



CTDOE

QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT

New London Public Schools

Quality Review Report

New London High School

**490 Jefferson Avenue
New London
Connecticut
06320**

Principal: Daniel Sullivan

Dates of review: November 13 - 14, 2007

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**Cambridge
Education**

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school:

New London High School serves 784 students in grades 9 through 12. Black students comprise 38 percent of the student population, Hispanics 43 percent and White students 16 percent. Asian Americans make up 2 percent of the population and American Indians are 1 percent. Nineteen percent of the students are English language learners (ELLs) and within this group, 10 languages are spoken. Spanish is the predominant non-English language spoken in homes. Sixteen percent of students receive special education services. The proportion of students eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches is higher than most other Connecticut schools. Attendance noted on the 2006-07 Compliance Report was 88 percent, well below that of Connecticut high schools.

The principal is in his second year of leadership at the school. The school has had several changes in leadership over the past decade. A new science and technology magnet school was recently formed to provide specialized courses for students from New London and surrounding communities and the former New London High School principal was appointed director of the magnet school. A new state-of-the-art facility was constructed adjacent to the high school to house the program. Magnet school students graduate from New London High School.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well:

- The principal has provided clear informed leadership to effect changes that have already shown some improvement in the school such as increased student attendance and reducing the number of students at risk of failure.
- The school has increased its focus on the need to use data to inform decisions and has created data teams to support its analysis.
- A good, well-targeted professional development program is having a positive impact on the needs of the school and its teachers.
- Administrators, department chairs and teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to work collaboratively for the benefit of students and the school.

Areas for Improvement:

- Attain and communicate clarification regarding the management and leadership expectations that the District holds for the high school principal and the magnet school director.
- Devise mechanisms for sharing data held in different areas of the school by guidance counselors, special education teachers, ELL specialists and others, to increase strategic understanding of the overall progress of students and the school.
- Continue training to strengthen teachers' ability to use data to plan for instruction so that it is differentiated sufficiently to meet the needs of all students.
- Develop the skills of administrators and department chairs further in analyzing data to inform the evaluation of instruction, the effectiveness of new and reconfigured programs and to plan strategically.
- Establish interim benchmarks so the school can track its progress throughout the year towards annual goal attainment.
- Extend the development of standards-based curriculum and pacing guides in order to strengthen the horizontal alignment of the curriculum. Use these to support the capacity of formative assessments to inform instruction and revise the curriculum.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance

This school needs improvement.

The school is in its fourth year of needing improvement under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal legislation. New London High School has benefited from the strong, well-informed leadership of the current principal who has led many changes to effect improvement in many aspects of the school. His astute use of data stands as a model for his administrative and teaching staff who are increasing their skills in this area. Requirements for teachers to focus on and share teaching practices are supported by time allocations and opportunities for collaboration.

Increased measures to increase attendance have begun to show good effect, as have efforts to reduce academic failure. The student advisory group, student mentors and a renewed focus on student activities are beginning to provide more students with avenues for character development.

Outreach to parents has also increased and improved. Communication through informative newsletters and an electronic grade reporting system are providing better information to parents. Parent participation in the athletic and musical life of the school is good although involvement in other areas is minimal.

Students are afforded broad choices of interesting courses. The school has focused considerable resources on providing professional development for improving instruction and using assessments of student learning to plan lessons and revise the curriculum. These initiatives need more time to take effect at the level of learning and, overall, student achievement is below that of similar schools and high schools across the state. Significant progress is necessary on virtually every measure of student achievement. The school improvement plan addresses these needs, but lacks specificity with respect to strategic benchmarks of progress.

Criterion 1: Student achievement in the core subjects

The students' achievement is below basic level and needs substantial improvement.

The performance of students on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) test is below that of similar high schools and is below that of schools across the state. Over the last five years, scores increased slightly, until 2006-07 when they declined. The school did not meet targets for adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the most recent assessment cycle. The school did not meet goal in any tested area. In mathematics, there is a wide disparity in achievement among ethnic sub-groups. In reading, the achievement gap is significantly smaller. ELLs and students receiving special education services perform well below their counterparts with less than 45 percent passing CAPT assessments. Boys' achievement in mathematics and reading are below that of girls. The scores of the school's higher achieving students on the SAT Reasoning Tests (SAT) fall well below state averages, as do scores on Advanced Placement (AP) examinations. The school's graduation rate is lower than comparable schools and its dropout rate is high. The percent of students attending college after high school has also declined.

Guidance personnel who monitor the accumulation of credits towards graduation track student progress from grade to grade. The school measures progress within the school year by students' grades in individual courses. These, coupled with recent measures such as the introduction of semester course assessments, are used as 'early warnings' of possible failure. They have also had the effect of increasing students' attention on learning, resulting in fewer potential failures. The recent creation of semester courses includes a month-long winter session designed to focus on preparation for state examinations.

The effect of this schedule change remains to be seen. Students take courses at three levels of ability in addition to special programs for ELLs and students with special education needs. Student achievement, as measured by the assessments noted above, draws into question the effectiveness of these arrangements.

Since taking the leadership of the school, the principal has identified the overall areas for improvement and taken steps to move the school forward, including using data to drive decision-making. However, capacity to interrogate all available data remains a challenge, as it is not all currently held in one area. Current information about students and programs needs to be organized and shared more widely to provide a robust understanding of the school and its students. The school's improvement plan addresses its need to make dramatic increases in all aspects of the school and sets forth ambitious targets for growth. However, these are not supported by interim benchmarks by which to measure how well the school is progressing towards its annual goals.

Criterion 2: The quality of instruction through teaching, learning and curriculum, and the use of data to promote learning

This area of the school's work needs improvement.

The school offers students a wide range of interesting courses that engage and motivate. In addition to the specialized courses at the magnet school, that some students take advantage of, the school also offers programs in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, culinary arts and allied health. Athletics is a strong part of the extracurricular program. The school has hired a director of student activities to increase student involvement in clubs, community service and other activities to extend learning.

The district is leading the revision of its curriculum to better align with state standards and this work is just beginning at the high school. The curriculum contains course descriptions but does not contain pacing guides to align instruction and provide useful points for administering the common formative assessments that are under development. With the exception of freshman humanities and introduction to quantification courses, introduced this year, there are no special literacy or mathematics initiatives.

In the past, movement through the curriculum drove planning for instruction. The focus on looking at student work to assess learning and plan teaching is a recent initiative. Its impact on teaching and learning is still emerging. CAPT data and high failure rates informed the recent reconfiguration of courses into the semester format with more frequent assessments. This broadened curriculum offerings and provided students with more immediate feedback on their progress. Although the full effect of this new arrangement is unknown at this time, initial indications based on the achievements of students at risk of failure indicate an improvement. Less use has been made of Preliminary Scholastic Achievement Test (PSAT) scores than SAT and AP scores in understanding instructional needs for improving achievement.

Instruction is largely teacher-centered and focuses on the whole class. Lectures and demonstrations followed by individual or small group practice is a frequent feature of lessons. Typically, student grouping is not based on analysis of student achievement data. Within the classroom, differentiated instruction, based on an understanding of students' discrete learning needs, is not yet a feature of instruction in the school. As a result, work is not directly matched to individual students' learning needs and this impacts negatively on progress rates.

For the second year, students with special education needs are included in regular education settings and receive modifications from special education teachers who co-teach these classes. The effect of this arrangement for learning has not been measured yet. ELLs are taught in separate bilingual classes until their proficiency in English is deemed sufficient for inclusion in the regular education setting. CAPT scores for these students are well below others in mathematics but are within ten points of their counterparts in reading. Instructional technology is used as an aid to learning in some classes where it is available. The magnet school is especially well equipped to support learning through experimentation

and investigation. With some exceptions, students are attentive and behave well in class. Newly hired deans assist teachers with management strategies and address the needs of students who have difficulty managing their behavior. Again, it is too early to judge overall effectiveness.

The district and the school have focused professional development on standards-based instruction, effective teaching strategies and using data to drive decision-making. Workshops and training have been supplemented by structures and practices that reinforce adoption of these initiatives. For example, data teams have been formed to support expectations that teachers engage in the analysis of information about student learning to inform planning. Departments are devising common formative assessments, based on state standards, to judge the effectiveness of instruction and share good practices. The lack of well-developed curricula with pacing guides inhibits the impact of this emerging practice.

To further support the identification and sharing of effective teaching practices, teachers are required to visit one another's classes to observe teaching on a regular basis. They may exchange a duty assignment to engage in this professional development activity. At the department level, teachers are also expected to videotape a lesson that is then shared with colleagues who provide feedback. Each month, three meetings are scheduled to enable teachers to engage in these collaborative and collegial professional development activities. While it is too early to judge their impact on teaching and learning, teachers attest to the increased focus on instruction and outcomes under the current administration.

Criterion 3: Students' personal character development

This area of the school's work needs improvement.

The current administration has worked hard to address impediments to learning such as high absenteeism from school and class. Rigorous accountability practices and automated notification of absence to students' homes have improved attendance at school. Administrators routinely 'sweep' the school to find students who are cutting class. Penalties for cutting and lateness include withholding athletic participation, a significant deterrent for many. Student attendance for the first two months of the current school year has increased to 93 percent.

Incidents of serious behavioral infractions have also declined under the current administration. The discipline matrix in the student handbook clearly delineates the behavioral expectations. Restructured administrative responsibilities for student behavior, coupled with a more personalized approach to managing individuals who misbehave, have resulted in fewer incidents. The school works effectively with the local police to provide additional security in the school and they collaborate on issues like gang activity and other potentially negative influences on students as they endeavor to learn.

The principal has formed an advisory group of diverse students to discuss issues in the school and enlist their leadership in collaborating to solve problems. Students are also included on the school improvement committee. They helped to create the school's mission, which is posted throughout the school. This clear statement of value for the community, diversity, achievement, learning, excellence, respect and success is beginning to take hold in the school. Generally, students behave well and exhibit positive attitudes towards learning. Teachers have been asked to examine their expectations for student achievement and some provide rubrics so that students have clear understandings of what they need to learn. Success has been variable although initial signs indicate that, overall, student failures are decreasing. Most students form good relationships with one another and are respectful to teachers and other adults, especially the principal. The school is forming a peer mediation group of students to further support positive relationships and constructive problem-solving.

Participation in athletics and the music program provide avenues for students to show initiative and take responsibility. To increase opportunities for students to engage in a wider range of character building experiences, the school has hired a student activities director. He is leading the formation of clubs and community service activities, which is increasing school spirit among students. For example, the school

has created a mentoring program in which seniors meet weekly with freshmen in small groups to support their integration into the high school culture.

Criterion 4: Effective leadership and management

This area of the school's work meets minimum requirements.

The principal has provided very effective leadership and direction during his short tenure at the school. After an in depth analysis of the school's data, he put several initiatives into place, some of which have already begun to show good results. During his first year, his focus was on creating improved conditions for learning by addressing attendance and behavior. While efforts in these areas continue, the focus on teaching and learning has sharpened. His direction for this year was clearly set forth to teachers and parents in explicit presentations made as the school year opened. These presentations promote and support high standards and increased expectations for effective teaching and resulting student achievement.

Interventions such as the requirement that teachers conduct peer observations and share videotaped lessons are aimed directly at improving the quality of instruction. In addition, administrators and department chairs make formal and informal observations of teaching. Although it is too early to judge the impact of the increased focus on teaching or the adoption of techniques introduced through professional development workshops, positive steps have begun to take place. Likewise, the analysis and use of data by the administrative team, department chairs and teachers is in the beginning stages. Data teams provide structure for this work but many need additional training to carry out this work effectively.

The principal has created several opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership in addition to the formation of data teams. He meets regularly with his administrative team, which includes two new deans promoted from within. He also meets with department chairs, several of which are new to their positions. Student and parent advisory groups also provide opportunities for collaboration to improve the school. Collectively, these structures and the clear direction set by the principal have resulted in a shared commitment and capacity to move the school forward.

The principal appreciates the support the district provides, especially for professional development and for the many initiatives he has put into place to address the school's many needs. In turn, they have recognized his successful efforts by nominating him for the state's "Principal of the Year" award. However, the lack of clarity regarding the management and leadership responsibilities of the principal and the magnet school director cloud the understanding among some students, parents and teachers as to who is in charge. Some of the very good initiatives undertaken by the principal are not adhered to by the magnet school.

Criterion 5: Partnerships with parents and community

This area of the school's work needs improvement.

The principal has created a voluntary parent advisory committee that is open to all. Parents are also included on the school improvement committee. These efforts to include more families as partners have begun to increase participation but parent engagement, overall, is low. The guidance department runs open houses and teacher and parent nights provide opportunities for families to learn how to contribute to their child's learning and future planning. Poor attendance inhibits the impact of these activities. Parents who are active in supporting athletic teams and the marching band have a strong informal network for participating in these extracurricular activities.

In addition to report cards at the end of marking periods, the school has initiated a new early warning of impending course failure. This effort at increased communication has been well received by parents.

Similarly, the school's use of an online grade book enables parents to check their child's average and their homework assignments to good effect. Teachers are encouraged to contact homes. The principal publishes a regular parent newsletter, as does the guidance department. These keep parents informed as to activities across the school.

Parents report that the diversity of the community is well respected by the school and point to its mission as a statement of its value for the wide variety of backgrounds represented in the school. The school is working to build better relationships with the community through outreach to civic groups. Additionally, partnerships with the police department, church organizations, local civic groups and other community organizations are growing. Relationships with institutions of higher learning provide opportunities for students to take college level courses.