

**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

**COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

***REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE***

**Ipswich High School**

**Ipswich, Massachusetts**

**March 6-9, 2005**

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**COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

**STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION**

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**FOR**

**HIGH SCHOOLS  
MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOLS  
AND  
K-12 SCHOOLS**

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**Effective for Schools  
Hosting Visiting Committees  
Beginning in the Year 2005**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Statement On Limitations**

**Introduction**

**Overview of Findings**

Quality of Self-Study

Discussion of Significant Findings regarding Teaching and Learning and the Support of Teaching and Learning

School and Community Report

School's Statement of Mission and Learning Expectations

Teaching and Learning Standards

Mission and Expectations	16
Curriculum	23
Instruction	30
Assessment of Student Learning	39
Support of Teaching and Learning Standards	47
Leadership and Organization	48
School Resources for Learning	58
Community Resources for Learning	71
Follow-up Responsibilities	77
<b>Appendices</b>	
A. Roster of Team Members	7

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## **STATEMENT ON LIMITATIONS**

### **The Distribution, Use and Scope of the Visiting Committee Report**

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

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

## INTRODUCTION

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) is the oldest of 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 five Commissions: the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), the Commission on Independent Schools (CIS), the Commission on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS), the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI), and the Commission on Public Elementary Schools (CPES).

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

Those Standards are:

### Teaching and Learning Standards

- Mission and Expectations for Student Learning
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment of Student Learning

### Support Standards

- Leadership and Organization
- School Resources for Learning
- Community Resources for Learning

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

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

A steering committee of the professional staff was appointed to supervise the myriad details inherent in the school's self-study. At Ipswich High School, a committee of 3 members with the principal serving in an *ex officio* capacity supervised all aspects of the self-study. The steering committee assigned all teachers and administrators in the school to appropriate subcommittees to determine the quality of all programs, activities, and facilities available for young people. In addition to faculty members, the self-study committees included twelve parents and two board members.

The study of Ipswich High School extended over a period of 20 school months from June 2003 to March 2005.

The visiting committee was pleased to note that parents and school board members joined the professional staff in the self-study deliberations.

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

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

### **The Process Used by the Visiting Committee**

A visiting committee of fifteen evaluators was assigned by the Commission on Public Secondary Schools to evaluate Ipswich High School in light of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The Committee members spent four days in Ipswich, Massachusetts. They reviewed the self-study documents which had been prepared for their examination. The Committee members also met with administrators, teachers, other school and system personnel, students, and parents to determine the degree to which the school meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. Since the evaluators represented public schools from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts, diverse points of view were brought to bear on the evaluation of Ipswich High School.

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

- review of the school's self-study materials
- a total of 45 hours of classroom observation
- numerous informal observations in and around the school
- tours of the facility
- shadowing of 15 students for a half day
- individual meetings with teachers about their work, instructional approaches, and the assessment of student learning
- group meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, and teachers
- the examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school

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

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

## **Overview of Findings**

*Although the conclusions of the visiting committee on the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation appear in various sections of this report, the committee wishes to highlight some findings in paragraphs that follow. These findings are not intended to be a summary of the report.*

### Mission and Expectations for Student Learning

Ipswich High School is an excellent school with a positive and supportive learning environment which reflects the values and beliefs incorporated into the mission statement. Ultimately, the statement of mission and expectations became a collaborative effort by the entire school community. The students appear to be aware of the scope and sequence of the academic expectations contained in the mission. They feel safe in their school and consider it to be a positive learning environment. The mission statement plays a central role in guiding the development of new programs and defining the culture of the school. However, the process of evaluating academic expectations through school-wide rubrics is new. Rubrics are not yet widely disseminated.

### Curriculum

The curriculum is revised and developed through the work of the subject area committees (SACs). The SACs are recommending bodies only. They review the work of the core curriculum- math, English, science, and social studies. The rotation of teachers through the SAC process allows for broad-based participation, but also negatively impacts consistency. SAC activity has been centered primarily around MCAS evaluation and curriculum revision during the summer. Ipswich High School is administered through a 4x4 block schedule. Faculty members and students are satisfied with the benefits of the block. Within the block format, however, the curriculum guides need to be revised to reflect a greater emphasis on depth of understanding over breadth of coverage..

### Instruction

Engaging students as active learners is central to the instructional focus of the school. Teachers utilize a repertoire of instructional strategies that promote active, authentic, self-directed learning in a personalized manner. Some teachers design lessons and assessments that require analytical skill on the part of the students. An examination of student work, assessments and discussions with teachers, however, indicate that higher order thinking skills often do not reach beyond analysis on the Bloom's Taxonomy scale. Evidence of synthesis and generalization were present – but substantially less common than simple analysis. Instructional practice is revised by teachers who receive feedback from many sources. These include: the mentoring program, summer institute, and curriculum revision meetings. Instructional feedback from supervisors is minimal, however. Discussion of instructional strategies is an informal part of the professional culture of the school. Without formal, dedicated time for the discussion of instructional practices, there is no assurance that these informal, collegial conversations will continue or have any meaningful, consistent impact.

### Assessment

Most students at Ipswich High School understand the school-wide academic expectations as well as the course-specific learning goals for their classes. However, the school has no formal process for measuring success in achieving its civic and social expectations. The existing rubric to determine school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the stated expectations does not clearly articulate levels of achievement. The development of classroom rubrics based on school-wide rubrics began with the approval of the school's mission statement last year. There has been little formal training in using and incorporating rubrics. Nevertheless, there is a commitment by staff and administration to provide the training and time to achieve this goal. At present, there is no formal process for reviewing and implementing appropriate assessment data. Without such a formalized process, teachers have incomplete information when reviewing and revising curriculum. The student work supplied to the visiting committee was representative of student work at Ipswich High School. The student work examined assisted the committee in evaluating the assessment and other appropriate standards.

### Leadership

The principal has the autonomy and the support needed from the superintendent and school committee to lead and make changes as appropriate. The leadership of the principal and assistant principal creates and maintains a shared vision, direction, and focus for student learning at Ipswich High School. Both administrators are approachable by students, faculty and parents. All are comfortable with their leadership style, and they represent a well-synchronized administrative combination which accrues to the benefit of the high school. Teacher observation and evaluation is a formative process of growth which has been underutilized by both administrators. They are aware of the problem, however, and are making plans to correct oversights. Parents and students have meaningful role in the decision-making process at the high school. The site-based management approach is effectively managed and utilized for the benefit of all connected with the high school. In addition to administration, the culture of this high school contains a high degree of respect and trust between students and teachers. There is an extraordinary level of caring exhibited at all levels of staff and administration.

### School Resources

Student support services are adequate to meet the needs of the mission and expectations of Ipswich High School. Student support personnel at IHS work collaboratively with faculty, and staff members, and the broader community to provide students with the tools needed to meet the school's expectations. The library staff is particularly strong and works cooperatively with teachers to achieve special project goals. Integration of library services has a positive impact on curriculum and instruction. Although many members of the guidance staff are new, they are eager to develop developmental and other guidance services to assist students.

### Community Resources

Ipswich High School works hard to secure community and local business support for educational programs at the high school. However, funding sources are unpredictable and unreliable. This unpredictability limits the implementation of long-range goals. Apart from funding, however, is the issue of safety compliance certification for the elevator and kitchen hood. This new facility should be in defacto compliance, but the paperwork was not in place to support this belief. The building is clean and in good repair, but maintenance and future capital infrastructure needs are a concern. Maintenance outsourcing may be found to be cost ineffective when analyzed. There is no plan to address long-term capital needs. With some attention to details noted in this report, this excellent school can maintain and improve upon its service to its students. The members of the school community may justifiably take pride in their achievements.



**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.**

**SCHOOL'S STATEMENT OF MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS  
FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

# **TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS**

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**MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR  
STUDENT LEARNING**

**CURRICULUM**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**

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## **MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS**

# 1

## **Mission and Expectations for Student Learning**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The mission and expectations for student learning at Ipswich High School were developed over a two-year period. Originally, the committee consisted of three teachers and the high school principal who reported monthly to the faculty. The mission statement was initially approved by the faculty and school committee in the spring of 2003. However, the decision was made to revisit the document and increase the number of participants the following fall. The second committee consisted of faculty members, parents, students, and the principal. The revised mission and student expectations were unanimously approved by the faculty, school council, and school committee between February and March, 2004. Parents, students, and community members had an opportunity to contribute to the development of the document at school council meetings. As a result of the depth of this process, the development of the mission statement was a collaboration of the entire school community. (self-study, panel presentation, parents)

Ipswich High School's mission statement reflects the fundamental values and beliefs held by the school community: student-centered, collaborative learning. The current document is based on the pre-existing district mission statement. Students who spoke with the committee were able to discuss the mission and academic expectations, felt safe in and positive about their school, and felt encouraged to take advantage of a variety of academic choices. In accordance with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom philosophy, the community believes that learning is a collaborative, student-centered endeavor in which teachers act as facilitators and models for life-long learning. At Ipswich High School, there is a partnership with parents and the larger community, evidenced by the BRIDGE and school to work programs, breakfast with the principal, and participation of parents on committees, school council, and the advisory program. Decisions that affect school climate and culture involve input from school council, student government, faculty members and parents. Ipswich High School provides a variety of teaching and learning strategies, and a supportive school climate. These elements are conducive to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and support the school's fundamental beliefs about student learning. (panel presentation, self-study, parents, class observations, students)

The Ipswich High School Mission Statement and Learning Expectations document defines four measurable academic, three social, and two civic expectations that reflect the school's mission. The academic expectations are clear, and students are aware of what they need to know and be able to do by the time they graduate. The social and civic expectations reflect the school's core beliefs in a student-centered environment of tolerance, respect, and trust. Thus, students have a clear idea of what is expected for them to be successful and responsible citizens. (self-study, principal, parents, mission committee)

Ipswich High School has established a clear, school-wide rubric for each of the four academic expectations in its mission statement. However, not all teacher/course rubrics are directly linked to the academic expectations identified in those rubrics. There are four levels of performance in each rubric: exemplary, proficient, satisfactory, and limited. The school has agreed upon a minimum target level of satisfactory for each of the four academic expectations. Students and staff members are enthusiastic about using these rubrics and speak of the advantages of having consistent school-wide rubrics. (students, panel presentation, teachers, parents, school leadership team, self-study)

Ipswich High School acquires feedback about civic and social expectations from several sources. The assistant principal submits semi-annual reports on data collected regarding referrals for student behavior. The number of harassments, fights, verbal abuse, and insubordination incidents are compared using benchmarks established last year. The school also tracks the amount of involvement in extra-curricular activities and participation in athletics. A community service project graduation requirement begins in the ninth grade. Students participate in a career day and job shadowing program which can culminate in the Bringing Reality into the Diverse Growth Experience (BRIDGE) program in the twelfth grade that provides work experience. Membership in the diversity club has increased. Student government members are required to participate and vote in town meetings. The school has a political science requirement, so all students take four classes of history to increase awareness of current events. Five students sit on the school council. All students participate in an advisory program. The drop-out rate is less than two percent. In addition, however, a database would be helpful in evaluating the information gathered regarding student academic, social, and civic expectations. (panel presentation, teachers, students, school leadership, self-study)

The school is driven by its mission statement to change and adopt new programs. Discussion surrounding the mission statement led to the implementation of an advisory program this year. Since this program reaches all students, it creates opportunities for them to attain the school's social and civic expectations even if they do not participate in extra-curricular activities. Other examples include a teens against dating abuse program for high school students initiated by a middle school teacher, a school-to-work program for at-risk students, an emphasis on technology programs, and the development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom philosophy and indicators. The school is constantly reviewing and improving its award-winning music, drama, and arts programs as well. The school climate is very positive. Tolerance, respect, and trust are common themes in all classrooms, depicted in hallway posters, and modeled by the staff. School spirit is tremendous and students display an enormous amount of pride in their school. The 90-minute semester block is very popular both with parents and school because it allows for in-depth exploration of course material. Parents and students surveyed have enthusiastically accepted the use of rubrics for student evaluation. Teachers clearly communicate their academic expectations, and the student body understands the requirements of each level of performance. Currently, attaining a satisfactory level for each expectation is not a graduation requirement. Since school-wide rubrics for

academic expectations have not been widely disseminated, however, parents have a limited understanding of the acceptable levels of performance and descriptive criteria for meeting the academic expectations. Thus, to complete information and support for its system, the school should make sure there are many, different opportunities for parents to become familiar with expectations and the functions and form of rubrics. (panel presentation, teachers, students, school leadership, self-study)

Ipswich High School uses feedback from a variety of sources to assure itself that its expectations reflect student needs, community expectations, and state standards. IHS takes pride in the fact that it has been named a Compass School and is currently a candidate for Blue Ribbon School recognition. The school uses scores from PSATs, SATs, and MCAS to support its expectations, but it does not yet have a data base in place to evaluate individual student achievement of academic expectations. (panel presentation, teachers, students, school leadership, self-study)

Ipswich High School has put in place a plan to review the mission statement at the end of every school year. Because this is the first year school-wide rubrics have existed, Ipswich High School has not yet begun to evaluate its expectations for student achievement. Students and the school community strongly support the new mission statement and expectations. Some teachers have begun to record those achievement levels on report cards and progress reports, but there is no comprehensive process to gather data to measure their impact on the mission. Updates to the mission statement and student expectations will be impeded by the lack of data and a strategy for collecting and analyzing data about student achievement. (self-study, teachers, school leadership)

### **Commendations**

1. The collaborative, supportive, student-centered approach to learning
2. The reflection of the school's core beliefs about student learning
3. The school community's support of the mission
4. The positive school climate of tolerance, respect, and trust
5. The role of the mission statement in guiding the development of new programs and defining the culture of the school

### **Recommendations**

1. Determine the connection between student performance on the academic expectations and graduation requirements, ensuring the school-wide rubrics are used to assess the academic expectations
2. Develop a formal process to update the mission and expectations for student learning using data collected from the application of school-wide rubrics
3. Align teacher and course rubrics with the school-wide rubrics that will be used to assess the academic expectations in the mission

## **CURRICULUM**

## 2

### **Curriculum**

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Ipswich High School (IHS) has recently rewritten its mission statement. It clearly articulates its academic expectations for students. Every department has assumed responsibility for providing students with opportunities to meet these expectations, and they are a guiding force in the school. (curriculum guides, self study, web site)

The curriculum is aligned with school-wide academic expectations and provides opportunities for students to achieve most of these expectations. The written curriculum conforms to a standard format for each course listing the standards, essential questions, expectations for student learning, unit expectations/outcomes, suggested assessments, instruction methods/student learning experiences, materials and resources. Using these guides, teachers have incorporated the mission and expectations for student learning into the curriculum and have developed their own rubrics that measure student achievement of these academic expectations. As a result, there is an increasing consistency within the academic expectations and improved preparation for instruction. (curriculum guides, self-study, teachers)

The curriculum engages students in inquiry, problem-solving, and application of knowledge and skills through class activities and projects. Field research in environmental science and marine and coastal science, activity-based programs such as exploring technology and performance-based opportunities provide opportunities for authentic application of knowledge and skills. An intellectually rigorous curriculum is the key to enabling Ipswich High School students to be successful at the college and university level. However, more opportunities are needed for students to practice and develop those higher order thinking skills which are central to intellectual rigor. Insufficient emphasis on these skills impedes students' performance in academically rigorous situations. (classroom observation, student work, final exams)

In some areas, the curriculum emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth of coverage. However, in some of the written curricula, samples of student work and final exams do not sufficiently emphasize depth over breadth. There is no formal plan in place to integrate higher order thinking skills into the curriculum. Some teachers collaborate informally, and have developed cross-curricular projects such as perspective drawing in geometry. Because of limited collaboration and insufficient emphasis on depth of understanding over breadth of coverage, students have fewer opportunities to make connections and to develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum. (student work, classroom observations, curriculum guides)

IHS provides opportunities for students to extend learning beyond the normal course offerings on the school campus through field trips, Virtual High School, the BRIDGE

program, independent study, and community service. Ipswich High School's music program, ranked among the top 100 in the country, enjoys a high rate of student participation. There are two or three major concerts and a number of performances in public service areas. Clubs and organizations such as Amnesty International, mock trial, drama club, and math league are integral components of the culture of IHS. These alternative educational experiences enrich student learning. (self-study, program of studies, student)

Monthly department meetings allow for effective curricular coordination within departments at the high school. subject area committees (SAC) in four of the core areas (mathematics, science, social studies, English) and in the arts attempt to articulate curriculum vertically K – 12. However, since these committees are recommending bodies only, implementation is not always effective. Additionally, at the high school, clear articulation is dependent upon communication and collaboration between the SAC representative and the department head. In many instances, teachers voiced concern over lack of implementation of recommendations at the sending schools. While rotating teachers as SAC representatives enables more teachers to have a voice in the process, the turnover adversely affects continuity. Though time is available in the schedule for departments to work collaboratively, that time has been used for other purposes. This has negatively impacted the articulation between/among departments. (teachers, leadership, self-study)

The library/media center effectively supports and enhances the implementation of the curriculum. The librarian solicits input from teachers for purchase of materials. However, because of heavy use of the media center, access to the facility is not always possible. The librarian attempts to meet the needs of the students by selecting appropriate support materials for individual classes and sending these materials to the classroom. While this practice reduces the opportunities for students themselves to select and evaluate reference materials and sources, it increases the number of students who are able to utilize library resources. (survey, teachers, self-study)

The professional staff is actively involved in the revision and evaluation of curriculum. A formal plan, Phase III Curriculum Development, has been developed that assigns SAC members the tasks of evaluating and revising curriculum as well as identifying professional development needs. However, the foreign language department is not part of the SAC initiative, and there is limited involvement of the entire staff in data-based curriculum revision. Highly qualified individuals are on staff and willing to share with colleagues. The administration strongly supports individual professional development requests. (teachers, curriculum guides, leadership)

The school commits sufficient time, financial resources and personnel to the development and revision of curriculum. SAC members examine MCAS data and make

recommendations to improve curriculum. For the past few summers, teachers have been paid to revise/write curriculum. However, there is little evidence to show that data was used to make informed decisions to improve curriculum in all disciplines. Although there is a new two-year plan for evaluation of curriculum, the Phase III Curriculum Development Document, the process has not yet reached the evaluation and reflection stage. SAC members are scheduled to complete this stage this spring. (Phase III Curriculum Development, leadership, teachers)

At IHS there has been limited professional development for all teachers to support the development and implementation of curriculum. Members of SAC have developed a Phase III document upon recommendations of an educational consultant from Education Designs. Using paid summer workshop days, teachers have spent time developing curriculum to support the mission statement and academic expectations that include essential questions. Teachers have developed rubrics to measure student attainment of these academic expectations. However, some rubrics, even at the exemplary level do not require sufficient use of depth over breadth and higher order thinking skills. In addition, some of the essential questions found in curriculum guides do not meet, in best practice, the definition of essential questions. This limits student opportunities to evaluate and synthesize information. (leadership, curriculum guides, rubrics)

**Commendations:**

1. Development of curriculum guides integrating mission and expectations
2. Adherence of curriculum guides to a consistent format linking expectations for student learning to curriculum
3. The award-winning music program for its opportunities to engage students in authentic learning
4. The faculty's use of real life applications
5. A dedicated faculty willing to share knowledge, ideas and expertise
6. The librarian's support of curricular projects

**Recommendations:**

1. Ensure that all rubrics are written so as to measure the degree to which students have achieved the academic expectations
2. Provide more opportunities for students to independently engage in activities that require greater depth of study and higher order thinking skills
3. Provide dedicated time for cross-curricular collaboration to enrich curricular

offerings.

4. Direct efforts toward professional development in the area of essential questions and rubrics
5. Ensure effective curricular coordination and articulation with sending schools in the district

## **INSTRUCTION**

### 3

## **Instruction**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Ipswich High School teachers use instructional strategies that are consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning. Teachers have embraced the block scheduling, and many examples of collaborative learning were evidenced in classrooms observed. In the majority of classes at least one academic, social, or civic expectation was the focus of instruction with many others being a secondary element of the lesson. Teaching practices which address the academic expectations include project-based learning, technology integrated with the curriculum, and authentic applications to learning. Social expectations are addressed through personalized instruction as well as cooperative learning techniques that require the interdependence of students. Civic expectations are represented in the three-year community service requirement for social studies and the required political science class. As a result, the school is a motivated community striving to acquire the knowledge essential to become successful and responsible citizens. (self-study, classroom observations, teachers)

From the development of drunk driving advertisements in health class to interactive learning games in foreign language to developing multimedia presentations across the curriculum, engagement of students as active learners permeates the school. Students report that this is common in their classes. Students are engaged as self-directed learners. For example, in journalism class students independently follow the process from beginning to end in publishing their monthly newspaper. In music, students are self-coached and peer-mentored in learning new pieces to perform. Rubrics provide opportunities for students to understand the expectations of a task and make decisions about the performance level to which they will aspire. In the school survey twenty-six percent of the students reported that they have participated in self-directed field trips. Ipswich High School faculty employs instructional practices which personalize instruction and provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills in an authentic manner. There are many instances of personalized instruction in a variety of academic disciplines such as projects related to student interests, using personalized comments to students throughout the classes and development of strong personal relationships between students and staff members. Directed study provides opportunities for students to meet individually with their own teachers for clarification of instruction. However, classroom teachers have not been formally trained in differentiated instruction or the implementation of classroom accommodations and modifications. Thus, the use of differentiated instructional strategies that promote active, authentic, self-directed learning in a personalized manner is inconsistent. (classroom observation, teacher interview, parents, students)

There are some teachers making connections across disciplines. Two years ago there was an American studies course which incorporated English and social studies, but due to the need to realign the curriculum with the frameworks, it was eliminated. However, cross-disciplinary connections were observed as well as reported by faculty in combinations

such as art and music with English, English with history and the history of chemistry. There are few instances when teachers bring classes together or find time to work together to develop more varied interdisciplinary connections. There is no deliberate, formal approach that would encourage this process. Consequently, opportunities for students to generalize knowledge across disciplines have been missed. (teachers, classroom observation, self- study).

Some teachers involve students in higher order thinking skills to promote depth of understanding. Examples include “what if” history papers, web-quests that ask students to show connections, and authentic applications such as the salt marsh project. However, while classroom observations and review of work samples reveal many examples of application of learned material, fewer examples of generalization and synthesis were observed. Consequently, students are provided with limited opportunities to stretch their thinking to the highest levels that will promote depth of understanding. (self-study, work samples, classroom observations)

Some IHS teachers promote students’ self-reflection and self-assessment. Seventy percent of teachers indicated that they provide opportunities for students to assess their own work. A specific example includes course-long reflections on writing in English culminating in a final analysis of the student’s writing portfolio which incorporates writing from other disciplines. Some teachers report using exit surveys for student self-reflection. However, there was a clear discrepancy between teacher and student perception of self-assessment. Only twenty-seven percent of the students reported that they always or often assess their work. (classroom observations, student work, self-study, teachers)

Teachers informally use feedback from a variety of sources including other teachers, students, and parents as a means of improving instruction. In the self-study and interviews, teachers reported receiving feedback from the mentoring program, the Summer Institute, curriculum revision meetings, directed study, surveys and progress reports. Regular communication is maintained with parents and students. Because of block scheduling, teachers can incorporate this feedback in a timely manner and make revisions to lesson planning in time for second semester. However, supervisors do not appear to provide feedback to teachers as a means of improving instruction. Furthermore, there is no protocol such as Critical Friends that teachers use to formally examine and discuss assignments, student work products, or assessments. As a result, teachers do not have a formal procedure through which to receive feedback to improve instruction. (self-study, teachers, leadership team)

All teachers are certified in their field, and ninety-five percent of IHS teachers majored in their content area in college. In the survey, fifty percent of the teachers indicated they had participated in specific training in instructional strategies. When asked if they had ample opportunity to reflect on their teaching practice, thirty-one percent felt they had adequate time for this purpose. Many faculty members remain current on best practice

through participation in workshops for professional development. Teachers reported in interviews, however, that specific training in instructional strategies such as differentiated instruction is needed. While teachers are certified and knowledgeable in their content area, there is no formal structure to ensure that they are cognizant of current research on instructional approaches and reflective about their own practice. Therefore, the faculty's ability to keep current with instructional practices is negatively impacted. (self-study, survey, teachers, leadership team)

Discussion of instructional strategies is an informal part of the professional culture of the school. Nearly three quarters of the faculty feels discussion about instruction is a significant part of the school culture. Yet, most of the discussions are limited to informal opportunities by interested colleagues during such times as directed study, lunch, and before/after school. Many teachers expressed a desire to make these discussions more formal and subject-specific. Without formal, dedicated time for the discussion of instructional practices, there is no assurance that these collegial conversations will continue or that they will be accessed by all staff. (survey, teachers, self-study)

Technology is thoroughly integrated into and supportive of teaching and learning. Ninety-six percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that they incorporate technology to improve instruction and support student learning. The design of the kivas within each pod supports classroom presentations with ease and professionalism. Numerous outstanding examples of student and teacher use are evident throughout the school including power point presentations, digital photography, multimedia presentations, internet research, and graphing calculators. Professional development opportunities in technology have been available to staff members through summer and after school workshops. These support students to organize and effectively convey ideas through oral and written communication and increase computer literacy. (classroom observations, self study, facility tour)

Some professional development opportunities have been provided for both short term and ongoing improvement in instructional practices. Through summer workshops of "Ipswich University", and courses provided throughout the school year, technology training has been provided in such topics as digital video, assistive technology, designing Web pages, and Microsoft Office. Additionally, in the summer of 2004, a literacy course was offered to all teachers across the disciplines. Over the two year span of 2002-03 and 2003-04, approximately eighty percent of the teachers pursued individual offerings outside of the district to enhance their instructional practice through such programs as those offered by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. While there are clearly designed professional development plans for each teacher and a recently formed professional development committee, there is no formalized professional development plan for the school guided by analysis of data and instructional needs. This will detract from the school's ability to sustain initiatives essential for ongoing school improvement. (self-study, survey, teachers)

Teacher supervision and evaluation have been minimally used to improve instruction for the purpose of enhancing student learning and meeting student needs. By contract, non-professional status teachers are evaluated twice per year and professional status teachers are required to be formally evaluated every two years with written reports provided. For the past few years, however, many of the teachers at the high school have not been evaluated as scheduled. While teachers within their first three years of employment have been reviewed as required, those teachers with professional status have not. Teachers report that administration uses informal means to gather data about teaching and learning with limited feedback provided to teachers. Thus, formal supervision and evaluation do not play an integral or vital role in instructional improvement for individual or school-wide teaching practices. (self-study, school leadership team, teacher)

**Commendations:**

1. The integration of the mission statement with academic, social and civic expectations into the instructional program
2. The rich variety of active, self-directed learning opportunities to meet the needs of all students
3. The personal connections established with students through instructional practice
4. The extensive use of authentic learning experiences
5. The dynamic integration of technology across the curriculum

**Recommendations:**

1. Prioritize time for formal collaboration and planning of interdisciplinary instruction
2. Increase the number of learning experiences that involve generalization and synthesis
3. Provide ongoing professional development in instructional strategies to sustain initiatives essential for ongoing school improvement
4. Develop a formal protocol for teachers to receive feedback from colleagues and students as a means of improving instruction
5. Implement a formal research-based supervision and evaluation procedure to improve instruction that is purposefully connected to improvement in student learning



## **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**

## 4

### **Assessment of Student Learning** **CONCLUSIONS**

Ipswich High School's school-wide academic expectations, as reflected in the mission statement, were established prior to the 2004-2005 year. A rubric for determining the level of achievement of these expectations has been developed and included in course syllabi and classroom assessment procedures. Teachers use individual rubrics that reflect the four school-wide expectations when assigning student work. The school has not yet developed a method for formally reporting the levels of student achievement in meeting these school-wide expectations. However, a plan to utilize the report card and school web site to do so is in its initial stages. The report card, faculty meetings, the principal's monthly newsletter and informal conversations among the staff currently serve as the vehicles for the reporting of progress in this area. In the absence of a formalized process of reporting these levels of achievement, it is difficult for the school to determine individual student progress in achieving the stated school-wide academic expectations. (self-study, observations, teachers)

The school has no formal process for measuring success in achieving its civic and social expectations. The existing rubric to determine school-wide and individual student progress in achieving the stated expectations does not clearly articulate levels of achievement. While the academic expectations for student learning are posted in each classroom and around the school, the social and civic expectations are not. Data regarding the level of student participation in athletics and extra-curricular activities, honors won, the number and nature of school disciplinary offenses, and the number of hours and types of community service are collected and reported to the faculty by the assistant principal. The recording and storage of this data is inconsistent in terms of when it is collected and where it can be found. Student civic and social achievements are reported to the community through the school newspaper, local media and newsletters. While the school is collecting data to determine student success in meeting the school's stated civic and social expectations, there is no plan to analyze that data and thereby evaluate their success. There is no direct connection with graduation requirements. (observation, teachers, facility tour)

Most students at IHS understand the school-wide academic expectations as well as the course-specific learning goals for their classes. School-wide academic expectations are visible throughout the school via posters that appear in offices and classrooms. Most teachers distribute syllabi that reinforce the school's learning expectations as well as articulate the course's specific goals and detail the course of study the students will undertake. Rubrics for learning activities delineate the specific skills, knowledge, and behaviors that a student must demonstrate to achieve exemplary, proficient, satisfactory, or limited understanding of the subject matter. Verbal explanations reinforce these expectations. Also, in some cases, teachers share models which depict the desired learning outcomes. Students benefit from such specific directives regarding their

academic undertakings. However, there is inconsistency with regard to format, terminology, and use of rubrics by some teachers. Efforts to further standardize the use and formatting of rubrics are underway and will lead to greater clarity of learning objectives for students in each class. (facility tour, teachers, self-study, students)

Students routinely receive assignments with rubrics attached in addition to verbal prompts and explanations as to how the assignment will be evaluated. Student and school-wide academic expectations are also clearly stated in course syllabi and unit outlines. Examples of student work demonstrate that teachers use specific learning criteria to assess student academic work consistently and that students are cognizant of what they need to do to succeed. Work continues in ensuring that the faculty uses common language, format, and indicators when assessing student work. The development of classroom rubrics based on school-wide rubrics began with the approval of the school's mission statement last year. There has been little formal training in using and incorporating rubrics, however. The staff has expressed a desire for time to learn and explore the use of the rubric method of assessment to revise curriculum and improve instruction. (teachers, student work, self-study)

Students demonstrate mastery of academic goals using a variety of formats. Teachers evaluate students using traditional pen-and-paper homework assignments, quizzes, and tests, but they also assign a wide range of other types of assessments. Some examples of these are PowerPoint presentations, posters, lab reports, oral and written projects and reports, research papers, journal writing, and creative writing that requires students to evaluate and interpret material. Additionally, various subject-specific authentic assessments are also used, such as drafting house plans using computer-aided design (CAD), building a chair out of cardboard, and certifying vernal pools using scientific observation methods. Individual grading rubrics often accompany specific assignments. The English department requires student portfolios, and some other departments use them as an optional assessment to assess student growth over time. Thus, students have varied opportunities to demonstrate mastery and to match work products to their learning styles. (student work, teachers, self-study, student shadowing)

While teachers at Ipswich High School revise their curriculum and instruction, the changes they make are not always based on analysis of student assessments. There are several areas which make use of student assessment results to make such decisions, however. One example is the English and mathematics departments making changes based on recommendations by the subject area committee's (SAC's) analysis of Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) data. Analysis of eighth grade MCAS scores also led to the creation of a college preparatory level 1 program (CP1). Low advanced placement Spanish scores led to changes in that course's curriculum. Other changes to the curriculum arise out of need. An SAT review course was added based on student request. The science department's periodic evaluation of its ecology project has used student and teacher feedback to make regular revisions to this

project. Summer curriculum work by departments has led to curricular changes, but it is not clear how assessments factored into these changes. Most of the discussions about student work are informal, irregular, and anecdotal. Cumulative exams and portfolios are a source of information to evaluate curricula, but there is no procedure in place for systematic review of such results. Although some faculty members use assessment data to make changes, this practice is not consistent across all disciplines at Ipswich High School. Without a formalized process of reviewing assessment data and using such data to initiate curriculum changes, teachers have incomplete information of student needs when revising curriculum. (self-study, teachers, standards committee meeting)

In-district professional development opportunities on the subject of assessment are limited. This year one such opportunity took place in September focusing on assessment and clarification of expectations, and another will occur in April that will evaluate rubric use within the school. The technology department also offers some workshops and summer institutes that help teachers create assignments that align with state curriculum standards as well as incorporating state technology standards. Teachers may take out-of-district courses, but a relatively low number report taking courses related to assessment of student learning. Teachers also may request to attend conferences and workshops out-of-district. Recognizing the need for more professional development opportunities, teachers and some administrators from across the district have formed a professional development committee. The committee has met several times this year to develop a philosophy, mission statement, goals, and strategies to meet the teachers' professional development needs. This committee has conducted a literature review and is researching best practices in other districts to determine what type of professional development initiatives would best serve Ipswich teachers. District expenditures on professional development have been restricted in recent years, and the professional development committee is researching possible sources of grant funding. A January professional day was eliminated in the 2005-2006 school year. Most discussion about student assessment occurs during collegial conversation or departmental collaboration. Teachers have adopted use of rubrics as a foundation for their assessment of student work, and they informally discuss the effectiveness of these rubrics. There is no systematic, formalized process for teachers to evaluate and modify assessment strategies. Therefore, students would benefit if teachers had more opportunities to be trained in, develop, and refine assessment strategies in order to identify those that yield the best results. (self-study, teachers, assistant principal)

The school's professional staff communicates individual student progress in achieving school-wide academic expectations to students and their families in a variety of ways. In addition to the report card, mid-quarter progress reports are sent home in all classes. Many teachers use e-mail and personal websites to communicate course assignments, expectations, and results. The principal's monthly newsletter, two parent curriculum nights, the school and local newspapers, and individual conferences further clarify student progress. Individual classroom teachers provide students with a course syllabus that identifies learning expectations for the class. Rubrics are regularly sent home with

student assignments. While progress in achieving the school-wide academic expectations is evident, there is no process for communicating student achievement of the school's civic and social expectations to students, parents, and community. (students, parents, panel presentation, student-parent handbook)

**Commendations:**

1. The commitment to implementing school-wide rubrics
2. The teaching staff for its use of a wide range of assessment strategies
3. The school-wide commitment to stating and assessing the academic expectations for student learning
4. The formation of a district-wide professional development committee to increase opportunities for collaboration

**Recommendations:**

1. Provide time and opportunity for teachers to meet and collaborate in order to use assessment to revise curriculum and instruction
2. Establish a formal process to use assessment and other data when revising and developing curriculum
3. Develop and implement common assessment terminology, format and indicators
4. Ensure that civic and social expectations for learning are clearly stated in the classroom and on the school web site
5. Continue the process of incorporating school-wide expectations for learning into course-specific rubrics
6. Establish a formal and regular procedure for collecting, assessing, and communicating student achievement in meeting the school's civic and social expectations
7. Develop a formal process, using the faculty developed school-wide rubrics, to assess the achievement of the academic expectations in the mission by every student

# **SUPPORT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS**

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**LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION**

**SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

**COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

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## **LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION**

## 5

### **Leadership and Organization**

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The principal has autonomy and authority to lead the school in achieving the mission and expectations for student learning. The school board and superintendent support the principal in creating budgets and implementing policy. For example, the principal coordinates the development of the budget with department chairs. He returns to the superintendent and school committee with a budget proposal that provides justification for the decisions he and his staff have made. To manage school organization, nine years ago the principal initiated dialogue among faculty and staff on the acceptance of a block schedule. It has been revisited twice since the initial dialogue and each time, the faculty has affirmed its continued support of the 4x4 model. The principal has initiated a number of policy changes that have included reducing graduation credits from 125 to 110, amending the tardiness policy, and revising the handbook on a yearly basis. Although the principal is constrained by a yearly budget freeze, he has full autonomy over available funds and donations. This autonomy drives the accomplishment of the school's mission and expectations. (school board, central office, teachers)

The principal's leadership creates and maintains a shared vision, direction, and focus for student learning. His relationship with the student body is direct, personal, and supportive. He passes out report cards to freshmen and seniors and addresses the student body via intercom or assemblies. Faculty members enthusiastically agree that he has an open door policy that fosters collegiality. Teachers feel comfortable coming to his office for any concerns that they may have. He is highly visible in the building. He enlists parental input through his monthly "Coffee with the Principal" and informs parents about curricular issues and changes in school policy through his monthly newsletter. Faculty members praise him for his leadership style that fosters a safe climate for teacher initiatives. As a result of his leadership style, teachers feel empowered to engage in ongoing conversations with colleagues and supervisory staff, focusing on student learning. (school board, self-study, teachers)

The assistant principal, department heads, and teachers provide leadership essential to school improvement. The assistant principal conducts a weekly forum with teachers where he discusses student news, upcoming programs, and other timely information. His role as steering committee chairperson during the NEASC self-study, demonstrates his strong leadership and communication skills. The principal and assistant principal are an effective and well-coordinated leadership team which contributes much to the smooth functioning of Ipswich High School. The role of department head includes developing budgets, observing staff, revising curriculum, and conducting monthly meetings. The assistant principal and special education administrator, along with other administrators, serve on the student assistance team which meets periodically to target at-risk students. Teachers serve on a variety of committees that include the school council, the district-wide subject area committees (SAC), the technology committee and the advisory

program. This involvement supports school improvement and fosters student learning. (self study, teachers, superintendent)

Student grouping patterns foster heterogeneity in all elective courses and in some core academic courses. Most of the elective programs such as art, music, technology education, health and physical education classes are grouped heterogeneously. In academic courses, students in grade eleven are heterogeneously grouped in English. In all other core courses, students are grouped by levels: college preparatory one, college preparatory two, honors, and advanced placement. The college preparatory one class was implemented last year in order to create a class smaller in size where pace could be more consistent and instruction more personalized for identified students. Once a student has achieved proficiency, there are opportunities provided within course offerings for movement between levels. In college preparatory courses and in elective courses, students have the opportunity to take a course for honors credit. Finally, the program of studies also offers transitional programs for those students who may require some remediation to gain mastery of the MCAS. Inclusion models and the life skills program provide support and assistance to the special needs student. Although there are opportunities for students to participate in a heterogeneous environment, increased leveling of courses needs to be critically monitored. (self-study, observations, teachers)

Teachers express their full support for block scheduling because they see that it directly enhances their instruction by facilitating cooperative and project-based learning, the use of technology, and alternative assessments. Furthermore, it addresses the needs of all learning styles, and among some teachers, provides for interdisciplinary instruction. Some teachers also plan cooperative learning activities in which students teach students. Therefore, block scheduling has empowered students to take responsibility for their own learning. (teachers, school leadership, self-study)

Parents and students have meaningful roles in the decision-making for the high school. Parent organizations have raised money for materials and supplies to supplement the IHS budget. These groups include Ipswich Citizens for Education, Capital Funds Campaign, Friends of Ipswich Athletics, and Feoffee Land Grant. These funding groups are comprised of parents, students and community members. The principal seeks parent input through his monthly meetings entitled “Coffee with the Principal” as well as through the school council which is comprised of students, parents, faculty, and staff members. Through its student council, the student body has initiated policy changes within the school. Specifically, students have proposed that faculty and administration reconsider a policy that banned drinking water in the classrooms. After a presentation by the student council, the staff and administration amended its policy to allow the drinking of bottled water in class. Also, a nutritional advisory committee, comprised of parents, central office administrators, school committee members, teachers, and students, was formed to review and recommend changes in the school lunch program as well as the renewal of the

Pepsi contract. These initiatives mirrored the site-based management style modeled by the administration. In this manner, parents and students demonstrate active involvement in Ipswich High School's decision-making process. (students, central office, self-study)

Teachers have a student load that allows them to provide sufficient attention to the needs of individual students. Block scheduling has created class loads of approximately sixty students per teacher each semester. Teacher surveys reveal that sixty-three percent of the staff feels that this configuration has provided students with more individualized attention. Although the average class size is twenty, numbers vary in classes due to scheduling constraints and an effort on the part of the teachers and administrators to accommodate classes in which there is a higher proportion of students with special needs. For example, honors courses are generally larger in number than college preparatory classes. In classes with a predominant number of special-needs students, an aide assists the teacher. As a result of these changes, there is an acceptable level of individualized attention given to students. (teachers, survey, leadership team)

There is a formal, ongoing program through which each student is assigned an adult member of the school community who personalizes his/her education. Beginning in the academic year 2004-2005, Ipswich High School has instituted an advisory program designed to address the academic, social, and civic expectations. This program meets throughout the year to bring greater attention to students' individual needs and aspirations. It is a vehicle for addressing a variety of topics geared to helping the students realize their potential. In addition, the school offers opportunities for life skill experiences outside the classroom. The BRIDGE program provides some seniors with a six-week internship experience at the end of their senior year. In addition, the IHS offers work-study programs for junior and seniors, co-curricular programs, MCAS remediation programs, and a student assistance team. These programs offer many opportunities for students to make personalized connections with faculty, staff and community members. (students, leadership team, self-study)

The staff collaborates within their departments and across departments in support of learning for all students. Departments meet once each month to engage in conversations about curriculum. There is informal curriculum development, as in the AIM course that coordinates art and geometry. However, it is perceived by staff members that formal collaboration across departments in support of learning for all students is lacking. In-service time and professional development opportunities need to be made a priority. (teachers, self-study, leadership team)

Embedded in Ipswich High School culture is a genuine respect that all school staff members have for students and their learning needs. Administrators, faculty members and support staff describe an exceptional school climate in which there is a reciprocal respect between students and adults in the building. Support staff includes teaching

assistants, who work as tutors, secretaries, custodians, bus drivers and cafeteria workers who all support the well-being and learning of students. They mirror the mutual respect and courtesy that has been fostered by the administration and staff at Ipswich High School. There is an extraordinary level of caring exhibited at all levels of staff and administration. (self-study , facility tour, school board)

Student success is regularly acknowledged, celebrated and displayed. The principal uses his morning address to the student body to report student achievements in sports, academic, and co-curricular activities. The teachers celebrate student academic achievement on a monthly basis through the student of the month award. Assemblies of the entire student body acknowledge the victories of sports teams and the achievement of awards by fine arts students. Student work is showcased throughout the building. There are publications including The Tiger Transcript, the Chameleon, and the school year book. In this manner, building leadership is further validated through a celebration of student success. (self-study, facility tour, central office)

The climate of the school is safe, positive, and respectful. In the self-study survey ninety-two percent and eighty-four percent of teachers and students respectively felt that the school was safe. A school safety officer is present in the building during school hours. The school has in place procedures for responding to crises. A crisis procedure checklist is posted in every classroom. There is also a phone chain which is used to notify faculty and staff members about emergencies. Teachers exhibited pride for their surroundings and were enthusiastic and positive about their working conditions. Students outside of the classroom appear orderly. Students are respectful to themselves, to their teacher, and to their facility. Procedures are in place that address and promote safety and respectful behavior. (self-study, teachers, survey)

The school board supports the implementation of the school's mission and expectations for student learning. The board has aligned its goals to reflect the direction of the high school. There is strong support from the school board acknowledging the strength of the high school administrative team comprised of the principal and assistant principal. The board supports high school initiatives like the block schedule which has facilitated a number of policy changes affecting student learning. Changes in class load, course requirements, development of SAC, and the revision of programs and policies have all been strongly supported by the committee. The school board enthusiastically endorses the principal's leadership style and vision and attributes their collaboration to driving the mission and student expectations for learning. As a result of this collaborative relationship, Ipswich High School is prepared to fulfill its mission statement. (central office, school board, self-study)

## **Commendations**

1. The principal for fostering a shared vision among school committee, faculty, support staff, and students
2. The assistant principal for his extraordinary work in building a school culture of collaboration among administrators, faculty, and support staff
3. The leadership team for fostering a school culture that empowers teachers and students
4. The site-based management philosophy which drives school policy
5. The leadership team for reaching out to teachers in ways that promote communication and collaboration within the building
6. The parents and students for building a stronger school community
7. The superintendent and the school committee for proving the principal with the autonomy necessary to be an effective school leader
8. The opportunities that are available for parents and students to be involved in the decision-making process
9. The recent development of the advisory program

### **Recommendations**

1. Ensure that teachers receive professional development in areas revealed as needing attention by analysis of student data
2. Provide opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaborative instruction
3. Extend the site-based management philosophy to the observation and evaluation process

## **SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

## 6

### **School Resources for Learning**

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Student support services are consistent with the mission and expectations of Ipswich High School (IHS). Library/media, health, guidance, and special education services are in place to respond to the needs of *all* students. The guidance curriculum consists of goals and objectives that align with the school's academic, social, and civic expectations; however, this document has not been aligned with national standards for school counseling curriculum. The availability to technology and the library seating arrangement promote collaboration and access to information. The special education department promotes inclusion so that students have the greatest opportunities to achieve the mission and expectations. Faculty and staff members connected to student support services clearly articulate a sincere and enthusiastic desire to assist students in meeting the mission and expectations. (observation, teachers, students)

All students at IHS have an opportunity to achieve the school's stated academic expectations for student learning. The course catalog indicates the topics to be covered in each course offering and the necessary pre-requisites. Counselors encourage all students to enroll in the most challenging course appropriate. Inclusion teachers support most special needs students in regular education classes. The few students with unique learning needs are provided with specialized alternative programs. Library services and technology are readily available for the use of all students. A school-to-career program, internships through the Bringing Reality into Diverse Growth Experience (BRIDGE) program, and job-shadowing activities provide students with the opportunity to achieve mission expectations. The creation of a new level of instruction, college preparatory I, is intended to assist grade nine and grade ten students who are struggling to meet established academic expectations. Although the intention of this change is to meet the needs of all students, it is also critically important that students enrolled in this new level are not compromised through decreased access to college preparatory II classes and/or expectations. The current allocation of resources allows all students the opportunity to achieve the expectations for student learning. (self-study, observations, teacher interviews)

Student support personnel at IHS work collaboratively with faculty, staff and the broader community to provide students with the tools needed to meet the school's expectations. The library staff works cooperatively with teachers and students to achieve special project goals. The special education staff provides support to teachers by meeting on a regular basis. Health services are available in the building throughout the day. The guidance department provides both individual and group counseling to support all students in dealing with personal issues, course selections, career plans, and post-secondary education decisions. The guidance staff communicates information about students with teachers on a "need to know" basis when student learning is affected. Support and instructional staff members work in a positive and professional manner. Special programs such as mini college fairs, "Healthy Decisions," an outside counseling

program, and a career-day orientation for freshmen are examples of programs that are brought into the school to support student achievement of social and civic expectations. The school program at IHS is enhanced by this outreach and positive climate of support. (self-study, teachers, students)

All student support services are evaluated on a regular basis. Guidance personnel perform an internal review under the direction of the principal and assistant principal. Freshman career day and senior exit surveys are used to improve services. Health services are reviewed by the high and middle school nurses under the supervision of the director of student support services. Special education is evaluated annually by the program director following the annual survey of parents. Special education services for individual students are evaluated in weekly or bi-weekly meetings with teachers and support staff. The Department of Education Coordinated Program Review staff questionnaire, conducted in 2003-2004, is included in the special education evaluation process. Library services are evaluated in an ongoing manner by the library staff; decisions are driven in part by surveys to improve teacher materials. Thus, regular review enables revisions to student support services to improve learning resources. (assistant principal , self-study, teachers)

Ipswich High School utilizes a variety of methods to enable ongoing communication with the school community and the community at large. The school maintains a web site ([www.ipswichschools.org](http://www.ipswichschools.org)) to provide information about available services to all members of the school community. In addition, the special education department's own web site communicates relevant information. The school schedules two evening parent-teacher meetings a year, inviting parents to meet with their child's teachers and to sample their child's academic day. The special education staff regularly contacts the parents/guardians of students in the program through phone, e-mail, and written reports. In-person meetings are scheduled as needed. The monthly school newsletter is published on the school web site publicizing events and news of the school while also providing the opportunity for the guidance department to inform the school community regarding testing and important deadlines for college applications and scholarships. A centrally-located bulletin board outside the guidance office informs students and staff members of upcoming events. School events are regularly published in the town's weekly newspaper. Effective communication with students, parents/guardians, and school personnel has resulted in extensive use of the student support services. (parents, self-study, observation)

Student records at IHS are kept secure and confidential in accordance with federal and state law. Health records are kept locked in the nurse's suite. Special education records, including individual education plans (IEP) for current students, are kept in the program manager's office. Special education archives are secured in a locked facility in the school's basement area. Guidance records are kept in locked filing cabinets in the guidance area. Teachers keep confidential records in locked cabinets. The director of

pupil services is responsible for ensuring that all records are kept in accordance with state and federal guidelines. A recent state audit found the school to be in compliance with state regulations. The procedures in place ensure that student confidentiality is maintained. (self-study, nurse, guidance)

There are sufficient certified/licensed personnel and support staff to provide effective counseling, health, special education and library media services. There are three full-time guidance counselors and one .5 adjustment counselor to meet the needs of 650 students, ensuring a ratio of counselors to students that more than adequately fulfills the recommended maximum ratio of 1:300. One full-time high school nurse shares the spacious health suite with a full-time middle school nurse. The library/media center is staffed by one full-time library/media teacher and one full-time aide who is also certified as a library/media teacher. This staffing allows for full services before, during and after school. However, this level of staffing in the library/media center is misleading. The full-time library media teacher and aide serve the middle school as well, a total of 1,150 students. This accommodation has not had a negative impact on the high school, but the middle school use of library/media services is severely curtailed. Four special education teachers serve as liaisons to eighty-six students. A variety of specialists and eight paraprofessionals assist students in a variety of special needs services. This level of staffing should provide students with a full-range of student support services towards fulfillment of Ipswich High School's mission and expectations. This level of staffing is sufficient to support the high school population. (self-study, teacher, facility tour)

The guidance department is committed to providing a full range of comprehensive guidance services. Two of the three guidance counselors are new to the system this year, presenting a set of challenges and demands on these professionals in becoming familiar with the school procedures, the staff, and the students. Counselors have established the goal to meet individually at least once per year individually with students to address personal, scheduling, career, and further education topics. The guidance staff collaborates with the school-to-work program to organize a career day program for the freshman class. Evening programs are scheduled during the school year for parents of juniors and seniors on the college application process and financial aid. Mini college fairs are scheduled each fall within the building for interested sophomores and juniors. Career and college interview workshops are held for all juniors. An on-line college search program, My Road, has been purchased, and students are encouraged to avail themselves of this search tool. The guidance staff works with local community and mental health agencies. One agency provides a counselor to the school to facilitate a "Healthy Decisions" group. The guidance staff meets bi-monthly with the community collaborative initiative facilitated by the district attorney's office. The guidance staff participates in all individual educational plan (IEP) meetings and is also members of the student assistance team targeting at-risk students. Guidance counselors determine eligibility for and write 504 accommodation plans under the direction of the assistant principal. Given that all counselors have non-professional status, significant professional development, supervision, and direction will be needed to ensure the provision of

comprehensive guidance services that meet all students' needs. (teachers, administrators, observation)

The spacious, well-supplied nurses' suite provides an appropriate setting for administering to the needs of all students. Privacy is insured by doors and curtains. Vision testing, hearing testing, postural screening and hygiene instruction are provided. Staff trainings are offered in the use of the Epi -pen and defibrillator which are stored in the suite. The registered nurse dispenses medications to students as required, and these medications are stored in a double-locked cabinet. The nurse provides direct intervention services, including referrals to the school psychologist and local health agencies. As a result, students access health services appropriately as needed. (self-study, nurse , facility tour)

Library/information services are integrated widely into the school's curriculum. The library media teacher surveys the instructional staff to assist in the acquisition of materials for specific projects and activities. The library, its materials, and available databases are utilized extensively by high school teachers to support curriculum. Information literacy skills are reinforced by both teachers and the library staff. Rolling carts with laptop computers enable students to access electronic library resources from classrooms through the wireless network. Integration of library/information services has a positive impact on curriculum and instruction. (observation, librarian, teacher)

Library/information services personnel are knowledgeable about the curriculum, and they support its implementation. Both the librarian and the library assistant are certified in library/media. The NEASC survey indicates that over ninety-three per cent of the staff agrees that the library personnel are knowledgeable in assisting with curriculum and instructional needs. Library/information personnel assist the staff with implementation of curriculum. Staff surveys are used when selecting new library materials. Library personnel occasionally serve as instructors in the area of research skills. Students at IHS have ample access to library media resources which support the curriculum. (survey, teacher, librarian, observation)

The library print collection supports all areas of the curriculum and is updated on a regular basis. Materials selected reflect racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity and are of interest to students. Technology resources are widely available to students and staff members and are utilized extensively across the curriculum. However, much of the library's computer hardware is in need of maintenance and some of the software is out of date and in need of updating. Currently, there is no funding for new technology targeted to the library. Non-print resources, including videos, DVDs, and books on tape are available. The limited number of available databases is utilized extensively; a wider variety of databases would augment the curriculum offerings. There is a complimentary arrangement with a local video chain that enables the school to borrow videos and DVDs for curriculum purposes without charge. The school belongs to the Northeast Regional

Library System which allows the school to participate in an interlibrary loan program for books and non-print materials. The varied range of materials and technologies available to students and staff and the responsive actions of the librarian improve teaching and learning. (usage statistics, librarian, self-study)

The IHS community has regular access to the library informational services and facilities. Staggering of library staff work schedules enables the facility to be open for student and staff use before school, throughout the school day, and after school until 4:00PM. Classes and individual students can be observed in the library at all times; as many as fifty students have been observed by staff members after school hours. Students in the Virtual High School classes and independent study courses utilize the facility as well. Students can access library database services from anywhere in the school. The access to the library has had a positive impact upon instruction at the high school. (observation, librarian, self-study)

The library/information services program fosters independent inquiry by enabling students and faculty members to utilize various school and information resources and technologies. Library orientation programs are given to freshman classes. Research skills are taught to groups and to individuals. The academic curriculum calls for all students to develop print and non-print research skills. Faculty members are made aware of information resources and technology individually and in groups. Virtual High School, directed study assignments, and honors contracts are available for all students to develop independent inquiry skills. Library/information services are sufficient to foster independent inquiry by students. (observation, student, facility tour)

The school has a policy in place for selection and removal of information resources and an acceptable use policy for technology. The library has a materials selection process adopted in 1988 and revised in 1999 adapted from the recommendations of the American Association of School Librarians. This document also contains guidelines for replacement of worn materials and procedures for dealing with challenged materials. A separate document (Weeding Policy) outlines the criteria for removal of library materials. The student handbook contains a comprehensive acceptable use policy for technology that requires the signatures of both parent and student. Filtering software has been added to computers to prevent abuse of privilege and protect the computers and network. These measures have greatly reduced the incidence of abuse. The technology plan for the school states goals of providing up-to-date hardware and software materials for administration, students, and staff members. These goals are currently not being met due to lack of funding and staff. Some computers and software used in the library have not been replaced/updated since the opening of the school. Other computers were installed in the library more recently. The policies in place for selection/removal of information sources and the acceptable use policy for technology are consistently monitored. Without updating of technology, however, the library will be unable to maintain the current level

of services to the school community, negatively impacting the quality of instruction. (student handbook, technology staff, observations)

Early intervention processes are in place whereby teachers, parents, or other members of the school community may refer students whom they suspect may have a learning disability. A pre-referral team chaired by the assistant principal assesses student difficulties and offers instructional strategies for classroom use; results of the attempted strategies are placed in the student's records. If concerns persist, the student is further evaluated to determine eligibility for services. Individual education plans (IEPs) are developed for each student receiving special education services. Monitoring of students is done by special education staff. Annual team reviews are held to evaluate student achievement of IEP goals. Students are re-evaluated for eligibility every three years. Modified course offerings are in place to enable special education students to meet expectations for student learning. Special education services are sufficient to meet all local, state, and federal laws. (staff questionnaire, observation, courses of instruction)

### **Commendations**

1. The commitment to the mission and enthusiasm of student support services
2. Staff outreach in support of achievement of the academic expectations
3. Communication regarding services to parents and students
4. Enthusiastic response by the counselors to the challenge of creating a new guidance team

### **Recommendations**

1. Determine the impact of College Preparatory I enrollments on student access to other levels of study and expectations
2. Provide appropriate professional development, supervision, and direction to newly hired guidance staff
3. Upgrade technology and electronic resources/databases in the library/media center

## **COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR LEARNING**

## 7

### **Community Resources for Learning**

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The school engages parents and families as partners in each student's education. Parent participation is primarily in the form of fund-raising activities including: Ipswich Citizens for Education, The Friends of Ipswich Athletics, Ipswich Music, Art and Drama Association, and private donations. Parents communicate with teachers via e-mail. They are invited monthly to meet with the principal to discuss relevant issues. Parents are involved in school council and serve on subcommittees: instruction policy, nutrition health and wellness, and technology. In light of budgetary constraints in recent years parent fundraising has provided significant financial support. The reliance on parent financial support is not a wise educational policy. (parents, teachers, central office)

The school has made successful attempts to foster productive business and community partnerships that support student learning. Local businesses such as the EBSCO Publishing Company and TJMaxx provide internships paid and unpaid. Twenty-six students are involved in internships through the Bringing Reality Into Diverse Growth Experiences (BRIDGE) Program. EBSCO and New England Bio Lab also provide donations. Partnerships with the institutions of higher education in the surrounding area have not been adequately explored. Community partnerships will enhance student learning experiences. (teachers, central office, students)

Ipswich High School is a five-year-old, state-of-the-art facility that supports many aspects of the educational and support services for student learning. The facility includes pod multipurpose areas, a media center, two gymnasiums, a dance/fitness room, a performing arts center, and a sizable music and visual art wing. Each classroom is equipped with four to five computers, printer access, and video and cable hook ups. State-of-the-art multimedia pods and facilities increase student-centered learning and self-expression. (teachers, students, facility tours, observations)

Procedures for insuring that the physical plant and facilities are in full compliance with federal and state laws are not in place. The building certificate of inspection has an expiration date of 9/1/2004, and the recommendation for inspection of the kitchen hood extinguisher expired in February 2005. The elevator inspection is current, but an updated copy of the certificate is not on-site. The building is accessible to the handicapped. The lack of procedures for insuring that the physical plant and facilities are in full compliance impacts the safety of students and staff. (existing certificates, school administrators, observation)

Equipment is adequate and catalogued. It sustains the educational needs of the students. It is maintained on an as-needed basis. The technology department is understaffed and overburdened with requests. Therefore, faulty equipment is slow to receive attention. The lack of functioning printers prevents timely completion of assignments. While there are

ample computers in the building, there is no funding in the 2006 budget to support the five-year technology plan. The lack of funds for technology will create problems in the future to support personnel and maintain equipment. (teachers, students, central office)

The building is clean and in good repair. A formal plan for light maintenance and general cleaning exists. There is no on-site maintenance staff member. Significant maintenance needs are contracted out and are not always addressed in a timely fashion. Outside maintenance contracts burden the budget. (custodial staff, central office, infrastructure tour)

The school has a strategic plan to address future program, staffing, capital improvements, facility, and technology needs. The draft of the five-year technology plan is pending approval. The performing arts center is lacking theater rigging in the fly space which impedes theater lighting and productions. Incomplete theater rigging may limit the amount of revenue that could be generated by outside theater use. In the strategic plan goals three and four address long-range plans for programming, staffing, and facility needs. There is no dependable plan for capital improvement. (central office, documentation, teachers)

At this time the school has a combination of public and private funding to sustain school programs and services. There is no dependable plan for the maintenance of staffing, supplies and instructional materials because of insufficient public funding. Additional funding sources include parents and community members, school choice allotments, anonymous donors, grants, and the Feoffee Land Trust. However, the sources of revenue are unpredictable and unreliable. Override attempts in 2002 and 2003 failed in the town election. The school committee is currently asking the town for a \$975,000 override. The unpredictability of financial resources limits the implementation of long-range goals. (central office, building administrators, school board, teachers)

The faculty has input into the budgetary process. The development and implementation of the budget is site-based. The school uses course enrollment data to develop such programs as, College Prep One, advanced placement classes, a life skills program, and English as a second language. These programs address student learning needs. (teachers, observations, documentation)

### **Commendations**

1. The support provided by parents and local businesses
2. The efforts of the community to build a new facility

3. The performing arts center for the opportunities available to students to extend learning beyond the classroom
4. Availability of advanced technology

### **Recommendations**

1. Develop more learning opportunities that utilize area colleges and universities
2. Make provisions for reliable sources of capital funding
3. Address the need for on-site maintenance personnel
4. Support the personnel and resource needs of the five year technology plan
5. Complete the infrastructure design of the performing arts center
6. Review all certificates immediately for compliance
7. Ensure that there is a process for the regular updating of local and state compliance issues



## **FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES**

## Commission on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS)

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### FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES

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

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

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

To ensure that it has current information about the school, the Commission has an established Policy on Substantive Change requiring that the principals of member schools report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence any substantive change which negatively impacts the school's adherence to the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of substantive change must describe the change itself and detail any impact which the change has had on the school's ability to meet CPSS Standards. The Commission's Substantive Change Policy is included in the Appendix.

All other substantive changes should be included in the Two and Five-Year Progress Reports and/or the Annual Report. Each member school is required to submit an Annual

Report form to ensure that the Commission office has current statistical data on the school.

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

The visiting team would like to express its appreciation to the Ipswich High School Community for the hospitality and generosity extended to the team during the accreditation visit.

**APPENDIX A: VISITING TEAM ROSTER**

David D. Perry, Principal	North Branford Public Schools North Branford, CT
Kathleen Spencer	Carver High School Carver, MA
Carolyn Wachta	Scituate High School Scituate, MA
Joanne Haley-Sullivan	Abington Public Schools Abington, MA
Denise Bylaska	Muriel S. Snowden International School at Copley Boston, MA
William Dow	Bourne High School Bourne, MA
Carla Blanchard	Harwich High School Harwich, MA
Karen Moore	Kennebunk High School Kennebunk, ME
Richard Durgin	Nauset Regional High School North Eastham, MA
Shanley Heller	Medway High School Medway, MA
Mary Beth Gallant	Ashland High School Ashland, MA
Edmund Grammer	Stoneham High School Stoneham, MA
Denise Lonergan	Dover-Sherborn Regional High School Dover, MA
Scott Newkirk	Cohasset Middle-High School Cohasset, MA

Jacquelyn Rodgers

Maynard High School  
Maynard, MA

Michael Horton

Nantucket High School  
Nantucket, MA

***APPENDIX B:***  
**Commission Policy on Substantive Change**

Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty (60) days of occurrence of any substantive change in the school which has a negative impact on the school's ability to meet any of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The report of a substantive change must describe the change itself as well as detail the impact of the change on the quality of education in the school. Examples of substantive change areas include the following:

- available programs, including fine arts, practical arts and student activities
- available facilities, including upkeep and maintenance
- level of funding
- administrative structure, including the number of administrators and supervisors
  
- student services
- library technology/media services and personnel
- student enrollment
- grades served by the school
- the student population that causes program or staffing modification(s); e.g., the number of special needs students or vocational students with limited English proficiency

***APPENDIX B:***  
**Commission Policy on Substantive Change**

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

- elimination of fine arts, practical arts and student activities
  - diminished upkeep and maintenance of facilities
  - significantly decreased funding
  - cuts in the level of administrative and supervisory staffing
  - cuts in the number of teachers and/or guidance counselors
  - 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
  - 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
- 
- identification by the state as an underperforming school
  - takeover by the state
  - inordinate user fees