, learning styles, special needs, physical appearance, disabilities, sexual orientation, etc.) while affirming fundamental similarities of the human community;
- To recognize our role in fostering high expectations and maximum challenge for all students and our responsibility for consistently examining our practice and our expectations for students with differences of race, gender, socio-economic class, language, learning styles;
- To continue to work through Empowering Multicultural Initiative (EMI) to make Newton an active anti-racist school system and community, through system-wide coordination of our commitment to respect for human differences.

Mission Statement - Approved by School Committee: October 9, 2001